

Suicide & Despair

The Urth list — 11 messages, 7 voices, 11 Jul 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3339>

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James Jordan — 11 Jul 2002, 14:03

At 11:55 PM 7/10/2002 -0500, you wrote:

If Silk wasn't trying to commit suicide over Hyacinth's casket, then what is the significance of Silk/Horn and Remora's conversation about death and suicide at the end of the series? I thought the reason that kept Silk retreated into the Horn persona through most of the books was that he couldn't face the fact of himself committing suicide. When he finally did, he emerged. Didn't the Neighbors say something when Horn was dying about "transferring him into a healthy body who's soul was dying" or words to that effect? I took this to mean that Silk's body was relatively healthy-- he hadn't gone far enough to truly be in danger of death-- but that his soul was dying, i.e. he had decided to end it all, made the decision to quit living, given up. If Wolfe is a Christian, than this is one of the greatest moral crimes a man can commit. If Silk is a servant of the Outsider, the same is true, and the fact that he committed it, fell so far, is why he stayed hidden in Horn for so long. I think the suicide theory explains things rather nicely. What holes do you guys see?

-Steve

For me, this same evidence points not to active suicide but to the sin of despair, of losing faith in God. These are strongly linked, of course. Despair is one of the greatest of sins. I think all the evidence that has been evinced to show Silk attempting suicide works better with the sin of despair. Silk's wounds I have always taken as the result of some kind of attack that left Hyacinth dead and Silk in despair. It seems pretty clear from the evidence in RTTW that Silk's ministry/mission has been over for some time, and that's depressing enough -- loss of calling after a season of heroic acts is very depressing. Now Hyacinth is dead. Depression and despair, yes. But suicide? I think not.

Anyway, despair is a kind of soul-suicide, so if you are saying, "Silk has sunk into despair and black depression, and is contemplating suicide," you may be right. But I don't think the wounds in his arms are self-inflicted.

Viewing the subsequent narrative as a process by which Silk recovers his faith, and thus his self, might be worthwhile investigating. What are the steps through which the Outsider takes him?

Nutria

James Jordan — 12 Jul 2002, 00:10 · follows James Jordan

It seems to me that Silk's throwing away a knife might be a knife he used in a vain attempt to ward off attackers, not one he used to inflict wounds on himself. The Neighbor says Silk's body is okay. It seems to me that if he had been trying for suicide, he would have succeeded. But I may be wrong.

Nutria

Inire — 12 Jul 2002, 00:17 · follows James Jordan

--- James Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:
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knife might be a knife
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I just had a horrid thought: all this talk about arm
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the carriage of a weapon reminds me of a murder in San
Diego years ago (I grew up there); is it possible that
Silk/Horn killed someone with that knife and the
wounds are the result of his victim fighting back?

could that explain the brevity and hostility he
experienced in the next encounter (where he gathered
the corn)? Had they heard something?

Out on a limb, i realize...

=====

Jeff "My dice hate me!" Miller

"The idea of verifying facts about the world through controlled repetition seems alien to just
about everyone with the _possible_ exception of Fr Inire, and he's a bug-eyed space monster. .
."

Gaming to keep War out of RealTime!

FOR SALE!! ->85 VF500F 'Contraceptor'<-

****Specify Type Of Goat****

James Jordan — 12 Jul 2002, 15:01 · follows Inire

At 05:17 PM 7/11/2002 -0700, you wrote:
--- James Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:
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Well, yes. That's just what I think happened. He was defending his house and his wife and himself. The horror of having killed someone (or at least wounded him and driven him off) + the death of Hyacinth -- well, that's enough for Silk to despair. But I may be wrong.

Nutria

Charles Reed — 12 Jul 2002, 15:51 · follows James Jordan

But why would fighting to protect himself drive Silk to despair? He killed the Talus and although he felt guilty about it, he didn't despair. He smacked Musk a wrapping good blow with his cane and apparently didn't feel all that bad about it (although he didn't kill Musk). He sliced Blood in two with his azoth and didn't fall into despair. In fact, the only time I can remember Silk really losing himself in despair is the scene where he and Horn are on top of the Trivigaunti airship. I've never really been sure of my reading of that scene, but it always seemed to me that his despair rose up out seeing the many and casual ways in which people deceive and hurt one another. I believe he told Horn that he had been focusing on all the evil that other people do to each other instead of focusing on the evil in his own heart, and that this misdirected and misguided focus is what led him to despair.

I know that was "twenty years ago" and that perhaps Silk has become more hyper-sensitive to violence in the intervening years, but I just can't buy into the notion that his despair springs from his having defended Hyacinth or himself from some attacker. The only way I could see this happening is if it was Hyacinth herself whom Silk had killed, but I don't believe that could have happened either. If I remember correctly (sorry, I don't have my books with me) Hyacinth was already in her coffin when Horn's consciousness was transferred into Silk's body, which I take to mean (given the relative isolation of their house) that they had known for some time that Hyacinth was ill, and that they were prepared for it when it came. Perhaps Silk even built the coffin himself (like they did in Faulkner's creepy novel, *AS I LAY DYING*).

