

Peace of Cat

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 15 Apr 1998

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Tony Ellis — 15 Apr 1998, 15:31

15/04/98

16:28

Peace of Cat

Rostrum wrote:

I love the story of the Sidhe and the flock of geese at the very end of the book, but I don't think I quite get it. I mean, I enjoy the story all by itself, but I don't see what it has to do with Weer's story. Given the placement of the story there must be some connection I'm missing.

Anyone see something here I'm missing?

Well, the story is about something outliving its time, that's the point made in the very last line. And that is what Weer has been doing. At the time Dan is telling him that story he is an old man, who has outlived most of his contemporaries. He is also a dead man, wandering through his memories, so he's outlived his time in a more literal sense too.

Since this story comes right before the very last paragraph of the novel, I think it serves to make Weer realise it's time to let go. Perhaps that's why he tells it to himself.

William Ansley wrote (re The Cat):

If anyone has any insights into this story, I'd really appreciate hearing them.

My copy of Endangered Species is a hundred miles away, so apologies if my memory lets me down...

This is the other side of the story we hear about in Conciliator, when Jonas and Severian have been put into the antechamber. As you say, the scandal was engineered by the spiteful Chatelaine Leocadia. The significance of the doll is that it is a kind of voodoo doll of Sancha - Leocadia obviously used it to manipulate Sancha into her disgrace. Her faithful phantom cat has brought it to light to reveal the crime.

I don't -think- the cat becomes a phantom cat because of anything Father Inire does - it's just a consequence of being flung carelessly into the mirrors. It's become a sort of witch's familiar.

Odilo sends the pawprinted counterpane to Leocadia as a way of directing the cat to her - he's not stupid. Presumably she sleeps with it on her bed, allowing the phantom cat to creep into the dreams of its mistress's enemy.

The significance of the last line is that Leocadia callously used Sancha's servant to bring about her disgrace. As we know from Conciliator, poor Lomer was imprisoned for the rest of his life for his part in the affair. Odilo, another servant, is affronted by this. So he sends Leocadia the

counterpane.

William H. Ansley — 17 Apr 1998, 01:20 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis said:

---snip---

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---snip---

Thank you very much for your analysis. This has decided me; it is time to read TBotNS again.

Wolfe's seeming expectation that we have read and remembered perfectly everything else he has written, so that we will be able to recognize and understand the most oblique references to events in his other works tends to annoy me at times. But, I can't say I wasn't warned in this case. "The Cat" starts out, (the beginning of the second paragraph) "As all who know the ways of our House Absolute (and I may say here that I neither hope nor wish for other readers) ..."

One may excuse Wolfe (and I am well aware that he needs no excuse from me) by saying that his stories hold up by themselves and the references to other of his works are a reward for careful readers. This is certainly true, but Wolfe seems to have mastered writing a set of related pieces that complement each other so well that their whole is very much greater than the sum of their parts better than any other writer I can think of. (In fact, does anyone else know of *any* other writer who does this?) It seems a shame then that these stories or novellas are first published separately.

The Fifth Head of Cerberus is a perfect example of this at its best. The novellas all work separately quite well but together they form a most remarkable work.

Wolfe has done this kind of thing less successfully, however. Sometimes the separate pieces don't hold up as well apart. I am thinking here of the four short stories in *_Endangered Species_*: "The Dark of the June", "The Death of Hyle", "From the Notebook of Dr. Stein" and "Thag". When I came across "The Death of Hyle" by itself (probably in *_Continuum 2_*) I felt it was missing something. And so it was. After reading all four together, I found that I enjoyed them, as a group, a great deal. (By the way, does anyone know who or what Hyle is?)

I think Wolfe has done at least one other set of linked short stories like this. I remember reading a story called "The Friendship Light" in *F&SF* quite a while ago. My memory of it is rather vague by now but I do recall that the narrator put up a gas lantern outside his house (he called it a friendship light) and by making the flame flicker at a certain frequency attracted a large flying thing that killed someone. I am not sure, but I think that God's fingers were mentioned, which would link this story to the two mentioned last November in this list ("Try and Kill It" and "Counting Cats in Zanzibar") by Joshua A. Solomon, which he said definitely mentioned God's fingers. I don't remember reading either of those, so I don't know if they were linked in any other way. The main reason I think "The Friendship Light" is part of a set is that it also seemed to be missing something.

Well, if I am right, I certainly hope that this set of stories will be in Wolfe's next anthology. And I hope he will have one out soon. It's been nearly ten years since *_Endangered Species_*.

William Ansley

Joshua A. Solomon — 17 Apr 1998, 09:52 · follows William H. Ansley

William H. Ansley wrote:

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William

"Try and Kill It" and "Counting Cats in Zanzibar" apparently have little in common besides divine digits. I haven't had any success in scoring that ish of F&SF. Would you be up for a trade? I'll photocopy TAKI and CCIZ for you if you photocopy TFL for me.

bee

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William H. Ansley — 17 Apr 1998, 23:40 · follows Joshua A. Solomon

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Sure, if I can find it. My old F&SFs have all been boxed and moved around as renovation on my house has progressed. I am planning to hunt for it this weekend, so I'll let you know.

William Ansley