

Substitute me for him, substitute my coke for gin...

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Jun 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/810>

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.

Dan Parmenter — 16 Jun 1998, 08:26

Here's some older stuff I've been meaning to reply to:

From: "Dan'I Danehy Oakes" <DDANEHYO at us.oracle.com>
The same holds true, to a lesser extent, for many prelinguistic animals -- cats and birds can readily be seen teaching their offspring how to perform various survival-oriented activities.

And if that skill is not acquired during a particular phase of development, it is never acquired. Kittens never taught to hunt can coexist with pet mice without the slightest problem.

BTW, that makes for an interesting thought right there. What if the shape-shifting ability (to whatever extent it exists) is like language
- a characteristic of the species the particulars of which must be realized during a "critical stage" of their development. All abos have the capacity to shape-shift but if its "parameters" aren't set (through parental/societal examples and interactions, as with language) the knack is never fully realized and such abos are like the examples one hears about occasionally of children raised in severely abusive isutations where they aren't allowed to interact and learn language (e.g. Kaspar Hauser). Such abos would have limited or nonexistant shape-shifting ability and no ability to use tools.

There's no evidence in the text of anything like this, but I found it interesting enough to type the above paragraph about it. Certainly a question might be asked of Wolfe: what is your "model of shape shifting"?

From: "Robert Borski" <rborski at coredcs.com>
For my paradigm, I'd like to deviate from literature and cite the various schools of analysis used to evaluate film. Even the most monomaniacal foaming-at-the-mouth practitioners of a certain cant would never insist their critical dissections are the only valid approach. (Hey, Gene, how's the head wound? Roger misses you.) Hence the various schools of thought that are taught in most collegiate film courses. Each has its own tenets, and while various conceits often overlap, each school has its own evaluatory dicta. Is it possible, however, to use the standards of one to critique the analysis of the other? I maintain no. Hence the auteur cahiers du cinema approach to analyzing CITIZEN KANE will always be every bit as valid as the Marxist approach, as long as each adheres to its referential frame. Each has its own grammar and rules; each generates its own true sentences. But mix them together, you have more gibberish than sense.

But don't we get into some hazy areas here? On the one hand there is the tenet of semiotics: the text stands alone. All interpretations that conform to the facts of the text are valid, regardless of whether the author intended them or not. And perhaps even the "mistaken" interpretation reveal the author's hidden intentions (to paraphrase one of Eno's Oblique Strategies). On the other hand there is Gene Wolfe, engineer and technical writer who is without question, one of the tightest plotters in the biz who documents everything. But that doesn't mean that there isn't room for ambiguity. This is the middle ground between the two extremes.

For example, in the context of BOTNS we know that there are these "sliver" Severians (as they've been called here) because Wolfe establishes it over the course of things. But I'm certain that Wolfe probably has no idea exactly how many there are (I believe that our Mantis has even speculated that there could be zillions of 'em). So yes, within certain parameters, a number of hypotheses are available. I'm starting to wonder if this sort of ambiguity isn't the whole point of 5HC - that there is no one right answer, just many hypotheses.

D