

first half of sorcerer's house write up

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Marc Aramini — 05 Jan 2018, 20:41

Here is the start, for setting up that it is a scam. I still need to write the second half and make conclusions about lupine, the hound of horror, kiki, and Shell's corroboration of a thin man with funny hands looking for Bax with a Greek. there are one or two unfinished segments in here. Any advice would be welcome.

THE SORCERER'S HOUSE: THE INNER RING OF THE TRIANNULIS

So I talked all this over with Madam Orizia. She is my psychic adviser. I said, "Do you think George will hurt his poor brother?" She tried the cards and looked terribly frightened. After that, the little crystal. That is the real one, as she told me two years ago. There is a big one, too. It is plastic but it looks like crystal and it tells everybody what they want to hear. She uses that one all the time.

But the little one is real. She said she saw great danger for George and his brother (you) too. BE CAREFUL. (Wolfe 114).

Wolfe has produced a lot of dense masterpieces. His later fiction can be just as complex as the work which skyrocketed him to, if not fame, a reputation as one of the genre's most accomplished literary artists. After a first reading of **The Sorcerer's House**, readers should be reminded that his stories are often also entertaining and fun even if definitive conclusions are never reached. In this novel, an educated con man struggling to make ends meet after incarceration contacts his twin brother in a series of letters that serve to flatter his brother's wife just as much as they hope to attract his twin's attention. He claims to inherit a sprawling and sinister house as well as a strip of land that will guarantee him a fortune; sorcery, multiple twins of different temperaments, shape-changing foxes, werewolves, a professional psychic, real estate agents, and his mother from fairyland all people a fast-paced plot that finally puts he and his brother George face to face (maybe). It has been labeled as an excellent introduction to Wolfe, and even the final "compiler's note" ends with the claim that "Baxter Dunn was unquestionably a most imaginative and picturesque liar, but all that he tells us cannot be false. — How much is true" How much fabrication? Perhaps we shall never know? (300).

Wolfe usually plays fair, but an ending like that casts doubt on whether we can ever meaningfully discern the "real" events from the fabricated or exaggerated ones. Luckily, we have at least one powerful metaphor to help contextualize the structure of this complex epistolary web. While the strange symbol of the three-ringed triannulis serves to indicate how the "magic" in the novel works, it also seems to be, in its own way, yet another metaphor for the novel as a whole. Everything found on the inner ring is on each of the external rings, but there are extra figures that appear on each successive layer, such that some images on the second ring are not found on the first, while images graven into the external third are not present on the two more central rings. If we look at the quote which opens this essay, we may have a fairly good idea of how to proceed: the "smaller" ring introduces truths from Bax's real life, which are then embellished according to Baxter's increasingly large ambitions. If we follow this metaphor, Baxter is attempting to con his brother in many of his letters, but the brief and quick notes to Sheldon Hawes, his cellmate, contain only a fraction of the details included in

Bax's other missives. At one point, he finds three coins, and pawns one of them at face value in order to try to get enough to make more money later: "I will sell one of the larger coins. It should bring a considerable sum, and with that I can redeem the smallest" (77) Even this act reflects Baxter's aim: he might be attempting to "sell" the larger stories in the hopes of material gain to redeem his actual meager existence — which is a coin sold at "face value" — the truth. However, this does not mean that the genre of the novel is a strict realistic con game, as there are just enough hints of a different type of supernatural menace in the short letters to Shell and in the missives from Madame Orizia, and just enough threat in the opening quote, to suggest that Bax might lose mastery of his plans, as he does not entirely control the parameters of the real and unreal.

Before getting into further discussion, we shall discuss the triple nature of Bax's story. At one point, he borrows a wheelbarrow from his neighbor to transport a recliner left on the curb to his new estate. [That neighbor is picturesquely named Mrs. Nabor — when Bax names his fox Winkle, he says, "Do you recall Mother's pretty white cat, George" The one whose kittens you killed? Never having been an original thinker, I have borrowed her name? (41). Mrs. Nabor's name might be an apt name for Bax to choose for a fictional person next door if he actually does lack originality.] As Bax sits in the chair, he notes, "I found fifty-five cents in the crack between the seat and the back. — fifty-five cents is a significant sum to me just now" (40). Perhaps the easiest way to make fifty-five cents is with two quarters and a nickel — three coins. Soon, he finds three gold coins inside a desk in the attic, of Greek design, and these are the coins which he intends to pawn above. [His areas of specialty and interest are the classical world of antiquity and nineteenth century literature]. After this, Bax finds a mattress in the attic: "Assisted only by [the fox] Winkle, I was — barely — able to drag the mattress down the spiral stair I have described and into this room. I am seated on it now, and sit proudly" (77). Of course, he discovers ridiculous amounts of money in this mattress (but why isn't he sitting on the recliner?), just as he found money in the chair and the desk, each find increasingly unbelievable and unlikely. This triple pattern, three in one, might also shed light on the organization of the novel as a whole.

