

Horn Lives

The Whorl list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 17 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1176>

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.

James Jordan — 17 Feb 2001, 13:11

I'm finally done with the book, and have not finished all the posts, but at this point I'm not at all convinced that Horn is gone and Silk lives. Quite the opposite. But I'm not completely sure. Let me make a case for this reading, and you can respond.

Because I think all you guys are wrong.

We have to pay attention to who the narrator is. Hoof and Hide NEVER believed that "Father" was Horn. Neither did Remora. Now Remora CLAIMS that he got the narrator finally to see the light and admit that he is Silk? Really? Are we supposed to believe this? People have been trying to get Horn to do this for over a year, but he knows fully who he is. But when they keep it up, as he says himself, sometimes he just stops arguing. Are we really supposed to take three pages of Remora's testimony and pit it against hundreds of pages of testimony from the narrator? Really?

Yes, Remora is a "good guy," if definitely annoying. But he has his own preconceptions. I don't think he's lying, but I don't think he recognizes the truth at all. He sees what he wants to see. Sure, the kids who write the final chapters believe he is Silk. Of course they do. And so does Remora. But there is no indication FROM THE NARRATOR that he ever accepts this, is there? Why don't they think he is Horn? Not just because he looks different, but because he manifests Silk's abilities, which are not Horn's. But (a) Horn has always tried to mimic Silk, and that's part of it. And (b) we have Horn's personality in Silk's body. Thus, he manifests Silk's physical genes and gifts, becoming an outstanding leader. And he has some of Silk's memories, since they are lodged in Silk's physical brain.

This construction fits perfectly, I submit, with the theology of the book. Christians live in Christ, in the body of Christ (both personal and churchly), and receive the same Holy Spirit as Jesus received. So, Horn lives in Silk's body, and receives the same Oreb. And, feeding on Christ's body eucharistically, Christians receive from Him. Similarly, Horn is receiving things from Silk's body.

But Horn's personality as dead and obliterated? No way. It is Silk's personality that is gone. Now, the narrator does say that he killed Hide and Hoof's father. But this could mean several different things, such as that his actions on Green resulted in the death of his body. It does not have to mean that a reviving Silk drove out the remnants of Horn.

At the end, the astral body of Horn appears most like Silk. Well, as Christians mature they are supposed to become more Christlike. That is, their inner selves are supposed to conform to Christ. And in the astral sphere, what we see are the inner selves. I don't think that this Silk-like appearance of the astral body means any more than that. Similarly, the human appearance of the astral inhumis shows that they are becoming human in their inner persons.

It's Horn, folks. First, middle, and last. Horn all the way. Horn becoming more Silk-like. Horn "becoming conformed to Christ in the inner man" as St. Paul puts it. But Horn. Nobody else. There. That's the gauntlet.

Patera Nutria

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

Alex David Groce — 18 Feb 2001, 14:27 · follows James Jordan

Nutria said:

This construction fits perfectly, I submit, with the theology of the book. Christians live in Christ, in the body of Christ (both personal and churchly), and receive the same Holy Spirit as Jesus received. So, Horn lives in Silk's body, and receives the same Oreb. And, feeding on Christ's body eucharistically, Christians receive from Him. Similarly, Horn is receiving things from Silk's body.

I agree with you that Oreb all along has strong aspects as a Holy Spirit figure. Given this, what do you think the significance of Oreb's possession by Scylla is? This whole Scylla-in-Oreb thing is strange. It is hinted at before RTTW, as members of the list suggested, but it makes little enough sense that I sort of placed it in the category of "why is Scylla emphasized when she hasn't had much role in RTTW? Beats me."

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32

--

Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)

Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department

8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

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

Adam Stephanides — 18 Feb 2001, 13:20 · follows Alex David Groce

I'm not sure how I came to be the Official Defender of Silkhorn's Silkiness. But since nobody else has yet picked up the gauntlet you've thrown down, I guess it's up to me.

My first reaction to your post is that you're trashing the most moving scene in the book just to save a grotesque allegory. Apart from that, some comments on specific points.

on 2/17/01 1:11 PM, James Jordan at jbjordan at gnt.net wrote:

Are

we really supposed to take three pages of Remora's testimony and pit it against hundreds of pages of testimony from the narrator? Really?

And there are hundreds of pages of testimony from Weer that he's not dead, and dozens of pages from the prisoner in "V. R. T." that he's Marsch.

Yes, Remora is a "good guy," if definitely annoying. But he has his own preconceptions. I don't think he's lying, but I don't think he recognizes the truth at all. He sees what he wants to see.

