

Malrubius' ghost

The Urth list — 10 messages, 6 voices, 18 Jul 2003

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maa32 — 18 Jul 2003, 05:16

Just one more thing that I forgot in our recent discussion of whether or not Silk could pass for Malrubius in the astral travel scenes of Return to the Whorl:

in the comments for The Book of the Short Sun when it was released for the SFBC in one volume, Wolfe said a little bit about it, urging readers to accept the astral travel and perhaps to discover the secret of "Malrubius' ghost". I obviously threw that catalog away a long time ago, but someone else should remember it as well. I say this is further reason to think that Silk in astral form certainly resembles Malrubius, and that the evidence is not circumstantial.

Marc Aramini

Chris — 18 Jul 2003, 06:09 · follows maa32

Interesting quote, and goes along with something I'd wondered myself.

But looking at it from the flip side, do you think it might be possible that, when Severian refers to the ghost of Malrubius, he's actually using a sort of euphemism? To be more direct, perhaps it was Silk astral travelling again, and since Severian had opted not to explain Silk in the first place he filled in a name to substitute in the ghost sequences?

Civet

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Silk could pass for Malrubius in the astral travel scenes of Return to the Whorl:

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Marc Aramini

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 18 Jul 2003, 15:58 · follows Chris

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Nah. Much more likely that Wolfe hadn't invented Silk yet then.

Meaning that Wolfe had something clearly in mind when he created the ghost of Malrubius, which was NOT the Narrator, or Silk, or anything to do with the Long and Short Sun books. When dealing with tBotNS, I think it's appropriate to (mostly) ignore the L/S books and seek for answers based on what's given there.

Not to say that Wolfe can't retrofit. The business about the gate is a perfect example: he took something that had no explanation (and indeed needed none) in the NS, and allowed the events of SS to intertwine with it so as to provide one. But to take something that was important in NS, and retcon it to change its meaning, would be bad art; it would damage NS in the context of the larger metatext.

Malrubius' ghost is explained by the Hieros as an aquastor generated by the ship from Sev's memories. I then see four possibilities:

1. This is in fact the case.
2. The Hieros lied to Sev.
3. Sev lied about what the Hieros said.
4. Wolfe commits bad art.

I reject the fourth.

The second and third are possibilities, but I would want to see some intratextual evidence for either, some reason to think that someone is lying in this particular case.

And I'll stick with the first pending such evidence.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 18 Jul 2003, 16:46 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Civet wrote:

But looking at it from the flip side, do you think it might be possible that, when Severian refers to the ghost of Malrubius, he's actually using a sort of euphemism?

I can go along with this, because I think you are saying that Severian saw a ghost-like Silk (as shown in BOTSS) and later in TBOTNS saw a ghost which he reported as being that of Malrubius, while still later this ghost was made somewhat ambiguous as a machine projection based upon his own thoughts (basically giving the ghost the form of a wise person Severian had met in real life, in order to deliver just-in-time wisdom).

Your point being that Severian's "alteration" is merely saying that the ghost was "Malrubius" rather than the who-knows-where-he's-from Silk. An editorial decision on Severian's part to avoid cluttering the manuscript with a character who would require a whole book (or four or seven) to himself.

And it is interesting in the way that "Silk as the model for the ghost" explains the connection between Triskele and the ghost as one of a temporal association, which was impossible previously because Malrubius died long before Triskele appeared. (In BOTNS, Triskele seems to

stand for beasts and Malrubius for wisdom, two entities who never met in life but were working together as ghosts.)

To be more direct, perhaps it was Silk astral travelling again, and since Severian had opted not to explain Silk in the first place he filled in a name to substitute in the ghost sequences?

"Ghost of Malrubius" already has two "fuzzies" in BOTNS: is it a real "natural" ghost, or is it a computer generated ghost? (Or sometimes one/sometimes the other?) To this we can add a third fuzzy: That it wasn't really =based on= Malrubius at all, but on the weird ghostly guy Silk. This third fuzzy collapses the "real ghost" probability wave to zero, leaving all the ghostly visitations of "Malrubius" as 100% computer-generated.

But to say that the ghostly visits in BOTNS are really further, undocumented astral projections of Silk, rather than a computer-generated ghost based on Silk, no, this causes too much trouble, I think.