Triplication allows other permutations and elaborations on themes, motifs, or legends within the novel. When he first goes out to eat with the interested real-estate agent Doris Rose Griffin, he hears a story from her about Mr. Black's old butler, who had a tendency to steal clothes-lines (106). Her story soon presents the potential immortality of the butler and even evolves into a suggestion that he serves the head of John the Baptist on a platter, though the disparate parts of the butler's tale seem to be cobbled together from multiple urban legends. In a letter to his old cell mate, Baxter then indicates that he is learning from the woman who tells this tale: "If I am really as smart as I like to think I am, I can learn something of shrewdness from her. As for technique, I have learned quite a lot from both [Doris and Winker]" (112).

In the next letter, a hobo shows up squatting in Bax's house, and soon returns claiming to be the legendary butler. Still later, the "butler" Nick casts aside this identity and a more vampiric iteration of the butler emerges from the locked trunk of the car in Baxter's garage. In this case, we can see how there might be three "uses" of Doris's story and the hobo: after his introduction as a story, the tale of the butler becomes real, and he begins to serve Bax. Soon, when that figure's role in the story changes, the butler is re-introduced in the form of a different character, with different details and features, and the first butler becomes Zwart Black, incognito. If we are to assume that Bax is constructing different versions of his tale (such as a tame exaggeration of romantic conquests to entertain his old cell mate) and a more fantastic one to attract George and Millie (for different purposes, we would hope), then we have three iterations of the butler: as a story, as a living man who serves Bax, and as a vampire or zombie liberated from the trunk. (Though this final figure seems to be a threatening one, Nicholas *still* calls Bax on the phone with the same verbal habits and subservient attitude as Bax's previous butler, in an act

which has no previous precedent in the text, perhaps symbolically suggesting that the man in that trunk actually works for Bax. When the ghostly figure of the “vampire” jumps out of the trunk, Bax describes it as “horrible, almost like a skull. Sunken cheeks. Big teeth showing through thin lips. White, as white as bone.” The police officer Kate Finn asks, “Could it have been a mask” It sounds like one? (269). Any scene with George present should at least be considered partially valid, even if it is a set-up, as George believes when he chases after the figure.)

If Madame Orizia’s statement about her larger con crystals are to be believed, then the inner ring of the triannulis is synonymous with the small crystal: “That is the real one.” The large, convoluted web of fabrications resonates with the crystal that just “tells everybody what they want to hear.” Unfortunately, Wolfe makes life hard for everyone by corroborating some (but not all) of the supernaturally seeming events in short letters from Sheldon and Madame Orizia — though after some reflection it seems that Bax himself describes exactly what Sheldon, who might represent the middle ring of the con game, would want: “You have been waiting for the sex, if I know you. The problem is telling you so that you will believe it” (156).

Wolfe’s late fiction often does two different things at once, and some of the subtext actually seems to be intended as metatextual or symbolic illustrations for the reader to begin to piece together the background story. In the case of **The Sorcerer’s House**, perhaps Madame Orizia’s and Bax’s contradictions, suggestions, and hints might point to the inconsistencies in the more fantastic version of the story. Besides Bax’s willingness to lie in the narrative at certain points (“I was lying, to be sure, but I was not under oath” (93)), he also offers a few other guidelines for telling truth from fabrication: “[A]nything one disbelieves is forgotten very readily? (161). At the very beginning, Bax offers two discussions of the broken side door of the Black House which seem to be mutually exclusive. When he considers how the young and strangely dressed twins might enter the house and determines that it must be from a cellar entrance, he notes, “Earlier, you see, George, I had searched the house from within; it was by that means that I discovered the broken side door” (53). However, when he first describes the house to George, he says:

Please pay attention. It is important to me at least.

[The house] stands half a mile, perhaps, from the Riverman. I had noticed it more than once, a white house in good repair but a house that had clearly been vacant for some time. A few windows were boarded up, and the lawn was full of weeds; a few days ago, I investigated further.

