

Horn and Silk

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 19 Feb 2002

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 19 Feb 2002, 16:51

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I think one thing that needs to be addressed is the nature of the relationship of tBotSS to tBotLS, and I think the best model is the relationship between the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament.

It has recently been suggested by several persons on this forum that Silk directly inspires LONG, thus giving it a greater level of veracity or accuracy than SHORT, or at least than those parts of SHORT that deal with Horn prior to his becoming blessed with Silk (and possibly some nameless inhumu). Now, it seems to me that, given that Silk is very much a messianic figure for the people of the Short Sun Whorls, and that Horn is the author of one, but not the only, account of the deeds of Silk, we need to look at the Apostles for our models of Horn.

My first inclination is to look at St. Paul. Quite aside from the obvious Odyssey parallel, one could easily see SHORT as in some ways paralleling the missionary voyages of Paul - complete with shipwrecks, the insistence of the principal on earning his way when the local people want to give him all he needs, etc., etc. There is, however, a very serious objection to the use of Paul as a model for Horn: Paul's (well, Saul's) persecution of the early Church, prior to his conversion, is a stark contrast to Horn's position as possibly Silk's first convert, and certainly a convert prior to the founding of the Silk cult.

The next choice would seem to be Peter. I don't recall anything in LONG that would parallel Peter's moment of doubt - but then, there's nothing in LONG that really parallels the Crucifixion either: perhaps a less literal approach is required here. At that point, things become a little more promising. Horn, like Peter, is the first to recognize the unique nature of his Master. Horn stays at home (well, new-home) with his people until at last he sets out on a journey which results in his death.

But that really doesn't work either. Another option would be John, and indeed one can see some parallels to John's apocalyptic visions in the Narr's experiences on Green and the Whorl.

But to be honest, I think in the end any such search for specific parallels is going to fall apart, because Horn isn't any of them - he is a unique character, in a very different situation from first-century Judaea: and at the same time, he amalgamates aspects of at least these three, and perhaps several others of the Apostles and Evangelists. And the voyages of Paul thus become relevant and interesting again (especially if we think of Krait as a possible parallel to Luke ... horrors!). We then see that Silk, as a result of his experiences on his voyage, ultimately is indwelt by the Spirit of Silk ... or is it that Silk is indwelt by the spirit of Horn? This becomes complex and confusing.

Comments? Sneers?

James Jordan — 19 Feb 2002, 17:47 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

No sneers from me. I've maintained this from the beginning, here and there. Certainly the Long Sun is based roughly on the gospels, though I think *Exodus* has some of Acts in it, and the end of *Exodus* is apocalyptic, like Revelation: the Whorl is coming to an end in fire.

In Long Sun, Auk is most like Peter, the "stumbling, bumbling Peter" of the gospels (in common mythology anyway). But I think you are on target in suggesting Horn as something new as well as something old (just as Silk is both new and old, but like and unlike Jesus). Maybe the voyages have something to do with Paul, though Paul went out as an evangelist and Horn's mission is quite different -- a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (see below). As you write, Horn was already a disciple, a kind of Mark (the very young man who grew up to write a gospel). But if we superimpose Peter on Horn, then his voyage to horrible Green can be seen as Peter's journey to Rome, where he died -- though this is not in the New Testament, and protestants like me don't believe it happened, yet it is a central part of Wolfe's Roman Catholic commitments.

Horn's actual mission, to bring Silk back, and "corn-silk" for a new world, might be a spin on the Revelation to St. John, which climaxes with the return of Christ and a new heavens and earth. But I think it is more a pilgrimage to bring back powerful relics (see below).

But for the triple political transformations that occur in the narrative, we would have to move beyond the New Testament into the political effects of the Christian gospel on the Roman Empire, on the tribes of northern Europe, etc. Also, the "incorporation" of a transformed version of pagan deities and myths is part of Roman Catholic history (rejected by us protestants, in the main). Wolfe believes there is much to this RC tradition. Thus, in Short Sun we start to get hints of Pas & Co. being somehow incorporated and transformed into the new "religion." And think of the "Mother." The old Earth Mother became united to the mother of Jesus and became a lot of the popular stuff about the Perpetually Virgin Mary of Roman Catholicism. Wolfe accepts this as part of the gathering and transforming effect of the Christian gospel. I suspect that in Short Sun he's spinning on this kind of thing, in its beginning stages. Eventually the Mother will become linked with the mother(s) of Messiah Silk. (?)

The inhumi are kind of like the unconverted gentiles, who were dominated by demons before the gospel came. They have to be blended with the "Jews" into the new Church. Don't we see the beginning of this kind of process in the Short Sun, ESPECIALLY if the human-plant hybrid hypothesis is correct?

With the Silk narrative as "inspired" while the Horn-Silk narrative is NOT "inspired," I think we are mostly moving beyond the New Testament as a whole and into the early Church. As I mentioned above, it looks like the Long Sun goes clear through Acts to Revelation.

So, while were speculating: Maybe in part Horn's trip to the Whorl is like a medieval pilgrimage to the Holy Land to acquire relics to bring back home. Along the way, we encounter gentile Muslims (inhumi), and when we get to the Holy Land, things are really bad there: It has fallen into bad shape and into bad hands. At the end, does Silkhorn return as a kind of Crusader to retake the Whorl?

In all, I think that there are allusions, but Wolfe has constructed a new narrative that is not just an allegory -- though there are more allegorical elements in Long Sun than I've seen in Short Sun. Allusion rather than allegory would be the ticket, I think.