There's no evidence at all that Remora's report of his interview with Silk was distorted by his preconceptions. And if nothing took place during this interview, if "Horn" just nodded at the end to shut Remora up as you suggest (or didn't nod at all), then why does "Horn" leave immediately afterwards, for ever, without seeing his sons again?

Sure, the kids who write the final chapters believe he is Silk. Of course they do. And so does Remora. But there is no indication FROM THE NARRATOR that he ever accepts this, is there?

Yes, there is: at the end of Chapter 20, and in Silk's words to Daisy in the Afterword. Your reasons for discounting these don't hold up.

Why don't they think he is Horn? Not just because he looks different, but because he manifests Silk's abilities, which are not Horn's.

And he doesn't talk like Horn, and he doesn't act like Horn.

But (a) Horn
has always tried to mimic Silk, and that's part of it.

I didn't buy this idea that Horn mimics Silk when mantis said it, and I don't buy it now. Horn deeply admires Silk, and has a strong sense of his own unworthiness. I don't think that Horn would presume to go around talking like Silk. What Horn says is that he "tried to model [him]self on him," (407) which is something quite different. (And to anticipate your rejoinder, I'm aware that Horn's imitating Silk would fit your allegory, since Christians are supposed to imitate Christ. But I don't believe Wolfe is the sort of writer who violates characters' psychology for the sake of allegory.)

This construction fits perfectly, I submit, with the theology of the book. Christians live in Christ, in the body of Christ (both personal and churchly), and receive the same Holy Spirit as Jesus received. So, Horn lives in Silk's body, and receives the same Oreb. And, feeding on Christ's body eucharistically, Christians receive from Him. Similarly, Horn is receiving things from Silk's body. But Horn's personality as dead and obliterated? No way. It is Silk's personality that is gone.

If Silk's body is the Church, and Silk's personality is gone from his body, does that mean that Christ's spirit has vanished from the Church?

Now, the narrator does say that he killed Hide and Hoof's father. But this could mean several different things, such as that his actions on Green resulted in the death of his body.

I can't imagine Horn's saying those words, in the context in which they appear, with that meaning. "I'm not going to say goodbye to my sons, who I will never see again, because my actions caused the death of my physical body on Green"???

At the end, the astral body of Horn appears most like Silk.

Not just "most like Silk." He no longer looks like Horn at all.

Well, as Christians mature they are supposed to become more Christlike. That is, their inner selves are supposed to conform to Christ. And in the astral sphere, what we see are the inner selves. I don't think that this Silk-like appearance of the astral body means any more than that. Similarly, the human appearance of the astral inhumis shows that they are becoming human in their inner persons.

There's no evidence that the appearance of people's astral selves changes as their character changes. The inhumis's astral selves appear human, not because the inhumis are becoming more human, but because their spirits are human, taken from humans.

Beyond this, I refer you to my earlier posts on the narrator's identity, in which I list in exhaustive (and perhaps exhausting) detail the evidence for the presence, at least, of Silk's spirit in Silkhorn on the Whorl, and a fortiori after returning to Blue.

Two final questions for you:

- 1) Why, according to your reading, does Horn never acknowledge that he is in Silk's body?
- 2) If the scene with Remora is meaningless, why does Wolfe include it at all? And why does he place it where he does, as the last chapter before the Afterword?

--Adam

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

James Jordan — 19 Feb 2001, 09:23 · follows Adam Stephanides

At 02:27 PM 2/18/2001 -0500, ADG wrote:

I agree with you that Oreb all along has strong aspects as a Holy Spirit figure. Given this, what do you think the significance of Oreb's possession by Scylla is? This whole Scylla-in-Oreb thing is strange. It is hinted at before RTTW, as members of the list suggested, but it makes little enough sense that I sort of placed it in the category of "why is Scylla emphasized when she hasn't had much role in RTTW? Beats me."

I don't know. I have the impression that Wolfe writes these books in layers, adding layer after layer of additional stories until we get a whole tapestry. We've got the Odyssey here, but also a medieval pilgrimage to the holy land to get relics with adventures along the way. And also occasional reference to St. Paul, it seems (e.g., tearing out eyes to give to others). We've got Oreb as Holy Spirit, but also then layered over that, Oreb as Computer-Menarche-Scylla. I guess the question is: Are all these layers supposed to fit together perfectly somehow, or are they just different layers?