The front door was locked, as I expected. The back door was locked also;

but a small side door had been broken open. I went in. A vagrant had certainly camped in the house at one time. (12)

Would Bax truly forget that the broken side door was the method through which he originally entered the house from the outside? However, given the entrance of Madame Orizia and George later in the text, it is difficult to deny that the house exists, even if Bax’s story of entering it is not consistent with later details. Wolfe’s “Please pay attention” suggests that this is not an unintentional error on his part, but a telling inconsistency. This is not the only inconsistency, of course. Late in the novel he explores the basement searching for the reporter Cathy Ruth, accompanied by Doris Griffin. When a large rat threatens her, Bax clubs it with his flashlight, “and it dropped to the floor and scuttled away” (227). When they come to a locked door, Doris tells him to shoot the lock. Inside, he confronts the malevolent dwarf Quorn, whom he jestingly notes seems based on the Dickens character Quilp from **The Old Curiosity Shop**. Even though Bax pulls the trigger of his gun, “the pistol did not fire” (228). Later, Bax will request advice from Sheldon: “I told you about the old guns and shooting the wolf. I shot at a door with one, too. After that I wanted to shoot at a rat. He was a great big bastard and I thought I could not miss, but my pistol would not fire. Since then I have been shooting at bottles

in the river" (252). There is no mention of the evil dwarf, and the rat in Bax's earlier letter accosted Doris before they reached the locked door.

There are several other key items in the text which are always described differently, though this might be easily understood by their "magical character." The ring he discovers in a fish, which probably belonged to the sorcerer Ambrosius (if we are to buy into his surface story) is first described as a bit of junk. Later, Dorris will see it as a "cat's-eye opal" (which supposedly has healing properties — here Doris seems to be attempting to get over the death of her husband Ted, though there is reason to believe she is primarily interested in money). When Bax runs into the pawnshop man again, he identifies the ring differently: "You brought in a ring — costume jewelry — for me to look at yesterday. I'd like to see the one you're wearing now — That's a fire opal, I believe, the best I've ever seen" (48). [The fire opal was often noted for healing deficiencies in vision and straightening the sight — definitely something which resonates with all of the strange "window" visions outside of Bax's house]. Later, the jeweler, named Dick Quist, says, "that's a star sapphire, the best I've ever seen" (190). [The star sapphire was supposedly valued as a love charm in antiquity]. While "magic" would explain the different appearances of the ring, the three-in-one pattern of the novel might also be established in these scenes. However, our hint as to whether this ring might exist at all is probably found in Emlyn's casual discussion of the triannulis:

"The middle ring has everything that's on the inside ring and some more things of its own. Look here. See this symbol?"

I did. It was an oval surrounding something that might have been a flame.

?It's not on the inner ring, but it is on middle ring. See? (63)

While the talk of "rings" might here be coincidental, the oval with the flame could very easily be describing a cat's eye opal — it appears on the middle ring, but not on the central small ring — in other words, it is not real. The other possible interpretation of the flame might be the "longlight" which allows sorcerous numen to accumulate. This could be the clearest indication that Ambrosius's ring is in fact not legitimate, given its appearance. Bax's story suggests that he is wearing two rings — one a plain golden band that belonged to Ted Griffin. When the man in the post office asks to see the ring, Bax says "both the rings I wore were mine" (48) However, the response is "Are there two" The gold ring with the large stone? (48) It seems that only one is visible, and in light of later developments, they might ultimately be Ted A. Griffin's rings.

Late in the novel, Winkle takes Bax to a lion-headed figure from Asian myth identified in the letter title as Manjushri. After showing the mysterious figure the "challenge" written by his brother George which suggests that each of the brothers will their estates to the other and struggle to the death, the bodhisattva gives Bax some practical advice, saying that he will "find" his brother only after he and the policewoman Kate Finn team up. While he actually employs her in the letter to help him search for his brother, she serves a vital role in the final court scene in getting the sentence of "George J. Dunn" commuted to community service, and "George" drops his own countercharge against her. Manjushri symbolizes transcendent wisdom, and, more importantly, is depicted with a flaming sword which cuts through ignorance and duality. In this sense, the symbolic implication of Manjushri actually implies cutting through multiplications like Ieuan, Emlyn, and even, ultimately George, possibly leaving only one twin left in reality. (Baxter's discovery of his brother's challenge is also strange, considering that he has been lost chasing after Nicholas the Vampire Butler in the house and also seems to have been arrested for violating his parole, further highlighting Madame Orizia's suggestion, found a few paragraphs down in its entirety, that attention must always be paid to who is present at each supernatural manifestation.)

There are other small details which seem contradictory, including Bax's claim to box and fence

at university: "I will not say I was expert at either; those who were regarded with contempt. Yet I did those things." (54) Earlier, (right after he switches hands for the second time in the novel), he finds Winkle in the attic and describes himself in a slightly different fashion: "I have never been athletic, as you know, but I mounted the oak rungs without great difficulty and managed (rather less easily) to clamber into the attic itself" (41). (Boxing, especially, is an athletically demanding sport even for its less accomplished practitioners, though I admit to bias here.) Of Winkle, Bax asserts, "In the presence of others she would become (I believe) an ordinary fox, red with black markings. You need believe nothing of this, of course" (55).

