

Short Story 84: From the Desk of Gilmer C. Merton

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 Aug 2014

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Marc Aramini — 06 Aug 2014, 18:28

“From the Desk of Gilmer C. Merton” was first published in 1983 in **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction** and is reprinted in **Storeys from the Old Hotel**.

SUMMARY:

The “story” is an epistolary one in which the tentative, timid, and inexperienced author Gilmer C. Merton queries an agent, is accepted with standard industry terms and then treated a bit dismissively. He sells the book and writes a sequel, but as his poverty encroaches after buying a typewriter from a famous horror writer, his personality becomes more threatening, and he begins signing his letters with the byline “Wolf Moon”. This change becomes obvious when it is suggested by his agent and editor that his publication name be changed, though he chooses the pseudonym Gilray Gunn. His timidity seems to give way and he becomes murderous, claiming “Gilmer C. Merton is dead. — in the future, please address me as 'Mr. Moon,' or in moments of extreme comraderie, 'Wolf'.” A mysterious event, probably a slaughter, is referenced by his agent as occurring near his community, out of which she expects he could get a non-fiction book. He requests that their renegotiated contract be signed in blood after expressing condolences on the murder of his editor's family by disembodied claws while demanding his check, and signs the final letter only Wolf.

COMMENTARY:

This is one of Wolfe's light-hearted parodies and there is little analysis to do. Wolfe says:

“From the Desk of Gilmer C. Merton” is the story my agent (Virginia Kidd) dislikes the most; she thinks Georgia Morgan's modeled on her. Nah. I should point out that Velo's a village near here. I don't think there's really a North Velo City, but in a few years there might be — this is Barrington, and there's also North Barrington, South Barrington, Lake Barringtown Shores, and Barrington Hills. So you see.

The name association between Virginia Kidd, with a state name and a pirate name, is pretty obvious and clearly Georgia Morgan follows the same pattern. Saul Hearwell the editor from Cheap Drugstore Paperbacks is clearly based on Wolfe's editor David Hartwell (King Saul and David having a pretty famous Old Testament relationship, of course, one of first friendship and then rivalry for the kingship).

The other puns are of course based in the science fiction and publishing community, with Gilmer buying a possessed typewriter from Steven E. Presley (Stephen King, of course, as Elvis Presley was known). The title of the book “Hijo”, or ?Son? is probably a pun on “Kujo” but also possibly a verbal play on Wolfe's Sun books. The names Barry Longear or Oar Scottson Curd are obvious in their references, and the response to late work by Robert A. Heinlein prompts the request, “please, not Robert A. anything.” The suggestion of the name Gil Donadil almost seems like a Tolkienesque fantasy name, but in any event there is a possibly unintentional

resonance with the hormonal medicine Gonadil.

The meaning of the name Gilmer Merton's does not quite match up well with the Wolf Moon who begins to sign the letters, though Thomas Merton does have an interesting quote about the moon which is by and large probably irrelevant: "What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves" This is the most important of all voyages of discovery, and without it, all the rest are not only useless, but disastrous.

Changing a novel's name from *Galaxy Shuttle* to *Come Dark Lust *shows a pretty extreme shift from science fiction to fantasy/horror.

Gilmer might mean renowned hostage, showing our author as a prisoner of a system before the mysterious power at work makes itself known, whether it be his anger and hatred or the typewriter, eliminating that portion of his personality. Merton could imply a settlement near the sea.

The only thematic take away from this involves the frustration of the publishing world, and how the treatment by agents and editors can breed a kind of murderous insanity, though of course we have a supernatural excuse in the form of Stephen E. Presley's possessed typewriter. The moon and its relationship to werewolves will be taken as a given.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

Is Gilmer murdered by his machine, or is this merely the expression of his anger and wrath, liberated by the spiritual forces of the typewriter? Thematically it really doesn't matter, as the timid Gilmer is dead and gone, replaced with malevolence and forged on the anvil of the publishing world.

What does the C in his name stand for?

CONNECTION TO OTHER WORKS:

Wolfe's pun-based and light fantasies exist if you are inclined to look hard enough, and this story is probably most similar to "Planetarium in Orbit" and "Dumpster World", though it could probably be construed as a sublimation of all the frustrations and asinine requests in the publishing world.