

Lord Valentine's Castle Short Guide

Lord Valentine's Castle by Robert Silverberg

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Characters/Techniques

As the central figure in his own story, Lord Valentine is an engaging hero. Yet since the plot involves his deposition and amnesia, he is essentially, for much of the story, a character without a past. Indeed, Valentine acquires or creates his identity in the process of regaining his memory and kingdom. First he establishes himself as a wandering juggler with the troupe of entertainers led by Zalzan Kavol; later he becomes the seeker after wisdom who is tutored by the lady of the Isle of Sleep; then he becomes Valentine the military leader who gathers forces and leads the assault up Castle Mount; and finally he is Valentine the trickster and political leader, who wins over his enemies by guile and negotiation more often than force. Throughout his epic quest to regain the power and throne of the "coronal" or king, of Majipoor, Valentine displays the sense of responsibility he had earlier lacked, and exhibits the spirit of liberal and charitable humanism that is to be the dominant tone of his rule.

Some of the lesser characters are effectively drawn, especially Carabella, the charming entertainer who becomes Valentine's mistress; Zalzan Kavol, the Skandar; and some of Valentine's other colleagues in the troupe of entertainers. Also well-sketched, though their roles are brief, are the Lady of the Isle of Sleep, an impressive mother goddess type, and Hissune, the clever gay vagabond, who will play a major role in one of the sequels to the novel, *Valentine Pontifex* (1983).

In the end, however, the novel is primarily concerned with Valentine's quest, a symbolic journey which can be interpreted on several levels. One major theme of the novel is a staple theme of the romance, the hero's acquisition of power — a motif which in this novel is concurrent with his overcoming of amnesia (another mythic theme of the romance, if one is to accept Northrop Frye's theories on the genre). Viewed in this way, Valentine's journey may be read in Jungian terms, as he experiences numinous encounters with archetypal figures like the mother goddess, the wise counselor figure (in this novel, the aged pontifex), and triumphs over the Labyrinth, in order to ascend the realm of power and authority (Castle Mount), and to rout his shadowy adversary (the usurper).

On another level, the novel may be read in autobiographical terms relative to Silverberg's career. Like Valentine, Silverberg is a prince, though of the realm of science fiction or literature; like Valentine, he eventually was crowned by awards and prestige in his third period; yet like Valentine, he abandoned his throne for a brief retirement. In Silverberg's case, the departure from his public role and vocation was voluntary, whereas Valentine's amnesia and loss of power were caused by a secret adversary. Yet the tale of Valentine's return to his kingship is also the story of Silverberg's return to the peak of his profession.



Social Concerns/Themes

Lord Valentine's Castle is the romantic novel by which Silverberg inaugurated a new period of fecundity, after the sabbatical he chose to take for the period of 1974-1978. According to accounts given in interviews, the idea for the book came into his mind spontaneously, an indication that his creative energies — sapped by intense periods of work — were undergoing a renewal.

At any rate, a proposal for the book presented to a publisher in the spring of 1978 was rewarded with a generous contract.

The main themes of Lord Valentine's Castle are the recovery of identity, which has been lost through carelessness and immaturity, and the attainment of one's kingdom or birthright through spiritual growth and the employment of guile without malice.

These themes are rich in narrative possibilities, and Silverberg spares no effort in elaborating the tale of Valentine's quest. The novel describes a richly detailed imaginary planet and a lengthy cast of effectively drawn characters. However, despite the numerous people who appear in Valentine's saga, the novel is centered on the hero's consciousness alone.



Literary Precedents/Related Titles

Lord Valentine's Castle owes as much to the modern tradition of fantasy as to predecessors in science fiction: the work of J. R. R. Tolkien and his imitators is clearly an influence. Unlike Tolkien, however, Silverberg shows little indebtedness to medieval heroic saga or to Norse mythology. Moreover, the planet Majipoor with its three continents, diverse cultures, and history is supposed to exist in a science fiction continuum. It has been colonized by humans and exists several thousand years in the future, although the various indigenous beings of the planet are Silverberg's own invention — including Skandars, sea dragons, and shape shifters. For this thoughtful and detailed construction of an imaginary planet, the most influential model is probably Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) and its sequels, although earlier writers, including even the much maligned Edgar Rice Burroughs, had constructed some elaborate cultures on other planets. The elusive Martians in Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* (1950) are at least one precedent for the shape shifters, who have been dispossessed of their land by human colonists. Undoubtedly, however, there are other instances of such aliens in the science fiction game.

Behind all the immediate influences in science fiction and fantasy, however, there is the general precedent of the literary romance and its folk tale antecedent, or colleague, the fairy tale. Lord Valentine's Castle is almost a compendium of motifs found in classic European fairy tales. Moreover, the traveling band of entertainers are reminiscent of the gypsies who inspired much European folklore.

Since the culture of Majipoor is so detailed and suggestive and its possibilities for fiction so rich, it was inevitable that Silverberg would return to it in sequels such as *Majipoor Chronicles* (1982), a series of ironic short tales providing vignettes of Majipoor's history, and *Valentine Pontifex* (1983), dealing with the major crisis of Valentine's administration. Science fiction provides ample precedent for the series about a particular planet: already cited are two of the most popular, the Barsoom tales of Burroughs and Herbert's *Dune* series. Yet another precedent is the "future history" series popularized by the stories of Robert A. Heinlein.



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