

the points of it all

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 09 Nov 1999

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Clifford Drane — 09 Nov 1999, 19:56

Well, argued, Cliff.

Thanks!

But I disagree.

Oh, drat. :)

(snip)

"I have always thought that this story illustrates the fact that there is not always a happy ending, and in many cases, no 'ending' at all."

Well, if this is the case, then why does this mini-story end with Severian's promise to Foila that he will record, remember, and tell the four stories? By doing this, he ensures that Foila and the rest will live on--will have immortality, via the stories. They will be remembered, even if only in the sense that their stories are remembered. This is Literature in a nutshell--the stories are to be preserved and retold. And because of this, Foila's death is not a complete end. The storyteller has achieved immortality through her story.

I see your point, and I think our ideas can co-exist. Yes, Sev promises to record the stories (and we are reading them, so he came through on his promise). But I'm not sure his promise was anything but a reaction to the area being decimated and everyone waiting for his judgment being killed. If they had lived, I think he would have judged (nice little sub-thread maybe - who would he have chosen?). What strikes me is that they were all so caught up in the storytelling, the consequences of the judgment to come - they had alot invested in the whole thing - And it didn't truly matter due to the attack. I think it shows us that nothing we care about, love, hate, etc. can stop fate or chance (whichever way you prefer to look at it). Things can irreperably change or *prevent* an outcome - what's the phrase... coitus interruptus? I could be struck dead by a meteor while typing this, just as they were struck dead before the conclusion of the contest. The cosmos just doesn't care.

So I still argue that the point here has to do with storytelling.

I might add that, while I agree, it's hard to argue against that because the entire series IS storytelling, by Wolfe through Sev to us. I can't think of a time when one could say it's NOT storytelling.

(snip)

"This, to me, is the ultra-refined meaning of

the Urth Books. The Grand Unification Theory, if you will."

...After all, storytelling is the human attempt to define life and invest life with meaning. If we can never fully grasp life, it is because we can never fully tell our stories. Modernism is an exploration of this concept (here comes The Sound and the Fury again!).

... and like in the film Rashomon there are many versions of the truth. I agree, but could insert that a story with no end is still a story, and "the end" is that it has no "end". Brain... hurt... :)

If you like, the four stories represent four perspectives on life. No story is judged above the others because all four are valid, worthwhile, useful, and beautiful perspectives.

Well, I could say no stories are judged because the contestants were all killed, and the contest rendered moot. I can't imagine Sev *not* judging the contest, had they lived. He's an executioner - very used to making decisions and not getting emotionally invested in the consequences of his judgments. I think he would have judged, if the attack had not occurred.

Cliff

Daniel Fusch — 09 Nov 1999, 21:50 · follows Clifford Drane

Hi, Cliff!

I just need to disagree with you about ONE more thing. I think you're reading Severian wrong.

(snip)

"I can't imagine Sev *not* judging the contest, had they lived. He's an executioner - very used to making decisions and not getting emotionally invested in the consequences of his judgments. I think he would have judged, if the attack had not occurred."

Severian tells us, however, that torturers are not supposed to make decisions or judgements. Their task is blind, unquestioning obedience to the decisions passed down to them by the proper authorities. Severian even tells us that he feels extremely uncomfortable when placed in the position of judge, is that he has developed an extreme aversion to judging, so that he is glad when Foila keeps postponing the judgement.

And I would also argue that the death of the contestants does not render their dreams and their desires meaningless at all. Their dreams are preserved in the stories, and their love is preserved through the stories (the stories, after all, were told in order to win Foila's hand--except for Foila's story, which was set against the others). By recording the stories, Severian ensures that their lives--and their deaths--are NOT meaningless.

But I agree with most of your other points.

Alex David Groce — 10 Nov 1999, 12:06 · follows Daniel Fusch

Clifford Drane wrote:

I see your point, and I think our ideas can co-exist. Yes, Sev promises to record the stories (and we are reading them, so he came through on his promise). But I'm not sure his promise was anything but a reaction to the area being decimated and everyone waiting for his judgment being killed. If they had lived, I think he would have judged (nice little sub-thread maybe - who would he have chosen?). What strikes me is that they were all so caught up in the storytelling, the consequences of the judgment to come - they had a lot invested in the whole thing - And it didn't truly matter due to the attack. I think it shows us that nothing we care about, love, hate, etc. can stop fate or chance (whichever way you prefer to look at it). Things can irreparably change or *prevent* an outcome - what's the phrase... coitus interruptus? I could be struck dead by a meteor while typing this, just as they were struck dead before the conclusion of the contest. The cosmos just doesn't care.

Ah, but whether this is true or not, I think it's not at all consistent with the theme of BOTNS--the judgement in URTH shows that all of the "loves, hates, etc." we've seen in NEW SUN are, in fact,

of cosmic importance--I think Wolfe is one of the few science-fiction writers who personalizes the universe while maintaining grandness of scale. Wolfe has few Big Dumb Objects, but some amazing Big Smart Objects (Tzad's ship, Yesod itself). Severian is special, but he's also something of an Everyman character--the fact that his actions are truly significant is, I suspect, meant to grant all human actions significance. Wolfe's stories tend to take place in an almost frighteningly "caring" cosmos--"The Death of the Island Doctor" is a good example of this. It is impossible for the characters in Wolfe's work to escape responsibility and judgement by claiming indifference on the part of fate/the universe.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

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