

Who is he? (RTTW spoilers)

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1122>

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Adam Stephanides — 09 Feb 2001, 19:07

My first post about the identity of the protagonist of RTTW, and of much of the other two books, was written in haste. Since then I've thought about it more, and I've come to the conclusion that I was more right than wrong: "Horn" is Silk, or at least more Silk than Horn, from the time he "finds himself" beside Hyacinth's body in Whorl.

The two alternatives I've seen suggested here are that it is Horn in Silk's body until Horn visits Pig at the West Pole, then Hornsilk until some point after the return to New Viron, then Silk (if I understand correctly what mantis wrote); or that it was Horn in Silk's body until Remora reads him the hyacinth passage. Against the first hypothesis, I didn't observe any marked change in "Horn"'s personality or behavior after the visit to the West Pole; nor is there a change in others' reactions to "Horn" (more on this below). Against the second hypothesis, I don't see why hearing the hyacinth passage should drive Horn's spirit out of Silk's body, or make it want to leave, whereas in my earlier post I gave an explanation for why it would bring Silk to realize his identity.

Against both these hypotheses, neither provides a good explanation for why "Horn" fails to realize he is in Silk's body, or even entertain the possibility. He knows he is in another body; he seemingly can't walk five steps on Whorl without somebody calling him Silk; he knows Pig thinks he is Silk; and Mint bluntly tells him that he is Silk laboring under a delusion (all this before he goes to the West Pole). Yet he never draws the obvious conclusion. If he really is Horn, he's astonishingly dense. I don't think that Horn's not wanting to believe that Silk could have attempted suicide, as has been suggested before on this list, is a sufficient explanation. But Silk's not being able to accept that Hyacinth is dead is.

My final argument is subjective: I think the series is much better if "Horn" is Silk. Silk, escaping from his wife's death by burying own identity, is much more moving than Horn or Hornsilk stumbling around on a quest he inexplicably doesn't realize is finished. More than this: "'Horn' is Silk" feels right to me, in the same way that "Weer is dead" felt right, and as "Horn is in Silk's body" never did.

On the other hand, there is some evidence contradicting my original assertion that only Horn's memories were transferred to Silk's body. First, as David DiGiacomo points out, the Neighbor had told Horn that his spirit would be transferred, not his memories. This could be gotten around; but there is also the evidence of the astral journeys. On "Horn"'s first trip to the Red Sun Whorl with Hoof, he looks, apparently, like a mix between Silk and Horn (p. 346) and this is apparently true of his earlier astral trips as well, and of the next-to-last trip to the Red Sun Whorl (p. 388, IGJ p. 373). On his final trip to the Red Sun Whorl, though, he looks like a younger Silk (p. 388). This is perplexing, because nothing happens between the next-to-last and last trips which could be expected to drive Horn's spirit out of Silk or make it want to leave. (The only possibility I can see that might be plausible is Horn's bargain with Scylla, but why that should have this effect I have no idea.)

Be that as it may, if "Horn"'s changed appearance on the last trip does indicate the departure of whatever portion of Horn's spirit had been present, we should see some change in "Horn"'s behavior. And we do: it is on the last trip that "Horn" provokes Juganu to kill him. It seems unlikely that "Horn" would want to die because he failed to bring Silk, as he claims. I think that Silk, free of whatever restraining influence Horn's spirit exercised (and, perhaps, with the awareness that he is Silk and Hyacinth dead coming closer to consciousness), is trying to finish his interrupted suicide, though giving it an explanation that fits Horn's memories.

So my current theory is that the Neighbor did send Horn's spirit into Silk's body. There it did not continue existing separately from Silk's spirit, as in possession; rather, it merged with Silk's spirit, as is shown by the astral appearance. In this merger, the components deriving from Silk's spirit were dominant, although "Silkhorn" believed himself to be Horn, to avoid facing Hyacinth's death. Between the next-to-last and last visits to the Red Sun Whorl, the remnant of Horn's spirit departed for some reason, leaving "Horn" wholly Silk. I can't claim to be able to explain everything in this account, but it seems to me that it fits the text better than any of the alternatives that have been proposed.

--Adam

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 13 Feb 2001, 13:18 · follows Adam Stephanides

While we await Adam's model of Silk-in-Pig and why the narrator should want to have it inside his crowded head, allow me to try again. A different approach, using Adam's previous post.

Adam wrote:

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Yes, well put. However, Adam, wouldn't it be an even stronger case if the world-weary Silk-who-saw-Hyacinth-dead was gone and replaced by a fresh Silk-who-did-not-even-know-she-was-sick? So that the only one in that body who knew the complete truth about Hyacinth was the Horn spirit.

Thus, a new-Silk "coming up to speed on the events of the last few years" rather than old-Silk being completely delusional.

Let us also put upon the table the literary Silk: this is the creation of Horn and Nettle, this is the Silk known by most colonists on Blue; this is the man Horn is sent to bring back. Lest we forget, Horn and Nettle wrote all of litSilk's dialogue. The gap between litSilk and being inside Silk's body, with one or more versions of Silk spirit as company, is bound to cause some trouble for the Horn side of the equation.

=mantis=

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