

Women; Incomprehensible Three

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 09 Sep 2003

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Sikozu Johnson — 09 Sep 2003, 18:30

On Mardi, sept 9, 2003, at 11:00 US/Pacific, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote: [Interrupting: As someone once added, "The whole damn thing incomprehensible."]

'The Incomprehensible Three' sounds like a jazz group.

Incidentally, to those who comment that Buddhism is confusing and mystical, I usually reply by asking them questions about the Trinity until such time as I am able to throw my hands in the air and say, "You think BUDDHISM is incomprehensible?!?" I figure they asked for it.

On a third note, there was some discussion before about women in Wolfe. Well, I must say that while I adore Wolfe, I find his Crypto-Catholicism and anti-feminism irritating. I have never met the man and can only stand in awe of his brilliant writing, but no one is perfect and sometimes he is boring or annoying: "Dorpspraak like Yoda annoying for hundreds of pages is" - or just angrymaking.

On women, he is angrymaking to me, if I may half-Dorp. His narrators so consistently paint a world in which women are either divine or divine bitches, and always incomprehensible, is very very aggravating. Long Sun and Short Sun beg for a half-decent female character who isn't crap. General Mint doesn't count, she is the virgin Joan of Arc, beyond humanity in person.

That's my opinion, held after rereading the books a few times. The women are stomach-churningly idolised or jammed in the mud, and the 'good men' casually rape, murder and kill.

Anyway, I'm sure many will disagree, but as a woman that's what I got out of them. Not to say I don't adore them but Wolfe is clearly tied in knots about women somewhere and it comes out plain and clear to me.

Of course, my idea of a fun time is reading "Hothead Paisan", so take it with a grain of salt. ;-)

Sikozu

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"I sit for world revolution"

Alan Ginsberg, 19 July 1981

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 09 Sep 2003, 18:42 · follows Sikozu Johnson

Sikozu writes:

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casually rape, murder and kill.

Well, of course, one might argue that this is the point - his "good" men are stomach-churning, hellish people also. One and all - as near as I can tell - his narrators are in desperate need of salvation. Even those, like Silk and Severian, who bring it.

James Wynn — 09 Sep 2003, 19:16 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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Well, as Horn said, you saw what you saw, but using the Long Sun as an example, I have come
to a much different conclusion.

Wolfe takes the stock stereo-types and puts them through fascinating twists.

Rose is initially portrayed as your typical rudas, but then as the story progresses we find she's a
much more complex and ironic character. Mint is your typical wilting virginal child, but in Calde
we find that she is no child; she's in her late 30s and is deeply questioning her choice of
vocation ~ like her mythological namesake she is literally being seduced by Death. She's hardly
defined by her virginity. If anything (like all the sibyls) she exhibits all three aspects of Grave's
White Goddess ~ sacred virgin, killing nymph, and cthonic prophesying underworld bride of
Death.

Siyuf is a termagant, but the leadership of Viron *and* Trivigaunte are deliberately revolting
characters. The Trivigaunte officers are competent, professional, and sympathetic characters.
Furthermore, IMO the twisted nature of Trivigaunte culture represented by Siyuf is intended as a
foil to have the reader to take note of the irrationality and cruelty of the machismotic culture of
Viron and Typhon's Urthly city.

And what of Chenille? What of Marble negotiating for Silk's release with the Ayuntamiento, her
crippling guilt, and her heartbreaking societal plight? I contend that even Hyacinth is a more
complex character than she is generally credited as being.

I've yet to see a "good man" in Wolfe's major novels. They are all ambiguous, frighteningly
wounded men.

~ Crush

Chris — 09 Sep 2003, 18:58 · follows James Wynn

Hmm. Here I always thought that the Trinity would be something a Buddhist or Hindu would
have a much easier time understanding than your average western Christian. Not to say that
the understanding reached would be better, but it would seem at least to come more naturally.

Not sure what you mean on the Dorpspraak - it goes on for a little while, but I've not seen him use something like that for hundreds of pages. Side note: your mileage may vary, but I found the dialog between Oreb and the catachrest to be far more annoying and difficult to follow.

Wolfe's women have been commented on fairly extensively here, so I won't drag the whole thing out again. But I think you may already have an answer in what you said toward the end there. I can't think of any character, male or female, in any Wolfe book I have read that is more "stomach-churningly idolized" than Silk (which is not to say that he doesn't have his flaws). And his other male protagonists? Flawed, sometimes deeply so - in some cases outright brutal. Does this indicate that Wolfe has issues with men?

I don't dislike most of Wolfe's female characters - in fact, many of them I like better than Wolfe's male protagonists - though it's true that some of them are just not very strong. I don't find that too bothersome, but what

does bother me is the kind of male-female relationships he sets up. But that's another story, and one best left to archive-browsing.

-- Civet

Sikozu said:

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