

textual support for Silk suicide hypothesis

The Whorl list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 27 Mar 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1290>

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Dan Parmenter — 27 Mar 2001, 17:52

I've been reading over a lot of the old posts regarding the Silk suicide-attempt hypothesis. My second reading of the series has mostly convinced me that this is in fact the case and the support I offer comes from the text and I'm quite surprised that no one appears to have mentioned it (at least not in the Whorl digests I examined). On page 66 of RTTW we get this after a trip to Green and some dream analysis:

"Let me illustrate my point. A man has a house where he lives for some years with his wife. They are very happy, this man and his wife. They love each other, and whatever else may go amiss, they have each other. Then the man's wife dies, and he leaves the house in which he has had so much happiness. It has become abhorrent to him. Unless the Outsider, the God of gods, restores her to life, he has no wish to see that house ever again. Am I making myself clear?"

Vlug said, "So I think," and Azjin, "To me not."

"I am speaking of the spirit departing the body at death. The body is the house I mentioned, and life was the wife who made it a place of warmth and comfort."

Azjin nodded. "Ah."

"Perhaps her husband goes the gods, as Legerman Leeuw suggested, perhaps only out into darkness. For the moment, it doesn't matter. My point is that he leaves the home she made for him, never to return."

"Bird go," Oreb declared. He had been hopping around the table, cadging bits of food. "Go Silk."

I told him, "If you mean you wish to die when I do, Oreb, I sincerely hope you don't. In Gaon they tell of dying men who kill some favorite animal, usually a horse or a dog, so it will accompany them in death; and under the Long Sun their rulers went so far as to have their favorite wives burned alive on their funeral pyres. When I die, I sincerely hope no friend or relative of mine will succumb to any such cruel foolishness."

How should one interpret this? I choose to interpret it as Silk (SilkHorn) describing his own life with Hyacinth and his subsequent suicide attempt when she dies. He speaks metaphorically, but perhaps it should be interpreted literally except with Silk as the grief-stricken one who tries to join his beloved in death. Silk is a classic "do as I say, not as I do" type. It wouldn't surprise me at all to hear Silk inveigh against pointless suicides while being exactly the sort who would go ahead and do just that. As to why he made such a clumsy attempt, despite his Augur's skills,

that's a poser, but I wouldn't rule out that Silk may not have been thinking clearly and simply thought "slash my wrists" without thinking about the proper technique (this is apparently quite common in failed suicide attempts). I think Silk the Augur was more accustomed to cutting the jugular vein.

Shellac

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

Kevin J. Maroney — 27 Mar 2001, 19:42 · follows Dan Parmenter

At 05:52 PM 3/27/01 -0500, Dan P wrote:

On page 66 of RTTW we get this after a trip to Green and some dream analysis:

"Perhaps her husband goes the gods, as Legerman Leeuw suggested, perhaps only out into darkness. For the moment, it doesn't matter. My point is that he leaves the home she made for him, never to return."

I still tend to interpret this as a profound grief to the verge of death rather than actual suicide. But....

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... this is stronger. I'm not sure why this isn't proof, but it still seems unconvincing. Maybe I'm just in denial.

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Yes, but Silk is a Wolfe hero who knows everything. :-) Also, wouldn't he have slashed his own throat?

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 28 Mar 2001, 07:56 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

Wombat (but the Kitchen Staff Supervisor is an _Aardvark_!) wrote:
Yes, but Silk is a Wolfe hero who knows everything. :-)

I think you have confused Wolfe heroes with Heinlein. (Uh, I mean Heinlein heroes.)

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William Ansley — 28 Mar 2001, 23:26 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

At 7:56 AM -0800 3/28/01, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
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I think you have confused Wolfe heroes with Heinlein. (Uh, I mean Heinlein heroes.)

--Blattid

It is an easy mistake to make in the SS books. I felt that Horn or Horn/Silk or Silk or whatever you want to call him bore a very close resemblance to the Heinleinian omnicompetent man, especially in IGJ and RttW. He can beat up men half his age, armed only with a rotten stick, plan, fight in and win battles and give advice to lovesick teenage girls. And that's not the half of it!

The only thing I can see that sets him apart from a Heinlein hero is his is his raging self doubt and feelings of inadequacy, which I will admit is a big difference,

William Ansley

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Kevin J. Maroney — 29 Mar 2001, 11:43 · follows William Ansley

At 11:26 PM 3/28/01 -0500, you wrote:

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It's true in _Long Sun_, too. Silk-as-detective, Silk-as-warrior (he defeats an entire Trivigaunte airship with his bare hands!), Silk-as-genetic-superhero. It's easy to overlook because Silk is so self-effacing, but he really is an overman.

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Oh yes. I was talking with Patrick O'Leary at the ICFA about what sets _Short Sun_ apart from most of Wolfe's ouvre. It's the raw emotionality of the work. Wolfe's work always carries a significant emotional charge, but _Blue_ and _Green_ are unprecedented in their sheer emotional weight.

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