

Westwind

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Jul 1997

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Patri10629 — 26 Jul 1997, 07:30

Starting reading this thread and stopped, picked up my copy of Storeys from the Old Hotel and read "Westwind."

A lovely story.

I get the feeling, as I always do with Wolfe, that there is much here that my first reading hasn't even begun to scan. So I offer these half-thoughts for what they're worth.

The Trademark Wolfean misdirection: Hints that Westwind is "his eyes" and, of course, it's the blind woman. But it's not. Or it is. But...

The dreary, dark and oppressive setting illuminated briefly by match flares of kindness and concern--so you really feel them, so they matter.

I was particularly touched by the scarred man's conclusion (which he hid from the blind woman) that the man who molested her also tried to protect her. "They are often the same man," the Ruler says. The struggle of Humans: Fallen God Stuff.

And how the benevolence of the Ruler seems incapable of relieving the general misery. Free will, in other words.

The idea of "getting away with something", say, peeing in a stairwell when the owner's not watching--the meager freedom and rebellion of the destitute. Sin, in other words.

And the poignant triviality of his spy's reports. Obviously, what news can you possibly bring to an all-seeing ruler? Apparently. It's not about what they say, it's about the fact that they have a relationship with him. Prayer, in other words.

I can see how someone might pick up sinister undertones--Wolfe might be playing with the Big Brother motif, as he often plays with SF tropes. But it seems to me that anything sinister comes from the setting, the characters--the sense of moral decay and poverty. It's hard for me to imagine a truly benevolent ruler. Maybe that's why the Ruler's goodwill seems so shocking.

As for the deception: everyone with a "communicator" thinks they're the special emissary, Westwind, and everyone is. Is it a deception? This is an irony, and, perhaps, a mystery, and I suspect every believer, on some level, feels exactly the same way.

Clearly, the general misery of this reality is not resolved by benevolence or Omniscience; it is merely occasionally relieved. How sad. And, perhaps, how true.

Patrick

Jim Jordan — 26 Jul 1997, 15:53 · follows Patri10629

Westwind is a pretty loaded with symbolism, more or less specific.

The inn is the church.

The message from the Ruler is the reading of scripture.

The potential message from the Department of Truth is the sermon, which the old woman says they don't need.

The game in 20 minutes is the standard Sunday afternoon ball game on tv.

The storm outside is the world and history.

The old woman is the church in person; she is lame, I suspect because she shares the messianic foot wound of Genesis 3. She's not all that pleasant, because after all, the Church is not all that great. She's redeemed; not perfect.

The scarred young man and young woman are people, injured by the world, seeking refuge in the Church.

The ham sandwich & coffee corresponds to communion after the scripture in worship. Ham because, after all, these is the Church, not the Synagogue.

High water everywhere: outside is not just the storm of history, but also a flood.

Lots of people show up to watch the game, far more than were interested in hearing the Ruler.

The young man says that the inn is a "really bad place." Such is the church, but it's better than the storm.

The Ruler cleans the air and the water; fairly cosmic activities.

Obviously, Westwind is anyone who talks to God through prayer. This comes from John 3:8, where those born of God are like the wind.

The young man takes off his shoes before talking to the Ruler; following the rule that one takes off one's shoes on holy ground.

The young woman covers her head before talking to the Ruler; following the rule that women pray with heads covered.

Knowing the Ruler is like knowing where a treasure is hidden; this comes from the parable of the treasure hidden in a field, which is the Kingdom of God.

Finally, notice that the young man is not surprised that the young woman is also Westwind.

Nutria