Having established these small inconsistencies, we should consider that Madame Orizia offers further advice to Bax that might just as well serve critical readers of Wolfe's novel:

[I]t would be well for you to review all recent manifestations. I would suggest that you give each one a short name, such as "Gray Figure in the Garden" or "Piano Played at Midnight." Be as specific as possible regarding times and places. Also, *persons present*. It is a key element. I will question you as to other details. Just what was seen, if anything? Just what was heard, if anything? Was there an odor? A sensation of cold? (221)

Madame Orizia's final advice in this particular note might also be worth considering: "Your sister-in-law has told me you were attacked by wolves of more than natural size, and mentioned, as you did in your letter, that you feel that your car, as well as your home, is a site of supernormal activity. Such may be the case, but I think it unlikely. More plausibly, it is *you yourself*. We must examine this possibility" (222). While Bax mentions multiple romantic interests and obtaining a house in the short letters shared by he and Shell, he does not mention fairyland — nor does he ever speak directly of the twin brothers who haunt his house, Emlyn and Ieuan, the sons of Zwart Black. After all, as Bax says, "Words really mean very little. Men can be defrauded with words and women can be seduced with words, and it really comes to about the same thing" (195). One of the most telling techniques for discerning truth and fiction in Bax's own letters involves his ability to write with both hands: "Have you ever seen me write different things simultaneously, Millie? One with each hand? It is a parlor trick, I confess, but since I have very few I am absurdly proud of it? (167). This might describe Wolfe's writing practice in the latter half of his career, and at each point that Bax "switches" hands we should consider that he is about to perform some trick — and perhaps these "tricks" might indicate how he could at least afford to rent a sprawling house and be in a position to fool his brother when he arrives.

Of course, the problem with assuming that all of the drama in *Medicine Man* is merely an elaborate set up undertaken by Baxter to lure his brother into a trap does seem to involve some initial investment. Where could that money have come from? When Baxter first learns that Mr. Black has left him the house through Martha Murrey, we get a discussion on the painting of the house, which was originally black. When Martha suggests that she might have painted it dun rather than white, Bax says, "A yellowish gray, isn't it? With darker mane and tail. Horses are that color sometimes. Do you play the races, Mrs. Murrey?" (20) It is at this point when he pulls the first of his "tricks" by changing his writing hand:

(This is getting lengthy, I find. I shall switch to the other hand.)

?I did for a while, I said. "It cost me quite a bit of money in the long run, though I enjoyed it at the time. I've always liked horses." (20)

He will switch hands again right before he introduces Winkle (as a being named after something from his past, his mother's pet, whose kittens he blames George for killing, establishing a motive for his hatred). Later, when Doris takes him out, he orders a dinner special called the Lakeshore Hat Trick: "Three kinds of fish, all cooked different. There's pike blackened with Cajun spices, a blackfish cake — that's a Chinese delicacy, sir — with a sweet Oriental glaze, and whitefish in black butter. Three small portions, sir, but taken together they make a big

meal, and it's only nine ninety-five." (37). The Hat Trick is not actually a term denoting some kind of sleight of hand (though in this case it might metatextually show us Bax's trick) — it is achieving three goals or notable achievements in a sport in a row (after which, according to the original coining of the term, a hat might be passed around for impressed onlookers to donate to the victor). Bax might actually be a shrewd sports bettor, and have funded the house through either legal or illegal gambling. His "second" benefactor is Alexander Skotos (though eventually this persona collapses into Zwart Black — even though Zwart supposedly attends Skotos's funeral at about the same time that Bax was incarcerated). In any case, Bax says that the name Skotos sounds familiar, though he cannot place it:

I said that, George, because I judged it contrary to my best interests to commit myself one way or the other so early. How was I to know whether I had, at some time in what I know you will concede has been a checkered career, come across an Alexander Skotos? Perhaps I had. Or more likely, Alexander Skotos was a name assumed by someone I had known under another appellation. I knew a man called Sandy Scott at Churchill Downs, for example. (97)

Often in Wolfe, a possibility which is originally put forth seems to be a clear incidental detail or misunderstanding which actually engenders a fuller understanding of the truth once other patterns are established. Churchill Downs is the home of the Kentucky Derby horse races, and perhaps the mention of betting on horses when he meets his first benefactor, Martha Murrey (who will assume the mantle of his birth mother as the story goes on) in conjunction with his first mention of betting on horses actually does reveal the trick of how Bax came into the money necessary to fund his con-game.

Even if we take Bax's letters to George and Millie at face value, there are still some inexplicable moments in the text involving his trips to Lakeshore with Doris that must be explored (including the manifestation of a huge white horse that might be understood as a water spirit or kelpie on the surface, or might remind us of Bax's love of horse races), and this serves as Bax's final switching of hands in the story, and so might be worth some examination:

What They Want to Hear

It is quite clear that Millie, George's wife, wants to hear beautiful things, proving her gullibility with every word she writes, and that Bax had anticipated both her gullibility and her discovery of the letters from the very start. George, more skeptical, is eventually provoked to seek out his brother based on the vague promise of wealth which he feels is owed him after being defrauded by Baxter, or for the more certain possibility of proving Bax's insanity. Bax knows how to exploit George's quick temper to his own ends.