=mantis=

Chris — 18 Jul 2003, 18:57 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

I agree, in light of the points brought up by several people today, that Malrubius' ghost literally being Silk in astral form is too problematic to hold on to in that form. Mantis is correct in his guess as to why I thought of the idea in the first place. In addition, it was always disconcerting to me that the explanation of Malrubius as the ghost was that he was chosen out of Severian's memory as a figure of wisdom and possibly a pseudo-father-figure, whereas the "real" Malrubius in earlier segments is never described with quite enough affection to really justify his having this kind of importance to Sev. (My god, what an awful sentence). Master Palaemon seems a more sympathetic character, and accounts of Malrubius suffer a bit by comparison. So, this always struck a false chord with me but at the time I was reading BotNS I was unable to resolve it. These alternate explanations appeal to me because they explain what I perceive as an awkward point of the text.

On the other hand, I don't know whether this explanation fits with the statement of Wolfe's that Marc originally brought up re: Silk's astral travel and the mystery of Malrubius' ghost. I wish I had the context of that quote, actually.

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 18 Jul 2003, 19:36 · follows Chris

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Now hang on, there: the unalterable reason why Malrubius was chosen over Palaemon is the fact that Malrubius is already dead, in the timeframe, and a logical candidate for a ghost is needed. Palaemon is not even a candidate.

The ghost is to Severian as a fairy godfather is to a hero.

Not to defend the old "Malrubius is the basis of the ghost" line, but still, there was a certain poignancy in the notion that a person who wasn't so influential when alive would be a source of wisdom after his death. That magical thinking wish that unknown ancestors would give us hints about the silly world around us: the more prosaic understanding about how the dead communicate to us through their words and actions in the past, whether we lived through that timeframe and did not perceive their wisdom at the time, or whether we were born long afterward.

Another thing is this: the closer in one gets toward Severian's core, the more silent he becomes. We know next to nothing about Valeria, yet he says he has written too much! So in this light it would make perfect sense that Malrubius was important enough to have little written about him.

=mantis=

Chris — 18 Jul 2003, 21:42 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Sorry, I didn't mean to imply that Palaemon would have been used in its place. I suppose what I'm saying is that one's affection for a "favorite" tends to be at the expense of that favorite's peers, and you can be more indifferent to the "2nd best teacher" than to a particularly interesting stranger. Not stating that as a rule, but it's true often enough and I had thought (perhaps incorrectly) that I had picked up some genuine indifference on Sev's part toward Malrubius (the living one that is).

The last paragraph is definitely an interesting thought. Although, with Valeria, you can somehow see her importance to him through his omissions even at the beginning; I did not notice anything similar with Malrubius, but that could just be a failure of my reading. But in general, your statement about Sev's silence about things close to his core brings some comparisons to mind. You have Valeria, who you find out very little about. Then there is Thecla, who you hear a good deal about, though Severian seems most comfortable speaking of generalities and is very grudging when it comes to details. And just to set the opposite end of

the scale you have Agia, who Sev is very open about nearly from the beginning- does he wax poetic about her from his very first description, or is that an error in my memory? You could throw Dorcas into the mix as well. Where do each of these people stand in relation to his core?

But this is a discussion unto itself.

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Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 20 Jul 2003, 00:59 · follows Chris

On Friday, July 18, 2003, at 08:58 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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I reject the fourth.

The second and third are possibilities, but I would want to see some intratextual evidence for either, some reason to think that someone is lying in this particular case.

And I'll stick with the first pending such evidence.

Don pops up. (whack him! quick!)

I see no reason to doubt your conclusion since Silk/Malrubius appears to Sev before the aquastor. Besides, if Silk can travel through time as well as space (and in an expanding universe wouldn't time travel necessarily involve motion?) it is possible that he is Malrubius in actuality. Even if this isn't the case, I see no real contradiction.

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Jul 2003, 05:18 · follows Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

Don, replying to Dan'l's sound post wrote:

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As Dan'l also wrote in that post:

Nah. Much more likely that Wolfe hadn't invented Silk yet then.

I agree. Malrubius could not be Silk in actuality. Malrubius may have been some sort of mentor to Sev, but that's not saying much; Hitler also liked dogs. Malrubius was a Master in a guild that hurt and maimed and killed people for a living. Silk was much nearer the opposite end of the moral spectrum. He could never have done those things to people; it's just not his nature. Hell, he thought he had sinned when he "killed" a talus, a stupid _machine_ that was trying to kill him.

-Roy

Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 23 Jul 2003, 01:32 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Monday, July 21, 2003, at 10:18 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Don, replying to Dan'l's sound post wrote:

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To be honest, I don't particularly like the idea of Silk even resembling Malrubius. That suggestion was more one of those from my brain to the keyboard kind of things. My only real point was that I don't think Wolfe intended the aquastor Malrubius to be Silk, retrofitted or not, and that Silk's appearance as Malrubius in RttW is not at odds with this since it predates the appearance of the aquastor.

It doesn't matter really whether the aquastor is the memory of Silk/Malrubius or the actual Malrubius.

Regards,
Don