

lazaret stories in context

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 Nov 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 09 Nov 1999, 09:01

Hallvard's Story--"The Two Sealers"

Melito's Story--"The Cock, the Angel, and the Eagle"

Loyal to the G17's Story--"The Just Man"

Foila's Story--"The Armiger's Daughter"

We can and do isolate the four lazaret stories to illustrate various points about this, that, or the other thing. Even Severian does (I'm thinking of his later use of Melito's story).

Many people (nobody posting on this list, mind you) seem to take these tales as pleasant little idyls, discursive tangents to the main thrust. And they might well be.

But there is a context to these four tales, a context that is relatively clear and easy (compared with the context of, say, the brown book--which is both a "Best of" anthology and an oracular device): a competition among suitors for a bride.

The point is, therefore, to "win the girl" for the suitors (and to allow her predetermined decision to be revealed in a soft-yet-firm way, for the bride-to-be; because yep, as so often in Wolfe fiction, the "fight" is rigged).

We know something about the suitors, and they reveal more about themselves (how each sees himself, what each offers to the maiden, why each one is the best candidate) through their stories. Seducing Foila =and= Severian (or better, seducing only Severian, since he is the "judge"--Foila is beyond seduction).

We can pore over every nuance and detail of these different male love-songs, seeing how each slights the other, what gift each promises, etc. A delicious mystery, the heart tanglements of a courtship rite.

Or we can take the female path of stone cold sobriety: Foila gives her judgement of the suitors in "The Armiger's Daughter."

Slam dunk; home run; game over. The fight was rigged from the start. But that didn't make it unworthy to participate in.

Of course (to return to the notions of the earlier paragraph), we can apply this interpretation of a facet (the lazaret stories) to the gem (Severian's narrative) as a whole. But we need not.

=mantis=