Patera Nutria

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

James Jordan — 19 Feb 2001, 10:38 · follows James Jordan

At 01:20 PM 2/18/2001 -0600, you wrote:

I'm not sure how I came to be the Official Defender of Silkhorn's Silkiness. But since nobody else has yet picked up the gauntlet you've thrown down, I guess it's up to me.

Thanks.

My first reaction to your post is that you're trashing the most moving scene in the book just to save a grotesque allegory. Apart from that, some comments on specific points.

For me the death of Jahlee was the most moving part of the book.

And there are hundreds of pages of testimony from Weer that he's not dead, and dozens of pages from the prisoner in "V. R. T." that he's Marsch.

True. I don't know that Wolfe is doing all that AGAIN, though.

There's no evidence at all that Remora's report of his interview with Silk was distorted by his preconceptions. And if nothing took place during this interview, if "Horn" just nodded at the end to shut Remora up as you suggest (or didn't nod at all), then why does "Horn" leave immediately afterwards, for ever, without seeing his sons again?

Good question.

Sure, the kids who write the final chapters believe he is Silk. Of course they do. And so does Remora. But there is no indication FROM THE NARRATOR that he ever accepts this, is there?

Yes, there is: at the end of Chapter 20, and in Silk's words to Daisy in the Afterword. Your reasons for discounting these don't hold up.

Yes, this is a problem for the Horn Lives viewpoint. But is Silk the kind of man who cannot face saying farewell to people he has unwittingly wronged? Okay, we can distinguish between Book Silk and Real Silk, and say that Book Silk would never act this way, while Real Silk might. But I'm not convinced this is enough. Wolfe is tricky, and I'm still inclined to think that what Narr. tells Daisy is cryptic.

There's no evidence that the appearance of people's astral selves changes as their character changes. The inhum's astral selves appear human, not because the inhum's are becoming more human, but because their spirits are human, taken from humans.

You may be right. I'll have to reinvestigate.

Two final questions for you:

1) Why, according to your reading, does Horn never acknowledge that he is in Silk's body?

Well, on my reading he does, at the end. But I recall a scene where he looks at his arm to see a scar that was present on Silk's body, and does not see it, thereby convincing himself that he is not in Silk's body. (Anybody else recall this?)

But the main reason, I think (today) is this: He wants to bring Silk back. The Neighbor told him that he was going to enter the body of a man whose spirit was departing. That means Silk is dead, and the proof is that Horn is in Silk's body. Horn does not want to face this fact.

2) If the scene with Remora is meaningless, why does Wolfe include it at all? And why does he place it where he does, as the last chapter before the Afterword?

Oh, I don't think it's meaningless. But I'm not sure the characters understand what they report, as is often the case in Wolfe.

We should start a separate string on this, I guess, but consider the citation from the Chras. Writings:

Though trodden beneath the shepherd's heel,
The wild hyacinth blooms on the ground. (p. 408)

Now, given how we have seen Silk and Horn (Silkhorn, Hornsilk, whatever) interpret the CW in other parts of the seven books, how should we interpret this? Surely NOT as some cryptic reference to the person of Hyacinth! Let me give it a Silklike try:

"Now, the shepherd is the master, who rules the land. Perhaps he is the Outsider, or one of his agents. Because of our waywardness, there are times when He must crush the blossoms in His garden; but not unto total destruction. Rather, though they are trodden down, they will rise again. Do not the Chras. Writings themselves say that a great flood must come before a new sun can be born to give life to the garden of the whorl? I wonder if this might refer to an event yet to come to the Red Sun Whorl that we have visited....

"A hyacinth is a flower of many possible colors, yet it seems we usually associate it with purple. As Oreb is black because of the black spaces of the Outsider's whorl, perhaps the hyacinth is also a picture of the work of the Outsider. His people, those who follow Him, will come to life again after those necessary times of judgment that He brings upon them."

Bla bla blah... Well, I guess this could refer to Silk's coming to life again after being trodden down. I guess that's what Remora thought. But perhaps it means that wicked New Viron can come to life again, and this is why "he wept."

Well, I'm not settled in my understanding, but I still lean heavily toward the Horn Lives interpretation. As you rightly point out, it's the only view that makes sense to me in terms of the basic grid of the seven books. "For Silk to live, Horn must die" seems to me to be the OPPOSITE

of everything the books are about. But, Wolfe can be tricky.

Patera Nutria

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

Adam Stephanides — 19 Feb 2001, 23:46 · follows James Jordan

on 2/19/01 10:38 AM, James Jordan at jbjordan at gnt.net wrote:

At 01:20 PM 2/18/2001 -0600, you wrote:

My first reaction to your post is that you're trashing the most moving scene in the book just to save a grotesque allegory. Apart from that, some comments on specific points.

