

Alga bitches some more

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 Apr 2001

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akt — 10 Apr 2001, 08:13

David DiGiacomo said:

1. Alga, why do you think it's worse than any other Wolfe book?
Or are you just tired of his tricks?

No it's all the loose ends and carelessness, see below.

2. I wonder how completely David Hartwell feels he needs to understand a Wolfe book before he can publish it. It doesn't seem that he has the luxury of reading through 4 or 5 times and then thinking it over for a while. If he hasn't worked out all the puzzles (or even just the ending), how can he edit effectively? Does he demand spoilers?

I think an editor who has spent as much time as Hartwell has with this series has a responsibility to readers to tie it up satisfactorially even if it means asking for revisions and a delay in publication. Of course he should demand "spoilers!" And get them, too--it's his job to look out for mistakes. Obviously, some of you think the book is dandy as is, which is why I have been staying out of the discussion lately.

From: William Ansley <wansley at warwick.net>

Why do I feel cheated? There were just too many loose ends. And the beginnings of most of the loose ends seemed to have no reason for being put in the trilogy in the first place.

Like the godling. No reason at all to introduce it/him, and a completely irrational sort of creature to put in a closed environment. Also like Merryn, whose appearance just seems bad-tempered on the author's part..

I have enjoyed some of Wolfe's most "puzzling" works, both those in which many of the puzzles seem to have solutions even when I couldn't figure them out (such as _Peace_) and those in which many of the puzzles seem to have no solution or we are not given enough information to solve them (such as _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_). RttW however, just left me feeling frustrated.

Seconded. I'm not a Peacenik, especially, but I have more respect for it that this.

From: "Robert Borski" <rborski at charter.net>

Well, for starters, the Brother and Sister section at the end of OBW is but one of many in the SHORT SUN trilogy where disparate individuals who are not actually related by blood are still able to forge loving, familial-type bonds.

Horn, for example, has a number of pseudo-children, from Brother and

Sister
to Krait and Jahlee to Fava and Mora.

HornSilk, meanwhile, has Hide and Hoof (and vice versa), while the Mother has Seawrack and Maytara Marble has Mucor--even as Fava and Mora love each other as much as sisters, just as Pig and Horn do brothers. Ditto for Greater Scylla and the Mother. And Brother, if he really is Fava's Bricco, is adopted by a highborn lady of the Vanished People as a son.

It's a very Christian theme, this notion of community--love thy Neighbor (heh) as thy self--and it has repercussions all through the three books that constitute SS, being a major leit motif.

So, yeah, obviously I disagree about your assessment of the Brother-Sister section, believing it to be important, vital, and integral to the series.

Except that it isn't. Those relationships were vital, this is thrown in like a load of old rubbish.

From: =?iso-8859-1?q?Nicholas=20Gevers?= <vermouliau@yahoo.com>
Subject: To alga: Complaining too early

I think part of the difficulty list members like alga and William Ansley have had in accepting RTW stems from the fact that they haven't had sufficient time to digest the Short Sun series yet. The implications of a Wolfe text take a while to emerge fully, if they ever do; give TBSS time. Meanings will emerge. Just reread, and ponder...

Oh, honestly, what nonsense--this isn't the Torah! It's not my fault that Wolfe abandoned Mucor, murdered Jahlee, sent Nettle and Seawrack off on a Star Trek menage a trois with the saintly Silk, ditched Babbie, gave us no word of Oreb and in general tossed his whole story out the window--or off-planet as the case may be. Leaving both Blue and Green to go to hell together, Neighbors, inhumani and whatnot. Tra-la, let's be off.

To a few specifics:

William Ansley's querying of the "brother and sister" section: TBSS is a political novel, with a strong but qualified utopian subtext. Please note, generally, that the final fivefold "Good fishing!" utterance at the end of RTW is almost certainly an homage to the ending of Kim Stanley Robinson's markedly utopian MARS trilogy ("..on Mars, on Mars, on Mars, on Mars, on Mars"). The Secret of the Inhumani is a political secret, an impetus to a juster social order; brother and sister represent Natural Man, or the Noble Savage, an essential component of general utopian discourse.

That strikes me as more nonsense. Why in the world would he be offering an "homage" to Robinson, a very different kind of writer. Proust, maybe, but Robinson? I don't think so.

Horn's status as inhumu-suspect, and the ring in RTW: Horn is not an inhumu, but he is inhumu-like, in that he is one individual masquerading as another (either Horn as Silk or Silk as Horn). Thus the repeated hints of Horn being an inhumu, which misled John Clute among others: the hints are thematic, pointers to Horn's inner and outer ambiguity. The ring Oreb retrieves for Horn in RTW changes form as a further pointer in the direction of shifting or uncertain identity: it is protean, like Horn, like the inhumi, like the Neighbors.

Why does that make him like an inhumu? As this list has pointed out repeatedly, Wolfe writing is full of such figures. And Clute was just plain misreading. It happens. (To me too.)

The death of Jahlee, and the massacre of the inhumi: Alga, I think this took you aback because you were anticipating Wolfe's intentions, a dangerous course as you once warned me. You had a utopian/feminist agenda in your reading; while repeating that TBSS is a political and even utopian novel, I have to say that its utopianism is cautious, indeed conservative, as is only natural for GW. Silk/Horn is concerned to protect humanity; the inhumi are predators upon humanity; the political settlement required to defeat the inhumi is universal human solidarity, this 1) to deny the inhumi human blood and 2) to ensure that such human blood as they do acquire is that of benign utopians. (Note that Sinew's village late in IGJ is an emerging utopia along these lines; but Silk/Horn is pessimistic about general prospects on Blue.) In the immediate term, cruder methods are needed to fend off the inhumi, such as the killing of Jahlee; the inhumi need to be warned to rein in their arrogance; and in any case, Jahlee had ample warning of the possibility of the murder, as in Horn's shooting of her "friend" on Green; and her attempt to kill Nettle was hardly benign. Wolfe in TBSS, as in all his major works, is being brutally frank about the nasty realities of existence; Jahlee's death fits perfectly into this scheme, like it or not.

I did not necessarily have a "utopian/feminist agenda," though I do admit that I was somewhat seduced by Horn's treatment of Fava, Mora and Jahlee in IGJ, especially in that beautiful ending, which, as I've said before, struck me as Chaucerian. I do not even object to Jahlee's death per se. I object to the hasty, melodramatic and far-fetched (would Jahlee really have attacked Nettle so foolishly--allow me to doubt it) B-movie manner in which it is fobbed off, just as I object to his bundling his characters off-stage gracelessly and without motivation or any clue as to what happens to some characters we have grown interested in. Nasty realities of existence are one thing, but I do expect an author to wind up his series with the same skill he has put into constructing it. See all the above. And what's more, I'm not going to continue this conversation endlessly.

Crankily,
-alga

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