

Literal or metaphor?

The Urth list — 10 messages, 6 voices, 11 Apr 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6370>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2013, 20:23

Without wanting to take any position on the current discussion, a metapoint:

Samuel R. Delany (a writer of Wolfe's "generation" of SF writers) points out in several places that one of the powerful "features" of science fiction is to literalize metaphors.

For example, in a mundane novel "He turned on his left side" means someone rolled over in bed; in an SF novel it may mean that someone threw a switch to activate half their body. Or the muzzy metaphor "Her world exploded" may mean that a planet belonging to some woman blew up real good.

The point here is that saying that something is a metaphor doesn't mean that it isn't also literally true -- or even primarily literally true.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Gerry Quinn — 13 Apr 2013, 10:24 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

From: Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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Delaney's point is true, but I do not think literal metaphors are at too much risk of being ignored on this list! Freud's "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar" may also be useful at times...

- Gerry Quinn

Lee Berman — 14 Apr 2013, 04:41 · follows Gerry Quinn

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes: The point here is that saying
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Thanks, Dan'l. I liked that post a lot.

Gerry Quinn: Delaney's point is true, but I do not think literal metaphors are at too much risk of being ignored on this list! Freud's "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar" may also be useful at times...

Also a good post. We must hope that every thoughtful, analytical poster here has a sort of literary "conscience" to tell him/her when he has speculated too far to be plausibly inspired by the text. But whose conscience allows too much and whose does not allow enough? The only possible judge is Gene Wolfe and he isn't saying much.

In reading Wolfe interviews, I am struck by one thing- he really expects a lot of his readers. Too much, in many cases. I'm currently thinking of when someone asked him if Pig was a godling. He answered in an annoyed tone as though it was far too obvious that he was, in fact, a godling.

It wasn't obvious to me, nor to anyone else I know of. But once I was forced to think about it, I could see that the blindness and the manner of speech invoke Tartaros and Auk and the name Pig invokes Phaea and he first appears in a chapter titled "Great Pas's Godling". He isn't as big as the other godling but he is big and knows a lot of stuff for a blind guy who seems to appear out of nowhere.

If I needed the interview to catch that one, what other stuff have I missed. It just seems more likely that I've missed more than I've (incorrectly) invented.

(FWIW, I once had a debate with Roy Lackey about whether the names of Horn and his family are meant to designate a connection via bovines. I recently noticed that when Horn and Pig are trying to decide a Vironese name for him, the big guy suggests "Bull" for himself and Horn smiles and says, "People would think we were related". So I think that resolves that.

Marc Aramini — 14 Apr 2013, 05:32 · in reply to Lee Berman

Anyone who has read his interviews on Peace knows that a few words create a pattern of conclusiveness. Mrs porter is miss bold across two hundred pages because she is blond, pretty, and associated with trees. Along with other patterns, this id creates a bigger picture. All Wolfe's work is like that, though it is always different. The little details add up to much more. That stuff is extremely deliberate. He changes her name because he likes the act of encoding and obscuring while still creating a method of decoding through patterns.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 13, 2013, at 9:41 PM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:
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David Stockhoff — 14 Apr 2013, 12:48 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/14/2013 12:41 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Granting, of course, that "bull" could designate a moose as well as a steer. But I agree that Horn's family is named around the animal *most

*Earth people, especially around the Mediterranean (and including the ancient Egyptians, thus influencing Greek mythology), have used for leather, meat, and glue for thousands of years. I'm curious what else Roy thought it might be.

But that's a classic Wolfe info-tidbit drop.

Lee Berman — 14 Apr 2013, 17:29 · follows David Stockhoff

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It was a number of years ago. But IIRC, the debate started when someone else speculated that the name of a certain character, (maybe Patera Bull or even Bison?) was suggestive of him being related to Horn. I think it was Roy's general contention that Vironese names were picked (by Wolfe) at random and any connections between them were personal inventions and shouldn't be to be used to find extra-curricular meaning. I remember asking Roy if he might concede that if not bovine then ungulate connections tied the male names of Horn's family together, but he never responded. That may have marked the end of Roy's participation on this board. A shame, but understandable.