Given that Sheldon Hawes goes by the nicknames "Shotgun" Shell, it might not be out of line to consider that he is a weapon that Bax plans to utilize. The story Bax feeds Sheldon might be more realistic than the letters sent to George and Millie, but Bax might still have an agenda here, especially given his knowledge that Sheldon will be interested in Bax's romantic entanglements, giving the incarcerated friend a chance to provide insight and advice and feel like a valued member of Bax's inner circle.

Madame Orizia, on the other hand, is something of a con woman all on her own. When she first offers her services to Bax, she indicates that her fees are ?\$500 to \$5,000, in addition to her travel expenses. In Bax's more fantastic letters, we learn that she is saved from rape and agrees to perform her services gratis: "To prove my gratitude, I will charge no fee. None! I must ask you to compensate my travel costs, however" (229). In her final report, she demands a travel reimbursement of ?\$4,387.76, though she admits "I promised to charge you no fee" in connection with Mr. Quorn (294). This sum might be enough to consider Madame Orizia firmly in

Bax's employ, though her earlier impressions might be reliable. It might be worthwhile to consider the versions of each story as a whole before coming to some specific symbolic conclusions.

The Story Bax Tells Sheldon Hawes and Other External Points of View

Bax reveals to his roommate over the course of many letters that he has come to Medicine Man "to get away from my brother George and his friends (the people whose money I took) and the university" (23). He has been unsuccessful in finding work and misses his old cellmate and their friend Lou (who might be a forger and is not allowed paper and writing materials). He says "I am going to try to get my brother to front me some money if I can" (9). In his next letter to Shell, he reveals that he has come into a large house somehow, though the side-door is a problem and kids come in at night — in addition, he is hearing many noises there. He has resolved to fix up the house and sell it if possible, and is trying very hard to get power returned to the estate.

Sheldon writes that he hopes to "get to this haunted house you got before Halloween" since he has a hearing coming up in September (41). He shares some personal childhood memories with Bax about how much he enjoyed freeing himself from the others at summer camp, calling it the best time of his life, and noting that "With the other guys I say it was the night I screwed some bitch, and sometimes it is a bitch I really screwed and sometimes just one I wanted to. But I have told you the truth" (44). This sentence might inspire Bax to embellish his romantic conquests, despite Sheldon's honesty.

In his next letter to Shell, Bax reveals that he has come into possession of three golden coins, but fears that trying to sell them might get him in trouble with the law. While he notes that he found the coins in an old dresser in an attic, he makes no statement about the other supernatural events which bookend this event in his longer letters to his brother George, which we shall omit here. He asks Sheldon if he knows of a lawyer, also indicating that he has met several women without giving any descriptive details [though they are probably at this point Martha Murrey and Doris Griffin.].

Sheldon tells Baxter of a local attorney who likes to see his name in the paper named Ben Ramsey (whom Bax will employ for his brother when the time comes). A man named Rick knows about Ramsey, and he is described as a "Tall guy, boosts cars, bad complexion" (99). Shell also advises Bax that there are only two types of women: "There are women who make trouble for you and women you make trouble for" (99). By this point in the book, Bax has become aware that he might even be left a lucrative plot of property known as the Skotos Strip, but he gives no indication to Sheldon at this point that this is the case, instead noting that he has given his parole officer his change of address. "I still haven't gotten a job, but I am starting to see some possibilities. Not office work, but something that might keep him off my back" (112). He reveals more details about the women in his life: a small and submissive Oriental woman and the widowed Doris: "She has tattoos in unexpected places — She likes money, but I cannot hold that against her. So do I" (112). He characterizes her as shrewd, and vows to learn from her [which supports the idea that he has perhaps begun to fabricate many details about his life to his brother George].

At this point in the book, Baxter begins getting letters from George's wife, Millicent, who has talked over some of the letters with her psychic advisor, Madame Orizia. Millicent warns Baxter about Doris and suggests that he pursue Mrs. Murrey, whom Bax has not seemed to mention directly to Sheldon yet. Soon, Baxter also receives a note from Madame Orizia, who suggests that his home is a node and "may well be possessed" (135). She offers her services and notes that her fees are between \$500 and \$5000, though she must be compensated for travel (136).

