

SS Stuff on a Monday

The Whorl list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 09 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1327>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 09 Apr 2001, 09:20

Michael, no, your theory, attractive though it is (I love the idea of embarrassing vampires to death...), simply doesn't fit with many of the Narr's statements about the nature of the Sotl. While pricking them in the vanity might do any number of things to the Inhumani, causing them to become mindless leechagators is just not a likely result.

Okay, now as to the utopia thing. There definitely does seem to be an aspect of that in SS. Some aspects worth considering:

1) It's clearly a form of the Hero's Journey.

2) If Wolfe is going to write a Utopia, it will be a Christian utopia -- which is almost a contradiction in terms, given the Christian belief that "this world" is radically Fallen and no true utopia is possible short of Heaven. But and counterweighting this we need also to remember that the word "utopia" comes from the Catholic St. Sir Thomas More, and did not, in his hands, mean a "perfect" state so much as an optimal one.

3) It's also in dialogue with several other things besides KSR's Mars books (which I haven't read, btw: are they really worth the effort?).

a) Another three-volume hero's journey: Dante. Nell mezzo del camino de whatever Horn finds himself all at sea (so to speak), lost. His journeys lead him through Hell (Green), Purgatory (the Whorl), and ultimately to, uh, well, that's where it gets kind of complicated...

But there's also a political Commedia here, as the Narrator journeys through hell (the theo-monarchies of OBW), purgatory (the Italianate city-states of IGJ), and paradise (the democracy of Dorp and the jolly quasi-anarchy of NV), only political "paradise" ain't no paradise anyway, which leads me to point b.

b) Another well-known SF political "utopian" novel featuring twin worlds, where the Hero's Journey leads him to realize that political utopia ain't going to happen? I refer, of course, to Le Guin's THE DISPOSSESSED. (Btw, if we take it that this dialog is intended-- and I think a strong case can be made for this -- then there is also an implicit dialog with Delany's [TROUBLE ON] TRITON.)

c) And, of course, it is in dialog with (and implicitly critiques, if only by differentiae) the LONG and NEW SUN books.

I think I'll go take my medication now.

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

Alex David Groce — 10 Apr 2001, 01:44 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Well, I haven't got much to say on this other than to direct your attention to:

<http://world.std.com/~pduggan/wolfeint.html>

GW: The adventurous reader has probably already moved past realism. I realize that sounds like a smart remark, but I mean past the kind of fiction that is called "realism" as a literary genre, and that's what it is: a literary genre. It is archtypically the story about the college professor who is married to the other college professor.

Did you read Ursula K. LeGuin's novel, *The Dispossessed*? It was about the college professor who's married to a college professor, only science fiction, and this planet is Russia and this planet is the United States. When I read it I was so disappointed. I'd had a dozen people tell me how wonderful it was.

Q: Yeah, I heard that too. Then I read it.

GW: I've read that book before; I've read it as realism many a time. It's a John Updike kind of book. I've read that story so many times ... now I read a book until I can recognize the story, and say, "This is what it is," and that's as far as it goes, since I have no urge to finish it. I'm long past feeling so guilty that I have to finish everything I start. I don't finish ninety percent of what I start.

Look, the reason someone should go past that sort of realism is that it is narrow, stultifying and ultimately false.

I'll add that I agree with Wolfe about *THE DISPOSSESSED*. It plus *THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS* stands as my exemplar of how even when the prose quality is uniformly excellent, a writer can vary wildly in quality.

Also, I still like *Short Sun* despite remaining clueless about the many apparent red herrings it introduces. The emotional impact didn't feel forced or as if he were tired of the series to me--although it did feel as if Silk/Horn was tired of writing.

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

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Michael Straight — 10 Apr 2001, 23:03 · follows Alex David Groce

On Mon, 9 Apr 2001, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Michael, no, your theory, attractive though it is (I love the idea of embarrassing vampires to death...), simply doesn't fit with many of the Narr's statements about the nature of the SotI. While pricking them in the vanity might do any number of things to the Inhum, causing them to become mindless leechagators is just not a likely result.

My original theory was that the Narrator meant this metaphorically. That if humans knew what the inhumani were, then they would regard them as mindless leechagators, rather than intelligent, possibly superior predators. The inhumani want to be taken for human, but they'll settle for Count Dracula (judging from Krait's initial encounters with Horn) so long as they don't have to be mere vampire bats.

On re-reading OBW, I see that the Rajan's words are hard to take metaphorically (he talks about the inhumani possibly being better off as mindless reptiles)--of course this is the same guy who claims to think Silk might be living on Green or some other continent of Blue and who claims to believe that hogwash about inhumani flying from Green to Blue, so what does he know!

Seriously, it could be both: loving each other would mean the inhumani could no longer prey on humans and would lose their intelligence, but the Rajan also says that this is **not** the Secret that the inhumani are hunting him for. So the Secret could still be that they want to be human.

On Mon, 9 Apr 2001, Adam Stephanides wrote:

'Fraid not; your theory won't jibe with Horn's statement that the Secret "is a weapon too heavy for our hands," and that the Neighbors knew it, but could not wield it (IGJ, 125). The humans on Blue are perfectly capable of saying to the inhumani "nyah, nyah, you aren't really human," and the Neighbors presumably could have done the same.

I take this to mean that the weapon is not too heavy to wield at all, but too heavy to wield responsibly. It would be too cruel (yes, more cruel even than burying them alive--how many inhumani claim to prefer death to abandoning the dreamwalking worlds where they seem fully human?) and Silkhorn believes that by exercising such cruelty, humans would ultimately harm themselves as well as the inhumani.

Further evidence: It is Hornsilk's harsh frustration of Juganu's desire to experience human life on Urth that seems to lead to the inhumani attack. Other inhumani he adopted and treated as human, and they seem to have loved him in return, but he rubs Juganu's face in his inhumanity and it enrages him.

-Rostrum

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Adam Stephanides — 12 Apr 2001, 11:43 · follows Michael Straight

on 4/9/01 11:20 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:

a) Another three-volume hero's journey: Dante. Nell mezzo del camino de whatever Horn finds himself all at sea (so to speak), lost. His journeys lead him through Hell (Green), Purgatory (the Whorl), and ultimately to, uh, well, that's where it gets kind of complicated...

I like this, though I don't know if Wolfe intended it. But surely Purgatory would be the Whorl _and_ Blue, with the conversation with Remora corresponding to the final purging of Dante's sins; and the undepicted voyage to the stars would be the Paradiso. That would make either Seawrack or Nettle Beatrice; either would fit. But who is Virgil, then? Since Virgil left Dante at the end of the Purgatorio, the logical candidate would be Horn's spirit, which (as I've argued before) leaves Silk's body around this time; which would mean that it is Silk who corresponds to Dante. But Silk wasn't on Green, except in astral form, and that came after the Whorl, so this doesn't fit.

But there's also a political Commedia here, as the Narrator journeys through hell (the theo-monarchies of OBW), purgatory (the Italianate city-states of IGJ), and paradise (the democracy of Dorp

and the jolly quasi-anarchy of NV), only political "paradise" ain't no paradise anyway, which leads me to point b.

This, otoh, I don't see. There's no significant difference in forms of governance between the city-states of IGJ and those of RttW, as far as I remember; if anything, Blanko is better governed than either Dorp or New Viron. And anyway, Dante liked theo-monarchies.

--Adam

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