

Optical connections

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 24 Oct 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3508>

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j e — 24 Oct 2002, 04:20

I haven't posted much, but I've been following the Peace discussion. It's been very interesting and I'm going to have to get my copy of Peace back so I can join in. I haven't read it in years, but Robert Borski's alchemical reading makes me want to again. One Peace note: in that stream of consciousness part near the beginning (about the synthetic deer and the orange tribe) Weer asks "What is a wabe?" It appears in Jabberwocky and I found a website which gives Carroll's definitions as well as Humpty Dumpty's:

Wabe (derived from the verb to swab or soak).
The side of a hill (from its being soaked by the rain.)

<http://www.math.luc.edu/~vande/jabglossary.html>

Without the book here that definition doesn't help me at all. Anyone?

Now that I've made a stab at being with the current discussion let me bound back to the Wolfe book I can't stop thinking about.

In the book of the short sun, I've noticed one of those nested significances Wolfe loves to employ to drive his themes. First, to establish some background, the technology of the Whorl is clearly photonic rather than electronic. We have several examples, the best of which is Incus' repair of Hammerstone in the tunnels where flashes of light are described coming out of the broken ends of the fibers. Photonics, based on the transmission of packets of light is fitting for a society which features many examples of technology that are just beyond our present level. It's also fitting thematically...all three collections feature sun in their titles for a reason. When Horn and his men are on Green, trying to find the last part needed to repair a lander, the monitor tells them it's a wave guide coupler. A wave guide is what it sounds like - a way of directing a wave, the coupler would then join together waves of different length or waves from different sources. Horn's body was still there when Silkhorn returned to give Sinew the ring that allowed Horn to be seen by the Neighbour who allowed his spirit to be saved. This is part of the nested significance, the minor to the major one described in RttW. Near the end of that book, when Silkhorn is at the pole to give Pig his eye, M'to talks about repairing his ship, the Whorl, by re-connecting the many strands of what sounds like the Whorl's optical backbone. When the book ends, Silk has left New Viron as he said: to go "to the stars". The implication is that he will lead M'to and the rest of the crew to make the repairs, and I don't think any reader doubts that he will succeed. I call Horn's episode the minor one because it involves a smaller ship, and fewer people. It's a goal for few, normal men. Also, it seems that his failure is necessary in order to save the spirit of Silk (who was suicidal - he was not fighting with anyone...imho). It is also interesting that what's happening at the pole is the connection of Silk's eye to Pig's optic nerve. All of these things are about attempts to allow the passage of light.

I noticed there's another Joe posting so I'll go back to Owl, which is my last name.

William Ansley — 24 Oct 2002, 17:26 · follows j e

At 12:20 AM 10/24/2002 -0400, you wrote:

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Finally, a question that falls into my area of expertise (such as it is), Lewis Carroll!

In the passage from Peace you mention above, Weer is thinking about nonexistant races of men. I don't have my book with me and so can't remember the details, but from what you say above, it was the orange-skinned people who worshiped sundials. The passage continues to the effect that, after the threat of legal action allows the "orange tribe" into the country club, "they out with strange oaths. What's a wabe?" (I am reconstructing the quote from memory.)

The definition of wabe that helps here is not the one you quote above, which is the one Carroll gave for the first[1] version of Jabberwocky, but the one Humpty Dumpty gives in Looking-Glass:

The grass plot round a sundial ... because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it ... and a long way beyond it on each side.

This is word play. The sound of the word "way" is combined with the sound of the common first letter of "before," "behind" and "beyond" to produce the word "wabe." (My apologies to everyone who already understood this perfectly.)

Because these people worship sundials, their oaths sometimes refer to sundials or the plots of grass surrounding them, the wabes. (Naturally, as sundial worshippers, they are familiar with Carroll's works, just as I would expect them to be with Wolfe's.)

[1] The first stanza of Jabberwocky (in slightly different form) was written by Lewis Carroll when he was still a boy, in a little private periodical he created by hand for the entertainment of his siblings. He referred to it as a "Stanza of Anglo-Saxon Poetry." Most interestingly, Carroll provides a gloss of the poem, in which he defines some of his invented words differently than he would later in Looking-Glass.

The link below will take you to a page with a reproduction of the hand-lettered poem.

<<http://www.math.luc.edu/~vande/jaborigin.html>>

William Ansley

David DiGiacomo — 25 Oct 2002, 00:20 · follows William Ansley

From: "j e" <lo_phan17 at hotmail.com>

In the book of the short sun, I've noticed one of those nested significances Wolfe loves to employ to drive his themes. First, to establish some background, the technology of the Whorl is clearly photonic rather than electronic.

The cards sound electronic to me.

When Horn and his men are on Green, trying to find the last part needed to repair a lander, the monitor tells them it's a wave guide coupler. A wave guide is what it sounds like - a way of directing a wave, the coupler would then join together waves of different length or waves from different sources.

A waveguide is just a rectangular metal tube, and it is an electronic, not photonic, device. (Although optical fibers also act as waveguides, they are not usually called that.)

Too bad Horn did not have access to eBay:

<http://cgi.ebay.com/ws/eBayISAPI.dll?ViewItem&item=1779221783>

j e — 26 Oct 2002, 13:31 · follows David DiGiacomo

I recently posed the idea that the Whorl technology was photonic rather than electronic. Actually I probably sounded very certain of it. All I have to go on is recent reading on the subject. Scientific American ran a set of articles on the subject in the Jan 2001 issue.

David replied:

The cards sound electronic to me.

No question about that. What about data transmission in the Whorl...doesn't it sound optical? And possession by a god is literally through the eye.

A waveguide is just a rectangular metal tube, and it is an electronic, not photonic, device. (Although optical fibers also act as waveguides, they are not usually called that.)

I understood that waveguides (as the term is commonly used) worked for both optical and electronic systems. I'm not sure you're disputing the gist of my post, though.

Too bad Horn did not have access to eBay

But then he'd be fighting his men for access; they'd be trying to hog bandwidth looking at porn sites.

Owl