

alga onto something

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Aug 1997

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m.driussi — 08 Aug 1997, 05:39

Reply: Item #7307956 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET02#

alga,

Re: NYRSF, reprint time is always cause for celebration. When PEACE came out again just a few years ago there were a couple of neat essays about it, and a timeline. So you can't use that as a fig leaf!

Re: me naming the animals. Ah, so what! Can't use that excuse, either. (But if you give me a little footnote, hey, that would be great!)

See, this is how it could go: you write it up, it is published, and then out of the blue there's not one, but =two= long letters to the editor in response, one from me and one from Nutria. And we're going at it like a battle royale, so people start to say, hey, what's it all about? And then Gene Wolfe, subscriber, drops in a postcard just for fun.

Re: TBOTNS, I don't mean to say that "Tracking Song" is a miniature or dry run or anything like that. Just that, as a Wolfe work it shows a number of Wolfe concerns (ecology, evolution, humanity's place in the universe) and even some sequences ("giant, seizure, ride to head, food denied"; magical combat with Decuman the sorcerer, magical combat with Ceryx the necromancer; etc.) that are more fully expressed in TBOTNS.

Re: the Autarch of "Eschatology and Genesis." I mean the dramatic role rather than any of the real autarchs--there is a scene where he orders the gardens to be firebombed in the hopes of killing off "Adam" so that he, the autarch, can usurp Adam's role in starting the human race of the new dawn. Likewise the ever mysterious countessa is trying to pull a lilith, competing with Eve and Lilith. Like the title of the play, like the play itself, "Tracking Song" is about the ending of an old world and the beginning of a new one--there are elements of congruency.

(Gee, that wound in Cutthroat's side is kinda sorta Christ-like, ain't it, doncha think?)

Granted there are a few main ways to read this story. We can agree that one reading is that Cutthroat is delusional the whole time--Mr. Magoo in the zoo thinks he's on the subway, or vice versa. He's amnesiac, he thinks animals are humans and rationalizes the obvious differences with quirky surrealistic props: a chair for antlers, wands for fish catching paws, hoes for tusks, etc. And because he is so non-threatening, the animals treat him like Forest Gump and everybody kinda gets along. This is the Kafka reading, which you so aptly named--don't back away from it.

The Planet Called Moreau reading is that the "humans" are not really just animals but beastmen who have fallen into their beastlike states. Cutthroat has been sent to help them along the path, as have those teams who spoke to the other groups.

The Changeling reading is that Cutthroat originally was a beastman like Cim who joined up to serve on the Sleigh (as she would like to do), was modified and sent back to teach others. (That he grows face hair means that he was not originally a wolf . . . he might have been a lion, since they grow face hair . . .) Or, as she suspects, he just found the suit or ate the sleigher who wore it (shades of FIFTH HEAD abo here).

Saying that Lindsay's savagry is different from "nature's" savagry in Wolfe's story is ignoring the strong similarity. We accept the beastman savagry once we recognize them as "animals" (thereby ignoring the Kafka reading); we cannot accept that Lindsay's capricious murderers are acting at the same level of survival instinct since we expect them to act like "humans." (Ironically? this is the split in perception that Cutthroat refuses to make.) Yet if we watch a nature program with our eyes wide open as a child's, then gee, does raw untamed natural reality =really= have to be so horribly violent? As adults we automatically shut down such childish notions, since that is the way the world is and there is nothing that one individual can do about it, but in the realm of dreams and visions we can still explore them.

Wolfe is offering a pre-coalition Narnia, where the critters are still going about the business of killing and eating each other. And Cutthroat is like the Green Man in that he is pointing to an alternative, however vague and utopian. (But he isn't the Green Man; he is just like the Green Man in this respect--an evolved being among devolved beings on the threshold of the next stage.)

Sure would be great if we could find these terms and names in some dictionary somewhere.

=mantis=