

Foila's Choice

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 10 Nov 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 10 Nov 1999, 20:04

Hey there, raster.

Raster write:

Is the fight rigged? Foila's story obviously reflects her situation and tells us a great deal about her character. But I think it's noteworthy that the maid in Foila's tale does not "choose to keep herself for herself."

Right. I didn't mean to suggest that she was going to chose this option. My money is on bachelor number three.

Shortly before Foila tells her story, the Pelerines' slave Winnoc informs us that "There's only three ways a man can be a slave.... Though for a woman it's different, what with marriage and the like." I don't think that Foila's story necessarily tells us **who** she intends to marry. Rather, she's letting her suitors (and us) know just **how** the marriage is going to work. The armiger's daughter is the brains of the partnership; she knows how to give orders by requesting a decision. Foila is a combat veteran, and she wants it understood that she is not going to be a chattel of her future husband -- whoever he turns out to be.

Well, okay. I mean, I agree with you, but I push it a little further. I mean, look, we are shown in the text about how the teller puts himself and his situation into the tale--but we do not get a blow-by-blow analysis of the woman's tale.

Note how, in the tale the armiger's daughter is physically wounded by the first two clods. And Foila is in the lazaret, presumably because she has been wounded. Note how in the tale the third suitor is the one who recognizes her as the =superior= being ("an angel" or "a shape-shifting vixen" <g>) that she is. Interesting thing, that: since you might think that a gal fighting in the trenches would be interested in =equality= rather than her own superiority, that is, the partner who fights beside you and sheds blood, etc., the military model of gender-bias free equality.

Putting these odd pieces together, it almost seems as if Foila is blaming her first two suitors/fellow soldiers for her own real wounding--not necessarily "friendly fire," but just their own ineptness as soldiers! After all, one is a seal hunter, the other is a farmer boy--whereas she! She is an armigette (she is at least a cavalry officer)!

On the other hand, it's entirely possible that Foila has already decided who will win the contest, and intends to nudge Severian in the correct direction if she sees that he's about to get it wrong. One obvious way would be to clarify the word "best."

Exactly my point. Here, let's wind it back a bit: who sets up the contest? Foila. Why on Urth would she do such a thing? Because she has no intention of marrying either of the two initial contestants (or she's just a ditz). She wants the stranger in a strange land; she wants the other officer; she wants the one who needs her like an infant needs his mother, the one who sees in

her not an equal (a soldier) but a superior being.

She introduces this surprise contestant, "just as a lark" (heh-heh, remembering the bird of the Armiger's Daughter). Then she =translates= his story. Hmm, now that's a bit suspicious. Finally, to burn all bridges just in case Severian is really dense, she tells her own story, which lays out the contest, its correct and logical result, and the future she has planned for her husband.

My sense: Foila is not some ditzy "Private Benjamin" type of female who just fell into the cavalry by accident and now has to chose between two really swell footsoldiers; she is a warrior princess. She gets what she wants, and she wants a war trophy/trophy husband/war bridegroom!

In part, no doubt, because such an object defines her class (armiger or armiger-wannabe) and profession (hussar); it proves her virility, her martial puissance, etc. Of course, hopeless romantics, we continue to hope that she is genuinely =fond= of the object . . .

Further datapoint: she obviously wants to be discharged from the military, using the past-tense in describing their roles to Severian, but that kook Melito insists that they are still soldiers--duh-uh! Wake up, lover boy! She wants to cash out, get her trophies and get back to civilian life; a life that, if she is indeed an armigette, was richer by far than anything her two lower class countrymen could possibly offer her.

=mantis=

Alice Turner — 11 Nov 1999, 22:03 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

May I offer an entirely non-PC thoroughly female take? (We're not supposed to take gender-based positions.) Mantis is right. Foila is taken with Sev. Foila is flirting with Sev. Foila wants Sev to make a move. Definitely.

-alga