

Death of Jahlee

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 17 Feb 2001

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James Jordan — 17 Feb 2001, 13:02

At 10:24 PM 2/11/2001 -0800, you wrote:

The protagonist spends a lot of time treating inhumans as people and trying to see their point of view, even to the point of wanting to learn about their reproductive habits. He must be the most sympathetic human the inhumans have encountered. Then Jahlee tries to kill Nettle, and Juganu leads a war party against the protagonist, who doesn't hesitate to kill them in either case (although he seems to have some regret about Jahlee).

I can't figure out whether these incidents represent the inhumans not being able to rise above their nature, or whether they are a consequence of their close imitation of humans. Perhaps they imitate humans in war as in love?

Jahlee is in love with Horn. Nettle is her rival. She realizes this when face to face with Nettle at last. Horn defends his wife, and "goes too far." But that's reality.

I believe that among the broad subtexts of the series is that Silk is like Jesus and Horn is a bit like Paul. Humans are the Jews, and the inhumans are the barbarians to whom Paul was sent. Yep, they are barbarians, but the good news of human blood can make them into something else. The blood of Christ transforms us. The body and blood of Silk are transforming Horn. Human blood is transforming the inhumans. But you don't stop being a barbarian overnight, especially when the "Jews" are really no better than the "barbarians," a point that both Paul and Horn continually make. Both must grow in "Silk-likeness." But it is "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans, chapter 1). Humans must be transformed so that the inhumans can be. So, let's not be surprised if Jahlee's "sanctification" is imperfect. Wolfe's characters are on the road to being better people, but they are never perfect!

But isn't there some awesome beauty in Jahlee's death? Dying in Nettle's forgiving arms? Wanting to be human so much that she hates her people and reveals the secret? Isn't this a good death, with penitence, forgiveness, and hope for a happy afterlife?

Read this section again, Alga. I thought it was both sad and beautiful. It made me care for Jahlee more than ever. I think this bittersweet end makes Jahlee more human, and more loveable, than if she had just turned into a good person and lived happily ever after.

Patera Nutria

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

Jeffrey Meyers — 17 Feb 2001, 22:02 · follows James Jordan

James Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> wrote:

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I guess I don't see how the inhumani as a whole are "on the road to being better people." If the inhumani are Gentiles, why are so few of them (possibly Krait and Jahle alone; would you also say Fava?) "converted." If the NT typology is to make some sense, I guess I would expect more "conversions" among the "Gentiles." Maybe I'm pressing it too much. But it is a major feature of NT history that many Gentiles come into the kingdom. The inhumani, however, seem intractable. But maybe you're seeing these "conversions" as typical. But I just can't help thinking that most, if not all of the inhumani on Blue turn on Horn/silk in the attack at the wedding. Of course, the last words of the book ("Good fishing!") seem to indicate a further missionary effort to other "Gentiles" undertaken by the Bride (Nettle), the Holy Spirit (Oreb), and a representative of the old world (the old sybl).

Patera Bunny

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

James Jordan — 19 Feb 2001, 09:37 · follows Jeffrey Meyers

At 10:02 PM 2/17/2001 -0600, Patera Bad Bunny wrote:
James Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> wrote:

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I don't see the humans "on the whole" becoming better people either. I meant Wolfe's characters.

But why not more inhumani? Well, I don't think the book of Acts or Paul's history is the main grid of the trilogy. It looks to me more like a Christianized Odyssey along with a medieval pilgrimage story (and I wonder if there is some specific crusade or pilgrimage narrative that Wolfe had in mind). I see the ripping out of eyes for others as a Pauline reference, as well as the fact that Horn is the first to begin to see a "mission to the inhumani." So, the "multitudes of gentiles" theme in Acts and the Epistles may well be lacking. At the same time, however, it does appear that multitudes of inhumani are wanting to become more human.

The inhumani, however, are primarily our children. Like our children, they mirror us. Thus, Krait and Jahlee are Horn's children. Also, Horn does not like what he sees in Sinew precisely because Sinew mirrors Horn to himself. This is precisely what humans don't like about the inhumani-children: they mirror humanity to itself. That theme, I believe, is the much larger and pervasive theme in the trilogy.

Or so it seems to me today.

Patera Nut.

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