It seems to me that the most logical explanation for Silk's despair is that Hyacinth had been dying for some time, and while she was still alive Silk was able to busy his mind with her care. But when she was dead, and placed in the box, and Silk found himself utterly alone in the Whorl, his grief and loneliness overcame him.

I haven't made up my mind on the question of whether Silk was actually trying to commit suicide or was merely whaling away at himself in grief-induced madness (I tend to favor the latter explanation), but I also think that it doesn't really matter. His emotions had overwhelmed him and he didn't know how to go on.

Just my two cents.

Charles (who needs a cool moniker to go by)

James Jordan wrote:

...<snip>...

I just had a horrid thought: all this talk about arm wounds, a lack of memory of how they got that way and the carriage of a weapon reminds me of a murder in San Diego years ago (I grew up there); is it possible that Silk/Horn killed someone with that knife and the wounds are the result of his victim fighting back?

Well, yes. That's just what I think happened. He was defending his house and his wife and himself. The horror of having killed someone (or at

least wounded him and driven him off) + the death of Hyacinth -- well, that's enough for Silk to despair.
But I may be wrong.

Nutria

Andy Robertson — 13 Jul 2002, 14:58 · follows Charles Reed

What people are persistently failing to acknowledge, though Wolfe flags it again and again, is that Hyacinth was a bad woman, and disastrous for Silk.

Silk's near suicide on the airship comes *after* he has obtained Hyacinth, after he has gotten his dearest wish, and realised it is dust and ashes. Hence the despair.

I believe that Silk's life with Hyacinth was hell. Consider the state of the house he was in - small, mean, "almost everything broken".

He did not, could not, kill himself while she lived, because somehow he still loved her.

But when she died, at long last, he lay down the burden of life and love, at last free of her, and allowed his spirit to die.

hartshorn

Charles Reed — 12 Jul 2002, 17:02 · follows Andy Robertson

I have to disagree with hartshorn's reading of the airship incident. If you'll recall, Silk was standing very close to the edge and Horn was expressing concern that Silk would jump. At some point in their conversation, Silk tells horn about how Maytera Marble had deceived Hammerstone by claiming to be Hammerstone's old girlfriend, Molybdenum. Horn then says something like, "I don't think that's any reason to want to kill yourself," to which Silk replies, "I disagree."

You're right that Hyacinth was part of it: the way she attacked the Trivigaunti pilot, the way she was fooling around with whats-her-name in the cabin below (I've GOT to bring my paperbacks to work so I can have them as a reference), but she wasn't the *WHOLE* reason for his thinking about jumping, and might not even have been the majority of it.

And speaking of Hyacinth, my first reading of the Long Sun books left me really confused about the ending. But my second reading has really cleared things up for me. I was never really confused about why Silk chased Hyacinth at the end of EXODUS. Rather, I couldn't figure out why Hyacinth ran away in the first place. That whole is really fascinating to me, and I'd like to examine it because it speaks to what hartshorn said about Hyacinth.

Hyacinth had already gone down into the tunnel and was urging Silk to hurry up, but Silk wanted to have a few words in private with Horn before descending. She finally got tired of waiting and came to see what the hold-up was. Silk was telling Horn something (I NEED MY BOOKS!) about lying, I think, and made some oblique reference to Hyacinth's lying that he fully intended for her to hear. I think he was using her as a "bad" example to illustrate his point. And that's where Hyacinth apparently realized that she didn't want to spend any more time with Silk, even if he could take her to safety. She "wigged out" at the thought of spending her life with this guy who was capable of insulting her in the most educated and civilized tones imaginable. She didn't want to go into danger with him, and she couldn't imagine spending

weeks cooped up with him in the lander. So she ran. And Silk, probably realizing what he had done and being aghast because of it, ran after her.

All I'm saying is that even though Hyacinth might not have been good to Silk, there are ways in which he wasn't good to her either. Hyacinth wasn't evil, and that it's very possible she was even good for Silk, because there at the end of EXODUS, she wouldn't allow herself to be used as an example. That is, she was forcing him to realize that he was doing it again -- focusing on other people's failings instead of his own. If she was able to do that for length of their marriage, then I can see how Silk would have been helped immeasurably by that.

I guess I prefer to be optimistic about their relationship in the Whorl since there's no real reason to be pessimistic. There are other explanations of the broken furniture than that Hyacinth was a horrible house-keeper, or that she threw things around when she got mad and broke everything in sight. If my reading of Silk after Hyacinth's death is correct, then I think it more than likely that Silk is the one who broke all the furniture after her passing.