I think the Long Sun naming falls along the same lines as saint names in BotNS. Some, like Dorcas, are clearly significant while most are not. Perhaps most of the plant and animal names of Viron were not picked with significant meanings but others like the Silk-Chenille-Tussah cluster or most obviously the Potto-Tarsier-Lemur, et al. group clearly were intended to imply connection.

In addition to connections surely some names like Blood, Quetzal or Remora or Bison were meant to reflect certain obvious or hidden attributes of the individual, themselves.

Gerry Quinn — 15 Apr 2013, 09:42 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman

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If that was the reason I would not find it understandable, and so I assume there must have been some other reason. Even if one doubts the ungulate[*] connection (which I would find difficult) one cannot dispute that Wolfe picked the names with a view to alliteration at least. And given that alliteration reduces the space of possibilities, the chance of an accidental ungulate connection is reduced.

[*] Maybe ungulate isn't quite right, though. Horn, Hide and Hoof might be thought of as epidermal by-products of large domesticated grass-eaters. Either way, it's natural to link them.

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António Pedro Marques — 15 Apr 2013, 10:30 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn wrote (15-04-2013 10:42):

From: Lee Berman

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[I would rather imagine Roy doesn't see a point in filling the list with discussions of the same ideas again and again and again.]

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Not necessarily epidermal, cf. Sinew. But that, not 'bovine', is the theme in Horn's family, the remark over 'bull' notwithstanding. I don't recall anyone ever not seeing it.

David Stockhoff — 15 Apr 2013, 12:16 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 4/14/2013 1:29 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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I see. It does not seem to me something worth leaving a board over. The pattern doesn't seem to indicate anything in particular, story-wise.

I'm reminded of the old cliché that American Indians who followed the bison used every part of the animal. I'm sure the Egyptians did too, but the cliché has to do with the Indians. That would suggest both men are related to Horn.

Any thoughts on the significance of cattle/bison to Horn's family? They weren't cattle people; bison are undomesticated.

Lee Berman — 15 Apr 2013, 14:53 · follows David Stockhoff

Gerry Quinn: >Maybe ungulate isn't quite right, though. Horn, Hide and Hoof might be thought of as epidermal by-products of large domesticated grass-eaters. Either way, it's natural to link them.

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David Stockhoff: Any thoughts on the significance of cattle/bison to Horn's family? They weren't cattle people; bison are undomesticated.

Well, we could debate whether the connection is as broad as "ungulate", in the middle like Gerry's "large, domesticated grass eaters" or as narrow as "bovine". I find that mildly interesting. But what I find more germane is that even Gerry agrees that there is a natural connection which is apparent to pretty much everyone here.

My point on the individual nature of Wolfe's namings may be illustrated by "Sinew". As Antonio notes, sinew/tendon is not an epidermal tissue product like horn, hoof and hide are. Taking up Gerry's observation of alliteration, Sinew also departs from the pattern of the other three "H" names.

I think this is likely not accidental. Sinew is Horn's "bad", ungrateful, rebellious son while Hoof and Hide are loyal, dutiful and respectful kids. A bit stunning that Wolfe manages to illustrate Sinew's separation from the family with both literary and biological symbolism of names.

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Well, of the people still here, I think only Dan'I might have been in a position to observe the full arc of Roy C. Lackey on this board in real time. Roy started several years before I did so I have to rely on the archive perusal I did before I started posting.

It was my observation that Roy started out like any poster here, making contributions, offering his theories for the interest of other Wolfe fans. But later, he seemed to settle more comfortably into the role of enforcer; the guy who told others why their theories didn't hold water. I can see why such a role might become spiritually draining after a while. I don't think the question of whether Patera Bull might be part of Horn's family was specifically the reason for him leaving the board. I think it was more of a last straw kind of thing.