Bax's letters to Sheldon seem to skip over many important events, as the next one we have access to indicates that his brother has come to town and has faced a hostile welcome: "I have never been present before while someone held a gun on someone else. That happened last night, and the someone else was my brother George" (155). He tells Sheldon how he has convinced his parole officer that he is earning a paycheck, saying he "bought into everything I told him" (155). [This parole officer never appears in Bax's letters to George and Millie.] Bax has established a bogus business, A Plus Tutors, and suggests that the president, who signs the checks, might be recognizable to Shell. It is only here that Sheldon learns of the inheritance from Alexander Skotos:

A kindly old gentleman called Alexander Skotos has left me a nice piece of real estate. Does that name ring bells with you? Skotos is Greek, so he would be Greek or at least look Greek enough to pass. I have been rummaging through every last memory I can turn up, and I have not found a Skotos or anyone who owed me and might use that name. Ask around please. I could handle everything here much better if only I knew who Skotos really was.

(156)

Obviously, this has occurred after the reading of Skotos's will and George's interruption, but he leaves out many of the details leading up to this, including the murder which occurred while he was eating dinner with Martha Murrey. Once again, he describes Winker and Doris, but no mention is made of Martha at all.

Baxter ends the note with the almost metatextual imprecation:

Remember, please, that the big question is "Alexander Skotos." Who was he?

Any information at all. Have you head of a Mary King? There is probably no connection, but she and Alexander Skotos lived here in Medicine Man or close to it, and both are dead. Please let me know, Shell. (157)

This is the most trouble detail in reconstructing a coherent picture of what has and has not happened, because if the timeline established in the note is to be believed, this is written right after George arrives in Medicine Man and is presented before Doris and Baxter pick up the ghostly hitchhiker who disappears from the car named Mary King. The emphasis in this section, of determining who Mary King, a minor character, and who Alexander Skotos, a major benefactor, are, seem to be given a lot of weight, especially since Mary King will not appear in his other notes (possibly on the same night that George was arrested) until several letters later, when Bax and Dorris stop to pick up a hitchhiker (the third female Bax picks up on the road in his narrative) who calls herself Mary King, saying that she is going, "Where you are going" before disappearing as they pass by a cemetery visible under a full moon obscured by clouds (200).

In Shell's next letter, which is **still** presented before the appearance of Mary King, he says he is writing quickly because of what Baxter said about having two women. Shell tells Bax he has heard something about the Greek and warns him against having two love interests. "You never trust a prosecuting attorney, a automatic, or a chick. Never!" (197) Shell describes how his acquaintance Iron Mike was put in touch with a Greek who wanted to talk to him at a diner. "The Greek came all right and had a long skinny torpedo with him. He says the skinny guy never said a word, just grinned the whole time. — The Greek ordered two coffees, only the skinny guy never touched his" (198). The Greek asks about Baxter and who he was close to. The threat made if Iron Mike should lie echoes the story of the Butler who stole clotheslines: "the skinny guy gets out a piece of clothesline and starts running it through his fingers. Mike said he had funny fingers" (198). This is external corroboration of a Greek man and the tall

figure who will at the very least assume the part of Nicholas in the main narrative, and it seems they have been looking for Baxter, but it is not clear if they are hostile to Baxter or not. (This also gives us no indication how the skinny man might have wound up in the trunk of Baxter's car, however). We shall return to the implication of this later.

Mary King finally makes her appearance in the next chapter, which is addressed not to George or Millie, but to Mrs. Pogach/Madame Orizia, and Bax tells her that he fears the paranormal activity actually extends beyond his house to an antique limousine in his garage. He describes how Mary King disappeared, though does not mention his second hitchhiker Kiki or werewolves, and invites Madame Orizia to come. In his letters to Millie right after this, he mentions that they are surrounded by wolves on the drive back, but makes no mention of Mary King. Instead, he notes that Emlyn "introduced" him to a woman he admires: "Lupine, the psychotic I had met beside the river" (202). None of this is related to Sheldon Hawes.

In his next letter to Sheldon, Baxter assures him that the Greek must have been the man he referred to earlier, but he is puzzled by the identity of the tall man, asking Shell to pay attention to any further news. He sends a package with smokes and candy to Shell, some of which he might be able to trade (and perhaps suggesting in their coded language that *he* wants to trade for Shell's services). He also signs up Shell for magazine subscriptions and offers to send money to his wife. He closes by saying that he has succeeded in shooting *something*: "I hit the animal, but it was just about on top of me and I could hardly miss" (210).

The next letters not written by Baxter are from Madame Orizia and Millie. Orizia suggests that he begin noting the persons present at strange manifestations and that Bax himself might be the actual locus of the supernatural activity. She also suggests that the wolves he wrote about to Millie were not werewolves. The letter from Millie asserts that she has received a call from George, who cannot leave town without being arrested again. She demands the keys to their good car, which was left at the airport if Bax sees George, and she hints that Madame Orizia did not believe her story about werewolves: "This was the only time I have ever said anything and had her not believe it. Don't you think that is sad" I do? (224).