At any rate, I think you are right on track with ONE aspect of the narratives.

Patera Nutria

At 10:51 AM 2/19/2002, you wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Feb 2002, 19:32 · follows James Jordan

Nutria,

Thanks for the thoughtful (and, by-and-large, supporting) remarks.

I see your point about Exodus having some aspects of Acts and of Rev.; but even if I thought those aspects were stronger than I do, there's nothing in LONG that in any way parallels the

Epistles. I guess the point that really tipped it over for me, and then I forgot to mention it in my previous post, was the the observation that much of SHORT is written in a sort of extended epistolary form. The first two books, and the first "I" sections of the third, are a huge letter home. Further, there is the interesting parallel between the letters, like Hebrews, that seem not to have actually been written by Paul but by someone writing in (so to speak) his voice: I think this bears some looking at in regard to the authorship of the Book of Horn, and especially of RttW.

I hadn't thought of adding Matthew to the mix, but he's an interesting choice. (Was it him or Mark who started out as a tax collector? Can't recall off hand. At any rate, I don't see much relevance to that...)

The interesting thing is that, though he isn't consciously evangelizing, wherever he goes, the Narrator spreads and adds to the myth of Silk. He makes clear early on, though he never says it, that the people of Gaon think he's Silk - I believe the way he puts it is that he is the only person in Gaon who doesn't know where Silk is.

What I am suggesting, though, is not that we should "superimpose Peter on Horn," or that we look at Horn as a parallel to Paul, Peter, or any of the other particular Apostles and Evangelists, but rather as a sort of parallel to all of them - that is, in much the way that Silk and especially Severian play so much of the role of Christ's life without being him, so too I think Horn is profitably seen as playing out a role that could be called "apostle-and-evangelist," but not as actually repeating or replaying the life of any specific Apostle or Evangelist. My own stumbling and bumbling through various details about Peter and Paul, in other words, wasn't aimed at saying "Which is he like?" so much as "He's like one of them."

All of which should teach me that I'd best not try to express this sort of thing at unGodly hours of the morning.

I really can't see the Narr's travels as a "pilgrimage to the Holy Land" or anything to parallel the Crusades - primarily because I really can't see the "Church of Silk" having arrived at anything near the medieval stage in the short time the exodants have been on the Short Sun Whorls. I do see your point about the effect of the Gospel on the various tribes; and while there is no overarching Empire of the sort that conditioned and informed the travels of Paul and other early missionaries, the situation reminds me more of these than it does that of the early-medieval missionaries like Augustine and Cyril. I'm willing to be convinced, though.

But I think we have here a situation at roughly the stage where Peter and Paul are just beginning to realize, and to tell the others, that the Goyim have to be let into the church - a fair parallel to the inspir(it)ed Narrator's somewhat mysterious insistence on treating Jahlee and Fava as people (because of the Secret Of The Inhum). So your comments about the "unconverted Gentiles" are in fact right on the mark, but militate for an earlier parallel. (Historically, though, I can't think of anything that might parallel the Secret. The Secret of the Gentiles? Puh-leeze.)

That this may add some nuances to our thoughts about the way(s) in which Silk and Horn are present in each other. Horn has quite literally become incorporated into the Body of Silk; but he is enabled to act, and granted his wisdom, through the power of the Spirit of Silk. H'mmmm... I wonder if these books are ultimately going to prove to be quite inaccessible to anyone unwilling to really think from a Christian-Catholic point of view?

Interesting comments about "the Mother"/Silk's Mother/the Earth Mother/ the BVM. Yes,

Catholicism does a great deal of syncretism (incorporation of local mythology) - on, I believe, the assumption that these mythologies were God's way of preparing the various peoples of the world to receive Christ. But historically, the reverence of the BVM goes back very early indeed; and while this would not be, from the Protestant PoV, an argument for reverence of the BVM, it is an argument, from the Catholic (i.e., Wolfe's) PoV for not thinking that said reverence of the BVM comes from this sort of syncretism.

Still and all: if we accept LONG as being the "parallel" to the entire NT, then perhaps it's worth looking at SHORT as a hagiographic legend? Certainly a number of these involved apparitions of Christ.

Obviously Wolfe has constructed a "new narrative that is not just an allegory"; but the same can be said even of books of any quality (e.g., Lewis's Narnian tales) that blatantly are allegories: that is, they are not just allegories.

Side note, from Dan'l to James: You wrote:
his voyage to horrible Green can be seen as Peter's journey to Rome,
where he died -- though this is not in the New Testament, and
protestants like me don't believe it happened, yet it is a central part
of Wolfe's Roman Catholic commitments.

I've never quite understood this, btw - most Protestants believe many things that aren't in the Bible (i.e., "Cannibalism and polygyny are wrong," "Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo," "The Gospel according to Matthew is divinely inspired, but the Gospel according to Thomas is not," etc.) - why do so many Protestants feel so strongly about rejecting this particular bit of historical trivia? I mean, it isn't as if this is in any material way the basis of the claims of the Papacy.

--D

Michael Straight — 19 Feb 2002, 20:48 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I've mentioned before another way in which the Long Sun books remind me of the book of Acts.

Acts is written in third person for the first 75% of the book, then it suddenly shifts to first person for a bit (the writer suddenly starts talking about what "we" did and where "we" went).

-Rostrum