Charles

Andy Robertson wrote:

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hartshorn

tom — 12 Jul 2002, 20:06 · follows Charles Reed

Andy Robertson writes:

Charles Reed write:

I have to disagree with hartshorn's reading of the airship incident.

I think I got the essence of the Silk/Hyacinth relationship right. It was the ultimate mutually destructive love, and that was its point.

Maybe Silk killed her in a fight? It would explain the broken furniture, and the cuts on his arms could be scratches. I think if we understood what Wolfe was trying to get at with this relationship we'd understand more about its end.

James Jordan — 12 Jul 2002, 23:04 · follows tom

At 03:58 PM 7/13/2002 +0100, you wrote:

What people are persistently failing to acknowledge, though Wolfe flags it again and again, is that Hyacinth was a bad woman, and disastrous for Silk.

While it would be a serious mistake to read these narratives only as theological allegories, I don't think that aspect can be separated from them as some "extra layer" either. Silk is a Christ figure, and Hyacinth a Church figure, a Magdelene. "Bad woman," yes, but in a way kind of like Severian. "Disastrous for Silk" I think goes too far.

Silk's near suicide on the airship comes *after* he has obtained Hyacinth, after he has gotten his dearest wish, and realised it is dust and ashes. Hence the despair.

Once again, remember the temptations of Christ: "cast yourself down from the pinnacle of the Temple and let the angels bear you up." Silk has just been tempted to become one with Pas. It appears that either he agreed to this, or that they did it without his knowledge. Now he's also meditating on Hyacinth's wayward ways. He doubts his calling, the worth of his life. Should he cast himself down and test the Outsider?

I believe that Silk's life with Hyacinth was hell. Consider the state of the house he was in - small, mean, "almost everything broken".

I took this to mean that society had rejected Silk, and that they lived in abject poverty. Pretty much the way the world treats its Savior. Recall how the Church is described in "Westwind" as a filthy run-down inn.

He did not, could not, kill himself while she lived, because somehow he still loved her.

But when she died, at long last, he lay down the burden of life and love, at last free of her, and allowed his spirit to die.

I can't buy this Total Hyacinth Explanation. Politics and ecclesiastical allegory are very near the surface in most of Wolfe's works. Also, despite everything, it is clear in the Long Sun books that Hyacinth really loved Silk. And in the Short Sun books, she did NOT abandon him when everyone else did.

I don't have an answer. Maybe indeed Hyacinth has just died of syphilis and Silk goes berserk and slashes himself. But it still seems to me that an attack on Silk's house is the easiest explanation. Wolfe makes a lot out of this event, so the answer is there, even if nobody has found the key to unlock it.

But then Charles Reed wrote:

It seems to me that the most logical explanation for Silk's despair is that Hyacinth had been dying for some time, and while she was still alive Silk was able to busy his mind with her care. But when she was dead, and placed in the box, and Silk found himself utterly alone in the Whorl, his grief and loneliness overcame him.<

You make good points against me that Silk did not mind killing enemies. Thus, I revise my view, and would say that Silk's despair is at the death of Hyacinth, however it came about. But I don't think this skilled auger tried to kill himself and failed. Either the wounds are the result of a fit, or came from outsiders; and I think the latter is more than hinted at in the chaos we see in the Whorl at this time.

Nutria

Jonathan Dale — 13 Jul 2002, 17:33 · follows James Jordan

I suspect that Silk was very distraught over the death of Hyacinth caused by the disease that it mentions. I also think (and the text seems to support) that he smashed up the place and then cut himself in his grief (whether ritual or atonement or just craziness); perhaps the neighbours heard all of these strange noises and breaks coming from the nearby house and figured him to be crazy or dangerous. I also think that Silk wanted to die, but would not or could not do it

himself, which explains the Neighbours reference to transferring Horn into a healthy body (relatively, or at least not dying) whose soul was dying. The story from this point is basically documentation of the gradual loss of Horn-in-Silk and the reaffirmation of the Silk character and persona. However, it is not clear to me where the Horn persona goes to (if it indeed goes anywhere; he may just cease to exist).

Jonathan

-----Original Message-----

From: James Jordan [mailto:jbjordan4 at cox.net]

Sent: Friday, 12 July, 2002 8:01 AM

To: urth at urth.net

Subject: Re: (urth) Suicide & Despair

At 05:17 PM 7/11/2002 -0700, you wrote:

--- James Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:

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Nutria

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Michael Straight — 15 Jul 2002, 18:40 · follows Jonathan Dale

On Fri, 12 Jul 2002, James Jordan wrote:

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Severian. "Disastrous for Silk" I think goes too far.

Well, the church was pretty disasterous for Christ, in the sense that he got crucified for it.

Doesn't Paul essentially say in Ephesians that the marriage in which the husband is most Christ-like is the one most like a crucifixion?

-Rostrum