

"Hour of Trust" itself (2)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 Feb 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Feb 2002, 16:25

In reply to my note, Adam Stephanides wrote:

It =is= a strange story. It starts out with the obsessive detail worthy of
REPORT ON PROBABILITY A

I had been thinking Robbe-Grillet (which was a main influence on REPORT, if
I'm not mistaken).

Yes, exactly so. I was trying to keep it within genre, and the Aldiss novel had recently come up
anyway within a Wolfe context.

I mean this: I understand the image of the woman bursting into flames as he
touches her erogenous zones, since this was already established as the
kamikaze hug of the Peace woman.

I'd interpret the final paragraphs to mean that they make love first, and
only after Peters' post-coital conversation does she go up.

I will agree that the delicate phrasing makes this reading possible, and that I had seen that fork
in the text and took the least-time-interval path, but either way it doesn't greatly affect my
overall point.

But if that is truly the case, then I
have to wonder: why him, why now, why here? She claims to have slept with
his boss--wouldn't the boss be a better target? Then again, she says that
the boss is purposefully losing the war, that is, he is perhaps her puppet,
or at least not doing anything she doesn't want.

Referring to her statement "'That's why Lowell is losing his war.'" (164)
But in context, this just means that the war is being lost; and I don't see
anything else implying that Lowell is purposefully losing.

Do you see what I mean, though? I am trying to answer the obvious question, "Why doesn't she
kill Lowell?" and the first answer is, "Because he is losing the war [consciously or not] and that
is what she wants." A possible stretcher would be, "Because if Lowell is out, then Peters will
inherit the throne."

The text establishes desire as a function of resemblance to someone unattainable (like
Severian:Thea:Thecla:"Thecla"). Peters lusts after the dark haired model/prostitute presumably
because she resembles Clio (whom he considers unattainable); while waiting in line for her, he
is told to man his post instead (set back); but then, glorious surprise, while he is the only one
working at the party, who should enter the room but Clio herself. And what do you know, very
quickly she talks about how Peters reminds her of someone--Lowell. All magically romantic.

The insistence that Peters is a young Lowell seems to suggest that Peters will (somehow) inherit
the throne.

I don't know why she picked him as a target either. My guess would be
simply that he's one of the few competent people working for the
anti-rebellion forces, and therefore worth eliminating. You'd think,

though, that having a spy working for one of the enemy leaders would be worth more than eliminating one subordinate, especially one who hasn't done anything amazing yet. Or maybe she's not working for the rebellion at all, and commits murder/suicide on her own, for whatever reason.

Precisely. The first fire-girl we see is presented as a non-specialist: all she has to do is walk out there, attract some soldiers, and flame on. Clio-the-rebel is obviously a higher level creature in the hierarchy--she successfully infiltrated US (at least one year earlier), and presumably her inside-information on forces and their allocation, fed to the rebels, is what makes the ragtag hairies win such stunning victories against all odds. If this standard espionage scenario holds true, then yes, Clio alive and in place is worth far more than even a roomful of US employees, nevermind just one.

Symbolically, though, it make more sense to me. Clio is history, as you point out (good call; I hadn't noticed that), and she stopped sleeping with Lou about six weeks ago (165), signaling that history has withdrawn its favor from the "government" cause. In signaling his intention to try and turn things around, Peters is attempting to stand in the path of history, and people who do that get steamrollered by history, if you'll forgive the mixed metaphor. (This doesn't explain why history should commit suicide, though.)

Right, I should make plain that IMHO the ending works well for the story on initial reading--it is a zinger, it seems out of the blue, and it "brings the war home" to an expat. It plays on the title. The first paragraph links Clio with history, sex appeal, and fire.

But right after that initial rush, second thoughts begin to creep in, and the logic of it seems to suffer.

(The Peace people seem to require the following conditions: a battle-front where they can appear and cause confusion; soldiers to see them and react, and die in favorable ratios [that is, better than one soldier for one Peace person]; cameras to film the whole thing for viewers.

Realistically, it seems like a poor tactic. All the soldiers have to do is shoot anybody approaching their lines who doesn't stop when ordered to. And in any case, the bombers only get a favorable ratio if the soldiers are stupid, like the ones who tried to rape the girl. Its value, if any, seems to be primarily symbolic: "Look how dedicated we are."

It is a tactic to push the soldiers to commit more atrocities (killing white-flag waving civilians, even naked civilians), which will further erode civilian support for the government and boost support for the rebels. That is, it is propaganda: demoralize/terrorize/brutalize the soldiers, win the hearts and minds of the civilians through manipulation. It is that whole "Life is cheap to them" thing, writ large. It is one reason why the rebels are assured to win. (Another reason is Clio's presence inside the company, but there's that problem again.)

=mantis=

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