

Andrew's thesis of Heroes

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 19 Dec 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3691>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Alice K. Turner — 19 Dec 2002, 03:57

From Andrew Bollen--hi there:

There are several Large Mysteries, but for me the major one is the relationship between Silk, SilkHorn and Severian. I cannot help but see a progression, from Silk, to SilkHorn, to Severian. The raw Silk is something of a wet - unwilling or unable to really take the reins of leadership in a crisis, rushing to his woman & leaving his people leaderless and adrift; a Paris filling Moses' sandals Contrast this with SilkHorn - a veritable old testament judge, time after time mending fractured communities, dealing out robust justice.

Wolfe does this wonderfully, I think. We see Horn at that start of Short Sun, judge of his little family, strong and courageous, but limited in his potential. He dies on Green, when circumstances overwhelm those limits. Melded with Silk, his strengths live on, but now as the strengths of a Hero, rather than an constrained within the confines of an ordinary mortal. All through Blue, I was thinking: Surely this yearning for Silk is an error; I cannot imagine Silk being of any use at all in this gritty, down-and-dirty world. I loved the way this view was both validated & transcended, in the development.

SilkHorn becomes a wonderful combination of Odin/Mercury, Heracles (not least in the yearning everybody has for his aid, in his supposed absence - so reminiscent of the Argonauts' yearning for the absent Heracles in the Argonautika; I would be amazed to find Wolfe did not intend this parallel), and Moses.

And this combination owes much to Horn. I cannot imagine Silk inspiring the kind of fear & awe that SilkHorn does, were he to lack the stern qualities of Horn.

Beyond Horn-qualities, there is an aspect to SilkHorn whose origin I do not quite understand. This is the magician aspect, which is exactly correct for a character who is part Hermes, part Moses (who was clearly a magician). This does not come from Horn, and I cannot see any evidence of it coming from Silk. From the text, it must be a gift in some way from the Vanished People, and of course there is a passage where a gift is explicitly granted. But the whole extended cycle is very intimately bound up with the idea of personalities and qualities layering on to each other, either by

transmission or by recycling through time. It would be much more fitting for such a layering to be involved with this aspect also. Is there any evidence of SilkHorn melding with a Vanished Person?

I am sort of a vanished person (lower case) on this list myself, but Andrew makes some great points and inspires me. Andrew, this is a fine thesis, though almost certainly Wolfe entirely backpedaled it--I mean that he had no notion of the invention of Silk or what would become of him at the time he was planning Sev's adventures. No, I do not think there is any such meld. I think it is useful to think of the VPs as angels, and of SilkHorn's gifts as having been angelically conferred, rather than conferred by Sev. who is certainly a magician, as Jesus was (water into wine, loaves and fishes, etc.). And there's certainly a reference to Fairyland, the magic ring and so forth. (Let me assure you that the confluence goes back to the Middle Ages and, to me at any rate, is quite valid. Hi Rat.) Lives of the saints are chockfull of miracles of much this sort. Mint was also miraculously endowed, and clearly a mythically heroic Joan of Arc figure. Greek heroes (like Hercules) become demigods, and that, perhaps, is what you are after. (I never before this moment thought of equating a saint with a demigod, but now I feel like writing a PhD thesis on it!)

I think it is also useful to think of Apheta as a sort of Mary Poppins (in charge) angel rather than a demiurge (I'm sorry, I can't respond directly to your second post as I still can't cope (Ranjit!!) with the new digest without a whole new reply to your second post and my attention span is only 15 seconds long.) She makes quite a point of downplaying herself and her powers. Of course Mary P. wasn't so sexy!

Now to Severian. I think it is completely natural to see a progression from the Moses/judge figure SilkHorn to the sort-of/kind-of Christ figure Severian (no doubt there are theological problems with this, but I don't think that Wolfe worries about them, so we need not). We are led to understand that the raw Severian was refined into this role through recycling in time. My "gut feel" is that part of the process must have involved a melding with SilkHorn, somehow or other.

Perhaps this is wrong; the only concrete evidence I have for this is Wolfe's comment somewhere to the effect that Silk is a member of Severian's Order, for whatever that is worth. But surely there is a connection between the two, not just a matter of some circumstantial genetic argy-bargy as has been proposed, but with a deeper meaning. Otherwise, why have the characters inhabit the same fictional space at all? The apex of the whole cycle is Severian's role in the redemption of humanity. Anything not part of that story surely does not warrant two further multi-volume narratives. So I think that Long Sun/Short Sun must be seen as a "precursor", convoluted & twisted in time, of course, but not in theme.

[some snippety]

Yes indeed, but it's after-the-fact logic. Trying to pull it all together. Which is what makes RttW such an annoying book (it has other annoying factors too). And, for the record, I did *not* find URTW an annoying book, as others have done; I found it both integral and uplifting in a awful way, and it might be my favorite GW book, just for the wonderful descriptions of the ship.

Also thanks for that Graves tree poem--I love that. Who cares if he used someone else's

translation. His words make the hair stand up from the back of the neck, his own definition of true poetry.

-alga

Andrew Bollen — 20 Dec 2002, 16:18 · follows Alice K. Turner

Alga wrote some nice, interesting things - thanks Alga! Just a quick comment on this:

Yes indeed, but it's after-the-fact logic. Trying to pull it all together.
Which is what makes RttW such an annoying book (it has other annoying factors too).

Oh, absolutely. I mean, if Long Sun/Short Sun isn't designed as a "precursor" to BOTNS in the way I tried to describe, then RttW is pretty inept in places - eg the meeting the young Sev in Nessus thing is just too much like the kind of thing you find in over-extended sci-fi series, once they have reached the flatulent stage.

I guess that's one reason why I'm hoping there's more to it ...