In Shell's next letter, he indicates that he gave a woman named Vicki Bax's address "and told her to get in touch if she needs some money" (235). (Presumably, this is Shell's wife, and she will not appear in the text, though it is tempting, given the appearance of Ben Ramsey, to suggest that all of the characters mentioned in Shell's letters eventually show up in *Medicine Man*). Shell proceeds to give him some shooting advice, advising him not to stall.

At this point, a letter from Millie indicates that she has grown increasingly upset from Bax's letters, and that she has heard from Madame Orizia in an unconventional fashion:

She has never phoned me before and I do not know how she got my number.

She told me a lot, especially about Geroge. I do not think she really likes him but she would not say that. I explained that I do not, either, but she still would not say it. She had seen him in the lobby. She had seen you in a trance, so she thought George was you! When she saw George, she wondered what you were so mad about!

She thinks that house is dangerous and you ought to move out right away.

(238-9)

(This seems to contradict Madame Orizia's earlier conviction that it was Bax himself who might be the source of supernatural disturbances. We will discuss this further below.)

In Bax's next letter, he indicates that Shell should tell him anything their friend Les might want to tell him. Bax seemingly corroborates some details from the climactic excursion in the

basement of his house which we shall describe below, in which he shoots at handle of a door and at a large rat. He also indicates he has been practicing his aim by shooting at bottles in the river. He does reveal an interesting feature of a dueling pistol which comes up for the first time in Shell's letters: "the touchhole — was clogged with burned powder. There is a pick to clear it screwed into the butt of each gun; they have had work to do from that time until this" (252).

He indicates that he is going out of town with a man he knows to practice shooting at targets, and says that antique guns are not illegal for a felon to have. He also reveals that George "punched out a nice copchick I know" and made bail before disappearing, though he does not know what might have befallen his brother (252).

"My brother and I do not get along well. I know I have told you much more about that than you ever wanted to know. Now a woman who knew the man who gave me the pistol thinks he did it so my brother and I would use them on each other — that he wanted one of us to kill the other." (252)

Here he attempts to present a more benevolent attitude towards his brother: "I have not the least desire to kill George, although he has never treated me like a brother; but if I must kill George to keep him from killing me I will" (253). He also suggests a job offer on letterhead from Martha Murrey's company, GEAS Inc., if it might accelerate Sheldon's parole (though he does not mention Martha Murrey by name).

In his final letter to Bax, Sheldon gives him further shooting instructions, and finally suggests that Bax cheats in order to win. "He's going to shoot you, so shoot back first. Only I do not think any of it will really come off. Take it easy. Be cool" (272) This imprecation to "be cool" has far more significance in light of Bax's discussion of Emlyn and Iuean as "hot" and "cool" tempered individuals, further insinuating that Bax corresponds with Iuean rather than "Emlyn the Good."

There are three more letters from external points of view, and two of them are strangely contradictory ones from Dorris Griffin. She admits in a "Dear John" letter that she was interested in the money which Bax had, then says "You were not particularly good in bed, but you were getting better but all this is just too crazy. You are crazy, your house is crazy, and when I am with you I am crazy too" (273). She mentions the woman Bax picked up while driving, Kiki, and says that she has quit her job. A postscript indicates that he should "keep Ted's ring until I send you my new address" (274).

Her next letter, titled "A Terrible Mistake,"

Ab de Vos — 07 Jan 2018, 11:03 · in reply to Marc Aramini

You might not know this but Zwart is the dutch word for Black.

Op 5-1-2018 om 21:41 schreef Marc Aramini:

Emlyn and Iuean, the sons of Zwart Black

Ab de Vos — 07 Jan 2018, 11:05 · in reply to Marc Aramini

And skotos is greek for darkness.

Op 5-1-2018 om 21:41 schreef Marc Aramini:

Emlyn and Iuean, the sons of Zwart Black

Ab de Vos — 07 Jan 2018, 11:37 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I could not find triannulis. I did find annulus. Trianullis might mean with three annulluses

<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/annulus#Latin>

The translations of annulus on the wike page like Portuguese: anel

<<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/anel#Portuguese>>? or Corsican: anellu

<<https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=anellu&action=edit&redlink=1>> make clear the proximity to the word leuan.

Op 5-1-2018 om 21:41 schreef Marc Aramini:

While the strange symbol of the three-ringed triannulis serves

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 13:15 · in reply to Ab de Vos

In folklore the bad Kikimora from the forest is married to Leshy, who is surrounded by wolves and bears. Bax thinks a bear might have killed the first one, but he does see wolves. From wiki "Because of his propensity to lead travelers astray and abduct children, which he shares with Chort, the "Black One", Leshy is believed by some to be evil. Others view him as more of a temperamental being like a fairy"

I think bax is dealing with House spirits. The Kikimora also appear as a woman to have sex with men and drain them of vitality at night (winkle).

