

Second hand books and Musings

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 29 Aug 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5141>

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O'Donnell, Tim BOSI — 29 Aug 2008, 13:15

Hi,

I hope all is well.

Living as I do in Ireland it can be difficult to get copies of Gene Wolfe's books. So I was delighted today to be able to pick up a copy of Endangered Species as well as two lovely editions of TSOTT and TSOTL from the 80s in my favourite second hand bookshop.

So, in celebration I thought I would post two musings I had recently in relation to BOTNS.

There has been alot of debate on the lists in the last while about the exact moral nature of the Hieros. It occurs to me that an indication of their true nature may be given by the fact that beautiful faces are hidden behind horrible masks (which of course are also hidden behind masks).

The other thought I had was on Severian's recuperation and his experience with the Ascian in COTA. In this passage (sorry, I don't have the book with me) he mentions how the Ascian is able to

express just about any thought he wishes but also mentions the inherent predictability of much speech in his own language. I wonder if this is commentary by Wolfe on one of his goals in writing?

In condensing fact, hiding important revelations in throwaway comments and playing on related words, names and concepts Wolfe shocks the reader out of passive reading. No longer can we assume we know how a sentence or piece of dialogue will end, we must interrogate every line and word for its true meaning.

Just some thoughts anyway, fire at will!

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Matthew Keeley — 29 Aug 2008, 20:03 · in reply to O'Donnell, Tim BOSI

On Fri, Aug 29, 2008 at 9:15 AM, O'Donnell, Tim (BOSI) <Tim.O'Donnell at bankofscotland.ie <Tim.O%27Donnell at bankofscotland.ie>> wrote:
Hi,

I hope all is well.

Living as I do in Ireland it can be difficult to get copies of Gene Wolfe's books.

Ireland's wonderful, but it's hardly the place for lupine reading. Are you in Dublin by any chance? Shame, if I'd known there were deprived Wolfe readers in Ireland, I could have bought a book or two on one of my transatlantic voyages. Alas, my time in Ireland is done now...

P.S. I think some of the later short story collections (Starwater Strains) used to show up in the Dawson St. bookstores (Hodges-Figgis and Waterstone's) in Dublin.

-Matt

Dave Tallman — 31 Aug 2008, 13:04 · follows Matthew Keeley

Hi Tim, welcome to the discussion.

There has been alot of debate on the lists in the last while about the exact moral nature of the Hieros. It occurs to me that an indication of their true nature may be given by the fact that beautiful faces are hidden behind horrible masks (which of course are also hidden behind masks).

The fact that the Hierodules have beautiful faces under their two masks doesn't really help indicate their true nature, in my opinion. It still makes them ambiguous. They owe their beautiful faces to the Hierogrammates, who evolved them from marine life. They use hideous masks so that people will fear them and let the autarchs rule, and masks over that to make the people believe they want to hide their ugly appearance. So there are quite a few levels of deception here.

We have had extensive debates about the morality of the Hierodules and Hierogrammates, but I'm not sure we have approached the problem with the extra information from the BotLS and BotSS. When Wolfe chose to tie the new series to the old one, he had a second chance to tell us how he intended us to see the moral issues in BotNS. Andrew (thalassocrat) had a theory that Wolfe completely subverted the old series with the new one. In that view, all of Severian's adventures were against the will of God, and the entry of Silk into his life changed things so that they never happened, reverting history to the do-nothing future of Master Ash. I believe that theory has been successfully refuted, and that even Andrew doubts it now.

So what about the opposite theory, that the new series is meant to validate the old one? Everyone agrees that Silk is good, and it seems that the memories of his visits have influenced the character of the aquastor Malrubius. Aquastors are not puppets -- what they say and do is based on their beliefs. We know this because the Severian of UotNS is an aquastor without

realizing it. So an endorsement by Malrubius of the purposes of the Hierogrammates is to some degree an endorsement by Silk, and thus an endorsement by the Outsider.

Hierogrammates are "holy slaves" trying to do the will of God, even if they can only guess at it. We know from BotSS that demons playing God (or Typhon playing Pas) get taken over by the real Outsider. Pas has become truly good, and the Outsider says that Kypris will as well, because she is the goddess of love and all love is of God. Wolfe also said in an interview that "The Outsider is not a form of Severian. Severian is a form of the Outsider." It seems to me that Wolfe holds that those who try to serve God end up doing so, at least in his universe.

On the matter of the Ascians, I think Wolfe is saying that human creativity will win over any attempt to subvert language. Orwellian "newspeak" attempted to prevent people from having incorrect thoughts, but Loyal to the Group of Fourteen was still able to express his own story. One does have to parse it carefully to get all the nuances, and that is certainly true of everything that Wolfe writes.

Paul B — 31 Aug 2008, 15:42 · in reply to Dave Tallman

On Sun, Aug 31, 2008 at 9:04 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:

Hierogrammates are "holy slaves" trying to do the will of God, even if they can only guess at it. We know from BotSS that demons playing God (or Typhon playing Pas) get taken over by the real Outsider. Pas has become truly good, and the Outsider says that Kypris will as well, because she is the goddess of love and all love is of God. Wolfe also said in an interview that "The Outsider is not a form of Severian. Severian is a form of the Outsider." It seems to me that Wolfe holds that those who try to serve God end up doing so, at least in his universe.

There isn't much use in reiterating my arguments for why the above might not be the case, so I'll settle for pedantically (ah!) pointing out that it's the Hierodules who are "holy slaves".

Paul