

Hues, HORARS: II

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 14 Jul 1998

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Robert Borski — 14 Jul 1998, 14:34

In a previous post I mentioned how I thought "The HORARS of War" and "All the Hues of Hell" were part of the same story cycle. Time now to examine what I think each means and how they may be further interrelated.

HORARS is an updated Golem story (which basically Mary Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN also is). As God has done with us, so have we humans done with the Homolog ORganisms (Army Replacement Simulations). But whereas God has created us in His image out of love, we create the HORARS for less noble reasons. We certainly don't love them; in fact there's evidence most ordinary humans revile them. But if it's a choice between us dying in combat with the Enemy or the HORARS, hey, we'll gladly let them be our our corporal stand-ins, i.e., the HORARS are bodies only (whores), fit only for acting out our vile needs. (We're their puppeteers, as we are Pinocchios, the robot tank.)

Of course the HORARS eventually turn on us, their masters, just as the Jewish Golem and Frankenstein's monster do (a consequence of hubris, I warrant; of our trying to usurp God). In this case 2910, the viewpoint character, kills Brenner, the Synthetic Biology Services rep, who symbolizes the HORARS' creator. (Brenner, I believe, is named after Sydney Brenner, famed director of the Cambridge Molecular Biology Laboratory, and whose pioneering work in genetics parallels that of James Crick and Francis Watson).

2910 also believes he is human, and much of the subtext plays to him being a Christ figure--like Jesus, he's an intermediary, only between man and machine--but there seems little doubt he is actually a HORAR. He is also reporter Keith Thomas, of course, the one person besides a few key generals who allegedly knows 2910 is human and to whom he gives his reports as field correspondent. This is implied by the story's last two paragraphs, as well as the name Keith Thomas. Keith means "wind" and 2910 has memories of growing up in Chicago (aka The Windy City), while Thomas means "twins," symbolizing I believe he is 2910's alter ego, an implanted memory that resurrects itself schizoaffectively every two weeks so he can "accept" and file his own field reports.

Anybody remember the Burt Reynolds-Woody Allen sperm scene from EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX, BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK? I think "All the Hues of Hell" is somewhat similar, only the local event we're witnessing is the creation via artificial insemination of a HORAR. It's a prequel in other words. The Egg is the female gamete; the shadow matter is seminal fluid; and the "demon" is an optimized DNA program, the genetic blueprints for a HORAR.

Observe the following bit of dialogue, when Jansen is talking about Kyle's "soul," which the cyborg describes in terms of a computer program (note too that "horrors" refers to the shadow demon): "I suppose it [Kyle's soul] may be put into one of these horrors [HORARS]. They seem more machine than human, at least to me." [ES, p.339] Given our last description of 2910, with his metallic leg, this seems to jibe with the "more machine than human" description. As do the

HORARS overall, who can run "miles without tiring and only sleep a couple of hours a night."

Other evidence we're witnessing an artificial insemination: much of what we see of the Shadow world in the monitors seems as if it could also be descriptions of ultrasound imagery, and there's a predominance of pink and blue, the traditional baby colors, with blue--i.e., a male fetus is being created--coming to dominate.

And of course, because this is an immaculate conception of sorts, albeit a scientific rather than a divine one, we have all sorts of religious subtext. Polyaris, of course, is the Paraclete, shouting "Ghost! Ghost! GHOST!" on one hand and warning of Danger, Fire and Catastrophe on the other. He's also the false star of Bethlehem--like the other Polaris, a fixed star used for navigational purposes. Meaning this is no Christ being born and damnation may not be far off.

There's also the character Jansen, who I believe is named after Abraham Jansen, a Flemish artist famous for his religious paintings. Just as he could see angels and paint them into The Adoration of the Magi, so too can he see the captured shadow demon without special equipment. The Jansen of Hues is also diagnosed as both dead and insane, signifying the abdication of belief in a world where man has usurped God as prime creator.

In fact, both stories seem to be cautionary tales about the ill-advisedness of tampering with nature, especially in regards to eugenics and attempting to improve on God's greatest creation, you, me and all the rest of our fellow Homo sapiens--hardly surprising caveats from a writer of Gene Wolfe's Catholicity.

Robert Borski

Michael Straight — 15 Jul 1998, 17:15 · follows Robert Borski

On Tue, 14 Jul 1998, Robert Borski wrote:

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[...]

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HORARS seems to me to be more fundamentally yet another example of one of Wolfe's favorite themes, the narrator who doesn't know who or what he is, and who is ignorant of his true role in the world. I suppose this is also a pretty Christian theme--that fallen humans don't know who they are, don't know the story they are a part of.

I think the irony of the narrator's pretending to be something he already is (does the text leave open the possibility that he really is human after all?) is more central to the story than a warning about not tampering with nature. The moral seems not so much that the HORARS shouldn't have been created in the first place (lest they rise up against us), but that we

shouldn't treat as sub-human creatures that seems so human ("For all you know, you might be one too!").

Hues is one of the few Wolfe stories I neither like nor get (probably some relation there), so I'm not going to try discussing it.

Anyone up for making a list of Wolfe stories where the narrator is mistaken about his own identity? Off the top of my head:

"HORARS"

"The Other Dead Man"

"Checking Out"

"The Changeling"

"Tracking Song"

"Forlesen"

Latro

Both Severian and Silk to some extent

Maybe Weer in PEACE

-Rostrum