Sent from my iPhone

On Jan 7, 2018, at 4:03 AM, Ab de Vos <foxyab at casema.nl> wrote:

You might not know this but Zwart is the dutch word for Black.

Op 5-1-2018 om 21:41 schreef Marc Aramini:

Emlyn and leuan, the sons of Zwart Black

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 13:53 · in reply to Ab de Vos

The question here is whether bax, who is being conned by house spirits, is guilty of setting up the man in the trunk who looks like the man who threatens iron mike in Shell's letters, who hangs out with "the Greek". That might not be supernatural, but the inheriting of power from black is just a fevered dream - the Kikimora are set on ruining relationships with real women (probably Doris Rose griffin - there's a reason she has that middle name)

Bax is trying to con his brother but his dreams get away from him. The House spirits are agitated when there is family strife. The sniffing out of the candle, wolves and bears, talking dogs, spectral appearances of the owner, sexy women in dreams - all are features of associated with the Kikimora and her husband, and Martha Murrey calling herself a scarecrow implicates her as a manifestation of a house spirit as well, given Kikimora in some traditions means scarecrow.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jan 7, 2018, at 4:37 AM, Ab de Vos <foxyab at casema.nl> wrote:

I could not find triannulis. I did find annulus. Trianullis might mean with three annulluses
<https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/annulus#Latin>

The translations of annulus on the wike page like Portuguese: anel or Corsican: anellu make clear the proximity to the word leuan.

Op 5-1-2018 om 21:41 schreef Marc Aramini:

While the strange symbol of the three-ringed triannulis serves

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 16:33 · in reply to Marc Aramini

So I am going to revise this slightly to conclude that the house is conning the con man. I still think he is trying to get his brother to come and the reading of the will is a set up with the intention of true revenge, but the House spirit is corrupting his dreams (Orizia reveals that at one point his trip to fairyland is a dream from which he awakes). No sorcerous inheritance will be forthcoming.

The last issue, given that leshy or Chort (the black one) is surrounded by wolves and bears (and bax sees a leering bear with the face of a man on one haunt through the woods) involves the Greek and the silent man who seems to be Nicholas in Sheldon's letters. The men bax defrauded coming after him? How did that man wind up in the trunk, which clearly contained something vile if the smell and temperature (though it rattled) were to be trusted, as Madame Orizia says? Warm and cold are also associated with fortune and the Kikimora - with cold indicating bad news.

Doris' letter says that she fears she may wind up as crazy as Kiki, granting her external corroboration.

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 20:19 · in reply to Ab de Vos

I am changing to title to Sorcerer's House: Con man conned by House Spirits

PAUL RYDEEN — 07 Jan 2018, 20:20 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Now that's a twist I hadn't thought of!

On Jan 7, 2018, at 2:18 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

I am changing to title to Sorcerer's House: Con man conned by House Spirits

Paul Rydeen — 07 Jan 2018, 22:13 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Interesting twist!

-----Original Message-----

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Marc Aramini Sent: Sunday, January 07, 2018 10:33 AM

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 22:31 · in reply to PAUL RYDEEN

All the weird things with leuan and Emlyn, the dwarf, and even mr black (chort/leshy and his bears and wolves) resonate with some feature of the Kikimora house spirit, who even appears as a vixen to have sex in dreams (Winker) ... Kiki, the wolves, and Quorn appear in m Orizia and Doris's letters at the end, but leuan, mr black, and the triannulis never appear in Bax's letters ... not because he doesn't think they are real but because of the meta structure - they are

deceptions of the Kikimora (scarecrow) ... Martha Murrey calling herself a scarecrow is wolfe at his dirtiest.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jan 7, 2018, at 1:20 PM, PAUL RYDEEN <rydeen at bellsouth.net> wrote:

Now that's a twist I hadn't thought of!

On Jan 7, 2018, at 2:18 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

I am changing to title to Sorcerer's House: Con man conned by House Spirits

Marc Aramini — 07 Jan 2018, 22:32 · in reply to Paul Rydeen

Never appear in Bax's letters to shell*

Sent from my iPhone

On Jan 7, 2018, at 3:13 PM, Paul Rydeen <rydeen at bellsouth.net> wrote:

Interesting twist!

-----Original Message-----

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Marc Aramini

Sent: Sunday, January 07, 2018 10:33 AM

Marc Aramini — 08 Jan 2018, 12:10 · in reply to Paul Rydeen

Also ... the Kikimora reputedly travel through keyholes, thus entering the trunk of Bax's car and traveling with him even if it is not unlocked. Sweet.

It would also explain who the woman helping George was - the House spirits are agitated by domestic strife and familial feuds.