For me the death of Jahlee was the most moving part of the book.

I also found that scene very powerful.

Yes, this is a problem for the Horn Lives viewpoint. But is Silk the kind of man who cannot face saying farewell to people he has unwittingly wronged? Okay, we can distinguish between Book Silk and Real Silk, and say that Book Silk would never act this way, while Real Silk might. But I'm not convinced this is enough.

That is a good point, and I admit I'm not sure why Silk is in such a hurry to be off. (I'll post further thoughts on this separately.) But in Silk, this behavior is merely anomalous. In Horn, I would argue, it is inconceivable.

1) Why, according to your reading, does Horn never acknowledge that he is in Silk's body?

Well, on my reading he does, at the end. But I recall a scene where he looks at his arm to see a scar that was present on Silk's body, and does not see it, thereby convincing himself that he is not in Silk's body. (Anybody else recall this?)

But the main reason, I think (today) is this: He wants to bring Silk back. The Neighbor told him that he was going to enter the body of a man whose spirit was departing.

Dying, not departing. The distinction is important here.

That means Silk is dead, and the proof is that Horn is in Silk's body. Horn does not want to face this fact.

You handled that better than I expected, I must admit. But for all Horn's admiration of Silk, I don't think his unwillingness to admit Silk's death would be enough. Remember, in Whorl "Horn" was constantly running into people telling him he was Silk (in fact, after a while I began to feel Wolfe was being too heavy-handed); and he knew he was in another body. It would require a huge emotional disturbance to keep him from drawing the obvious conclusion.

2) If the scene with Remora is meaningless, why does Wolfe include it at all? And why does he place it where he does, as the last chapter before the Afterword?

Oh, I don't think it's meaningless. But I'm not sure the characters understand what they report, as is often the case in Wolfe. We should start a separate string on this, I guess, but consider the citation from the Chras. Writings:

Though trodden beneath the shepherd's heel,
The wild hyacinth blooms on the ground. (p. 408)

Now, given how we have seen Silk and Horn (Silkhorn, Hornsilk, whatever) interpret the CW in other parts of the seven books, how should we interpret this? Surely NOT as some cryptic reference to the person of Hyacinth!

Why not? In Chap. 12 of RTTW, "Horn" interprets the passage from the CW as, in part, referring to his and Olivine's specifically.

Let me give it a Silklike try:

"Now, the shepherd is the master, who rules the land. Perhaps he is the Outsider, or one of his agents. Because of our waywardness, there are times when He must crush the blossoms in His garden; but not unto total destruction. Rather, though they are trodden down, they will rise again. Do not the Chrasmmological Writings themselves say that a great flood must come before a new sun can be born to give life to the garden of the whorl? I wonder if this might refer to an event yet to come to the Red Sun Whorl that we have visited....

"A hyacinth is a flower of many possible colors, yet it seems we usually associate it with purple. As Oreb is black because of the black spaces of the Outsider's whorl, perhaps the hyacinth is also a picture of the work of the Outsider. His people, those who follow Him, will come to life again after those necessary times of judgment that He brings upon them." Bla bla blah... Well, I guess this could refer to Silk's coming to life again after being trodden down. I guess that's what Remora thought. But perhaps it means that wicked New Viron can come to life again, and this is why "he wept."

I didn't know that wicked New Viron had died. (After his remarks on how even Silk could not make the town better, "Horn" surely doesn't think that Gyr Falcon's death will make a permanent difference.) And your reading doesn't account for "Horn" sense of doom before Remora brings the writing. And I still can't see Wolfe making the scene you describe the climax of the book.

Well, I'm not settled in my understanding, but I still lean heavily toward the Horn Lives interpretation. As you rightly point out, it's the only view that makes sense to me in terms of the basic grid of the seven books.

And to me, "Horn lives, Silk is gone" renders the narrator's story pointless.

"For Silk to live, Horn must die" seems to me to be the OPPOSITE of everything the books are about.

It's not that Horn was sacrificed to save Silk. Horn died on Green, as Thecla died in her cell. (If you read carefully the Neighbor's words to Horn, she never actually says that Horn's life will be saved.) But putting Horn's spirit into Silk's body, where it merged with Silk's spirit, she gave Horn a chance to posthumously fulfill his quest, as well as to see his wife again.

But, Wolfe can be tricky.

Agreed.

--Adam

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