

Slingshot endings?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Aug 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6282>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Gwern Branwen — 20 Aug 2012, 18:43

http://www.sf-encyclopedia.com/entry/slingshot_ending

A term used by Kim Stanley Robinson when attempting to describe the typical ending of a Gene Wolfe tale. The Book of the New Sun (1980-1983), There Are Doors (1988) and Exodus from the Long Sun (1996) all close as their protagonists begin to move towards a goal which has been anticipated from the beginning. But they move out of frame, out of the end of the book, and the story closes as though before its proper ending. But, though unexpected readers might feel that the effect is of truncation, of not being told what should be told for proper completion, a true slingshot ending persuades its readers that the story has indeed been given — simply that they have to tell themselves the final outcome.

If the slingshot is not simply to be another device of the conte cruel or Horror in general (as in certain novels by Brian Evenson), it is almost certainly necessary that the ending envisaged by the reader be a happy one. Thus the device — though never common — is more often found in the literature of Fantasy, where the happy ending tends to be built in, than elsewhere. The reasons for its infrequency are plain: such an ending must be told in a fashion which surprises the reader but also compels ultimate assent, not an easy task; and it is a daring device, one that commercial publishers may resist. Late twentieth-century examples of use include Ursula K Le Guin's "In the Drought" (in Xanadu 2, anth 1994, ed Jane Yolen) and "The Rio Brain" (February 1996 Interzone) by M John Harrison and Simon Ings, the latter tale being rejected — because of its "abrupt" ending — several times before eventual publication. The slingshot ending is more common, therefore, in the early, relatively uncommercial years of fantasy (> The Encyclopedia of Fantasy), when narrative risks could more easily be taken.

...Clearly, as throughout The Book of the New Sun and its successors, the device can be used to provide a compelling transition into a further book; but the primary use of the slingshot ending, as in Wolfe, is to close the telling in a rush of wonder. Perhaps the most famous sf example of a slingshot used to convey the Sense of Wonder is A E van Vogt's The Weapon Makers (February-April 1943 Astounding; dated 1947 but 1946; rev 1952; vt One Against Eternity 1955 dos), which closes with a line that introduces a brand-new thought and a term not previously encountered in the book: "Here is the race that shall rule the sevagram."

Looking, I see only 2 brief mentions on Urth.net:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0012/0569.shtml> and

<http://lists.urth.net/pipermail/urth-urth.net/2008-January/008624.html>

Where does Kim Stanley Robinson say this?

gwern

<http://www.gwern.net>