

OT: further possible examples of story suites

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 11 May 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 11 May 2002, 00:31

Blattid reported:

Ursula K. Le Guin has (apparently) recently come up with a useful term for books like *_5HC_* and, another particularly useful example, Kim Stanley Robinson's *_Icehenge_* -- i.e., books that are more than story collections or "fixups," but not exactly novels -- in an online interview with somebody or other named Nick Gevers, she refers to such book as "story suites," which I think is quite apt, but then when is UKLG other than apt?

Sounds good. So would Steinbeck's *CANNERY ROW* and Jack Vance's *THE DYING EARTH* both be further examples of "story suites", or are they something-else-again?

=mantis=

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 May 2002, 15:49 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Regarding Le Guin's term "story suite," Mantis asks:

Sounds good. So would Steinbeck's *CANNERY ROW* and Jack Vance's *THE DYING EARTH* both be further examples of "story suites", or are they something-else-again?

Haven't read *CANNERY ROW* (actually I really only discovered Steinbeck last year, though I'd read & loved *THE MOON IS DOWN* in high school), but if I recall correctly TDE would be more of a fix-up in the classic sense -- similar to (say) van Vogt's *VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE* or Asimov's original three "Foundation" books. That is, the stories were clearly written for more or less independent publication and, while they build on each other, don't totally alter each others' "meaning" the way the stories of *5HC* and *ICEHENGE* do -- the "story suite," as I am understanding the term, is more closely linked by meaning, not just sequentiality, than the classic fix-up.

--Dan'l

Michael Andre-Driussi — 15 May 2002, 17:02 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Blattid wrote:

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of a fix-up in the classic sense -- similar to (say) van Vogt's VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE or Asimov's original three "Foundation" books. That is, the stories were clearly written for more or less independent publication and, while they build on each other, don't totally alter each others' "meaning" the way the stories of 5HC and ICEHENGE do -- the "story suite," as I am understanding the term, is more closely linked by meaning, not just sequentiality, than the classic fix-up.

Okay, granted the greater degree of pieces altering each other's meaning. Neither one is likely to be a story suite . . . but the final word would have to come from Le Guin. :)

OTOH, while I'm not certain about the publication history of CANNERY ROW (did sections appear in magazines, etc.), my understanding of THE DYING EARTH is that it is 6 stories, and only one of them was published in magazine form--that was the same year (1950) that the book came out, and as such amounts to a publicity release (just as "The Tale of the Student and His Son" and "The Armiger's Daughter," two tales from TBOTNS, appeared in magazines). Or so it seems to me.

So fix-up "in the classic sense of van Vogt," well hmmm. Divining Vance's (probable) intentions rather than the publishing record (making TDE a "failed" van Vogt fix-up?). Ah well, such quibbles! Look, blattid said "more of a fix-up," not "exactly a fix-up," so there's no quibble, even.

=mantis=

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 May 2002, 17:45 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis argued with hisself, kinda ...

Okay, granted the greater degree of pieces altering each other's meaning. Neither one is likely to be a story suite . . . but the final word would have to come from Le Guin. :)

Why? She coined a useful term; that doesn't make her the final authority on it. The word "retcon" (which I didn't, actually, coin but saved from vanishing) has totally escaped it's coiner's or my intended meaning, but it's a useful term of art anyway. And when you're dealing with a book like 5HC or ICEHENGE, none of the existing terms really _do_ work.

BTW, I like "mosaic" too, but think it more appropriate for something made of more, smaller parts -- in fact, TDE might work here, but (as I said) I don't recall it well enough.

... [M]y understanding of THE DYING EARTH is that it is 6 stories, and only one of them was published in magazine form--that was the same year (1950) that the book came out, and as such amounts to a publicity release (just as "The Tale of the Student and His Son" and "The Armiger's Daughter," two tales from TBOTNS, appeared in magazines). Or so it seems to me.

And you could well be right -- it could well be that Vance conceived TDE as a suite of interconnected stories (are they?) and not just a series of stories. I read it once, twenty-plus years ago; I admit to being sort of blind in one eye where Vance is concerned. I deeply admire his style, and would cheerfully kill to be able to speak like one of his characters -- _nobody_ speaks with that kind of spontaneous elegance! -- but most of his stories qua stories just go in one eye and out the other for me. Only thing that has really stuck is the "Demon Princes" sequence.

So fix-up "in the classic sense of van Vogt," well hmmm.
Divining Vance's (probable) intentions rather than the
publishing record (making TDE a "failed" van Vogt fix-up?).
Ah well, such quibbles! Look, blattid said "more of a
fix-up," not "exactly a fix-up," so there's no quibble, even.

Well, yeah. This is more of a matter of degree than a binary "it is"/"it isn't." It can be a floor wax
and a dessert topping, for all of me, and a big part of the idea behind "story suite" or "mosaic"
would posdef be dat ole debbil auctorial intentionality ... you can draw a sort of spectrum. Most
any "novel" built from parts can be slotted on here somewhere... Putting in a few examples to
create the sense of this...

o Far left, or "fixup," end of the spectrum -- example would
be something like "Space Beagle." Stories clearly written
as individual parts, shoved together to make a novel with
no particular continuity or whole plot.

o Somewhere to the right of this we can slot "Foundation" and
the rest of the original trilogy, where the stories are linked
a bit more thematically (as Delany observes, each story's
resolution provides the problem for the next). There's more
of a shape to it, but the stories are still very much
independent; the experience of someone coming across one of
them in an anthology or an old magazine won't be _that_ radically
different from that of someone reading it in the omnibus.

o Near the middle, a smidge to the left side, we might find
Delany's "Tales of Neveryon" and its sequels. The stories are
not _quite_ independent; indeed, they follow the pattern SRD
diagnosed in the "Foundation" stories, but thematically rather
than in terms of plot. (The re-placement of the first tale in
the final volume is, in this sense, either problematic or
a claim that it's been rewritten by the very existence of the
rest of the stories.)

o Still near the middle, but a little to the right side, I'd put
something like Mike Resnick's "Birthright," whose story-bits
are clearly composed as a whole to create an overall effect,
but don't really interact beyond that level. This would be the
ideal example of a "mosaic," I think.

o Somewhere to the right of the middle I'll place Le Guin's own
"Tales of Earthsea." The stories can be read independently, but
together form more than (as first appears) an historical overview
of Le Guin's imagined world; they are a consistent and balanced
set of variations on certain themes that play through the whole
Earthsea series, and more specifically in the "second trilogy"
of which "Tales" is the centerpiece. Those who read its final
story, "Dragonfly," in Silverberg's _Legends_ antho, may recall
that it was surprisingly thudding in that context; in the context
of Le Guin's collection, it opens up and loses a lot of the
thuddingness.

o And, at the far right end, of course, my exempla would be 5HC

and "Icehenge."

The point here is not to create pigeonholes or whatever, but to work out a useful term, going forward, for critical discussion of these not-quite-novels.

Blatt blatt,

--Dan'l