

5HC: Puss in Boots

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 11 Jun 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 11 Jun 1998, 17:36

Here's my stab at the "Puss in Boots" passage. I can't explain it completely, but I have a few comments (which may strike everyone else as obvious).

I'll quote the passage first, because it's short:

Later. For a moment I thought I saw my cat flying like a shadow in the dark, and I wondered if she were really dead, though I broke her neck. The day before I found the burial cave for him, she brought me a little animal and laid it at my feet. I told her that she was a good cat and could eat it herself, but she only said, "My master, the Marquis of Carabas, sends you greetings." And disappeared again. The little animal had a pointed snout and round ears, but its teeth were the even, biting teeth of a human being, and it smiled in its agony.

1) I take it this is a dream or hallucination, since even if the cat is an Annese, there's no reason for her to be quoting "Puss in Boots."

2) Note the similarity between the plot of "Puss in Boots" and V.R.T.'s scheme. In one, the miller's son assumes the identity of the Marquis of Carabas and usurps an ogre's castle and lands after his servant Puss in Boots kills the ogre. In the other, V.R.T. assumes the identity of Marsch and usurps his position after killing him. Note, too, that the "little animal" is mouse-like, but with a human characteristic: Puss killed the ogre by tricking him into turning into a mouse. So while the correspondence is not exact, I submit that this dream or hallucination symbolizes both Marsch's death and V.R.T.'s intended theft of his identity.

3) From the way V.R.T. speaks of, and to, the cat here, it definitely appears that he regards the cat as a cat, not as an Annese, whether his girlfriend or not (and nowhere else does he speak of it differently). Of course, this could be a subtle bit of misdirection, but in that case it would be much easier not to mention the cat at all. And elsewhere in the journal, he's a remarkably poor liar.

--Adam

William H. Ansley — 12 Jun 1998, 11:06 · follows adam louis stephanides

Here's my stab at the "Puss in Boots" passage. I can't explain it completely, but I have a few comments (which may strike everyone else as obvious).

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Carabas, sends you greetings." And disappeared again. The little animal had a pointed snout and round ears, but its teeth were the even, biting teeth of a human being, and it smiled in its agony.

To me, at least, the little animal is obviously Mickey Mouse (or possible one of the other, similar cartoon mice with pointed snouts, round ears and square human teeth). Wolfe definitely has Mickey on his mind from time to time; witness the story "Three Fingers" in *The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories*.

So, I think this passage is, more or less completely, a joke. Wolfe has been known to joke. In fact, in some essay I can't find right now he says something to the effect that his sense of humor makes women faint and strong men cry. And I think it's true--at least the last part.

William Ansley