

the book seminar

The Urth list — 6 messages, 4 voices, 03 Mar 2003

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Fernando Q. Gouvea — 03 Mar 2003, 13:40

Well, I thought I'd report a little bit about the book seminar I'm running. In the first session, we discussed "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories", "Alien Stones", and "La Befana". I found it was harder to generate discussion than I expected! Most of the students seemed to have settled for reading the stories at a rather superficial level, and were surprised that I wanted to poke at them further. Still, a few seemed to have captured some of the hints (for example, that Daw may not be what he seems in "Alien Stones", or that he may have intentionally caused the death of the empathist). But overall it seems to have gone reasonably well, though I'm hoping that I'll do better at generating discussion with the next batch of stories.

The next three are "The Hero as Werwolf", "Three Fingers", and "The Death of Doctor Island". There are obvious non-literary issues to pursue: genetic "improvements" for "Hero", the Disney corporation and their brethren for "Fingers", and mental health and utilitarian calculations about who is valuable to society for "Doctor Island". Of course, in each case there are interesting literary questions too. Suggestions for avenues to pursue are welcome!

Some questions of my own:

- Does anyone know why Wolfe chose the spelling "Werwolf"?
- Is the drug mentioned at the end of "Three Fingers" a real drug? If so, what does it do?
- How should we read the ending of "Doctor Island"? Has the boy been helped, or has his personality been destroyed?

Fernando

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The Byzantines hammered away at their hard and orthodox symbols, because they could not be in a mood to believe that men could take a hint. The moderns drag out into lengths and reels of extravagance their new orthodoxy of being unorthodox, because they also cannot give a hint -- or take a hint. Yet all perfect and well-poised art is really a hint.
-- G. K. Chesterton

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James Jordan — 03 Mar 2003, 14:36 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

At 07:40 AM 3/3/2003, you wrote:
Some questions of my own:

- Does anyone know why Wolfe chose the spelling "Werwolf"?

Dunno. And I can't help your other questions either. But I do recall that the Hero has a foot wound, and this has messianic overtones in the Bible (and kingly overtones in Greco-Roman history). The last line of the story definitely alludes to the Gospels. The name "Paul" might be significant, given Paul as a distinctive follower of Jesus. But, I don't recall thinking the story was an allegory of any sort. With Wolfe, the allusions might be twisted, inverted, or some kind of dark spin on things. Interested to know what others might think.

- Is the drug mentioned at the end of "Three Fingers" a real drug? If so, what does it do?

- How should we read the ending of "Doctor Island"? Has the boy been helped, or has his personality been destroyed?

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Gareth Jelley — 03 Mar 2003, 23:33 · follows James Jordan

From: "Fernando Q. Gouvea" <fqgouvea at colby.edu>
- Does anyone know why Wolfe chose the spelling "Werwolf"?

Is it just closer to the German word?

No idea :o) But I'd guess it was something to do with an etymology of the word we see more commonly used; or perhaps it is a cognate which is used because it resonates more with the content \ style \ concerns of the story.

<re-lurks>

Best,

G.

Gareth Jelley — 03 Mar 2003, 23:38 · follows Gareth Jelley

From: "Fernando Q. Gouvea" <fqgouvea at colby.edu>
Well, I thought I'd report a little bit about the book seminar I'm running. In the first session, we discussed "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories", "Alien Stones", and "La Befana".

Is there an archive on this? I'm currently reading the collection 'The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories', and have read the title story, and most of 'Alien Stones'. Both have really intrigued me, but the first one particularly, because Wolfe (as one would expect) leaves so many questions unanswered, and leaves the reader asking so many questions...

I always find it difficult /not/ to read into Wolfe, because he is one of these writers who, in his style of story-telling, invites the reader to rummage around between the lines. However, I don't know how much of 'The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories' I have deciphered, or, in fact, if there is anything to 'decipher'; it may simply be that we are supposed to be left wondering and remembering.

Best,

G.
gjelley at btopenworld.com
<http://members.lycos.co.uk/cavor> - updated 14\02\02
<http://www.livejournal.com/users/scribeoflight> - updated frequently

Gareth Jelley — 03 Mar 2003, 23:45 · follows Gareth Jelley

From: "Fernando Q. Gouvea" <fqgouvea at colby.edu>
- Does anyone know why Wolfe chose the spelling "Werewolf"?

This article may be of interest:

'Hellhounds, Werewolves and the Germanic Underworld'
<http://www.indigogroup.co.uk/edge/hellhnds.htm>

It is from a website called 'At The Edge' which describes itself as exploring "new interpretations of past and place in archaeology, folklore and mythology."

The article seems quite heavy on the word-formation and etymology front, and brings back memories of my Old Norse and Old English studies... But it is 23:43 here, and my eyes water at the web page :o) I'll have a look at it a bit later.

Basically, though, it seems to confirm my thought that the word has been used for its closeness to the German form, and thus, probably, for its proximity to the Old Norse \ Old English \ Germanic roots of the word...

However, what I don't know, is where the extra 'e' came from: why is the English 'Werewolf' spelt the way it is...

Mmmm.

Best,

G.
gjelley at btopenworld.com
<http://members.lycos.co.uk/cavor> - updated 14\02\02

Richard Horton — 04 Mar 2003, 22:38 · follows Gareth Jelley

On Mon, 3 Mar 2003 08:40:40 -0500, you wrote:

- Does anyone know why Wolfe chose the spelling "Werwolf"?

The etymology, as far as I can tell, is "wer" (man) + "wulf" (wolf), hence manwolf. As such, why add the "e", one might ask?

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