

Inhumi, and Wolfean authors

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 11 Apr 1999

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Nicholas Gevers — 11 Apr 1999, 06:42

Regarding rostrum's point about Horn as a perhaps biased narrator, this influencing his perceptions of the inhumi: yes, this makes excellent sense, especially as the Horn who writes *The Book of Silk* evidently doesn't have much first hand knowledge of the inhumi, having to compare them with the "hus" via the testimony of others. Horn is very much the observer, Patera Silk's Boswell; he reports what others say and do, and is limited to the prejudices of his fellow colonists. I thought I'd add some notes of my own to what others have said in the past about authors whose works would appeal to the Wolfe audience. One obvious candidate is Paul J. McAuley; there has been comment on his series *CONFLUENCE* being a homage to *TBotNS*, but all his later work is Wolfean, especially *RED DUST*, and even his neo-cyberpunk novel *FAIRYLAND* has many conscious Wolfean echoes. Also worthy of mention is the British Horror/Fantasy novelist Tom Holland; people may have been discouraged from reading his work by comparisons of him with Anne Rice (yecch!) and the absurd retitling of his first two vampire novels by his US publishers as *LORD OF THE DEAD* and *SLAVE OF MY THIRST* (original titles *THE VAMPYRE* and *SUPPING WITH PANTHERS*). In reality, Holland is a very literate and ambitious writer, who plays elaborate games of allusion and literary disguise; his most recent novel, *THE SLEEPER IN THE SANDS*, is a masterpiece along the narrative lines of *THE ARABIAN NIGHTS* and *PEACE*, with stories within unreliable narratives within stories. All his work is highly recommended. One other Wolfean parallel, which strikes me as particularly close: what about Brian Aldiss' *THE MALACIA TAPESTRY*, which was published in the mid-1970s? It could easily have helped inspire *TBotNS*, in particular *THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER*; it is set in an ancient shirt-of-Nessus city, which is under a curse of changelessness; it's hero, whose name is Perian (!), is, like Severian, a member of a disreputable profession, and is thus peripatetic; Aldiss's uses a baroque style not unlike Wolfe's and also invokes a lot of archaic and gnostic terminology. I also find suggestive a curious literary coincidence: shortly before Wolfe began publishing *TBotNS*, Aldiss told Charles Platt (in *THE DREAM MAKERS*) that he was planning a Malacia sequel; then Wolfe's Book appeared, and Aldiss did *THE HELLICONIA TRILOGY* instead, as if *TBotNS* had pre-empted his Malacia scheme, covering overly similar territory; finally, in his 1986 critical study *TRILLION YEAR SPREE*, Aldiss damned *TBotNS* with incongruously faint praise. Am I on to a hidden literary rivalry here, or is this a phantom? Any comments?

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