

The ending (was Re: (whorl) Not the Torah, but Torah-like)

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 12 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1346>

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Adam Stephanides — 12 Apr 2001, 11:41

on 4/11/01 3:08 AM, Nicholas Gevers at vermoulian at yahoo.com wrote:

As for this repeated criticism about TBSS's "hurried ending": it's not hurried at all. It's simply that GW has spent seven volumes building up characters and scenarios, and he rightly assumes that readers who have stuck with him this far know those characters and situations well enough by now to infer their final motivations and destinies. To invoke Kim Stanley Robinson again: GW is the king of the slingshot ending; his texts move on and work on beyond the page; read in the spirit of the enterprise.

But the ending voyage doesn't "work on beyond the page." We've never seen Silk qua Silk with any of the other passengers (except Oreb), and the others are all strangers to each other, so we have no idea what will become of this ill-assorted bunch. And, to be frank, I don't particularly care.

To compare it with ENGINE SUMMER, a comparison mantis made (though apparently he didn't mean by it what I took him to): in ES also, the protagonist's story is not resolved in the sense we had expected it to be; instead, a sudden twist of events abruptly "closes off" the protagonist's story. But in ES the resolution worked, and I didn't feel cheated, because it was emotionally moving and thematically resonant. Neither of these things are true of the ending voyage in RttW.

Thus, to repeat what I and others have pointed out: Mucor is now old enough to look after herself; just in case, Babbie remains on Blue to keep many eyes on her; Jahlee is a predator and jealously in love with Horn to boot, and is fully capable of a crime of passion on Lizard Island, just as is Horn himself, a mere human when all is said and done; Oreb accompanies Silk to the Whorl again, as you would expect; Nettle ditto, because the only remnant of her husband is in Silk, Old Viron is her old home anyway, and her children are all grown up on Blue and Green; Seawrack ditto, because she and Silk form an archetypal couple once Hyacinth is out of the way, and Horn (again) is still in Silk; and Blue and Green are left to their own devices because that is how God governs the Earth and its humans, giving them free will.

In your list of motives, you don't explain why Silk wants to leave, or why he has to leave so quickly. Aside from this, I think alga's basic complaint is not that the characters aren't motivated, it's that the hasty departure fails to resolve any of the narrative threads that have

been left dangling.

A couple of minor points on the ending, while we're at it:

1) If, as you've argued, the inhumi mobbed the wedding to kill "Horn" and anyone whom he might have told the secret to, then Silk and Nettle's plan to use Pajarocu as their point of departure might not be that great an idea.

2) To put Nettle on a small boat for weeks with a woman who, in Daisy's words, "trusted only 'Father,' and would have put her long knife into any other person as readily as I would gut a fish" (411) seems to be asking for trouble. Isn't being nearly murdered by a rival once enough for Nettle?

--Adam

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

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Apr 2001, 10:10 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam hath writ:

... the ending voyage doesn't "work on beyond the page."

No, it doesn't. New Viron, however, does; and so does the Whorl. We haven't a clue what happens to the crewly mot that set off from NV (well, as you point out, we do in fact have a rather ugly clue), but we have a ramifying sense of the futures of the colonists. Horn set out on a quest to save the colony: he succeeded. He thought he was going to save them spiritually by finding Silk; he was wrong. He saved them physically by bringing back the corn (which is all they really wanted anyway).

Which ramifies backwards toward the way Silk thought he was supposed to save his manteion (and, as we learned, failed in the long run), as opposed to they way he was actually supposed to save it (and succeeded).

In your list of motives, you don't explain why Silk wants to leave,

Because he simply doesn't belong there?

or why he has to leave so quickly.

As I've pointed out repeatedly, this is far from established, and at least some evidence points to the idea that he doesn't leave all that quickly. The events prior to the Bloody Wedding don't leave time for Nettle to have read the Narr's manuscript, but we know from one of the editorial asides in OBW that she has. I suspect that her having read it is one of the things that prompts her to accompany the Narr on his journey.

Perhaps an actual statement of how long it was between the wedding and the departure would have been nice, but we know perfectly well that Mr Wolfe doesn't like to tell what he can hint at.

1) If, as you've argued, the inhumi mobbed the wedding to kill "Horn" and anyone whom he might have told the secret to, then Silk and Nettle's plan to use Pajarocu as their point of departure might not be that great an idea.

Big Ouch. I haven't worked out the inhumi's motives for the attack yet -- I've only read RttW once, and my copy is out on loan -- but you're certainly right on an "if" basis.

2) To put Nettle on a small boat for weeks with a woman who, in Daisy's words, "trusted only 'Father,' and would have put

her long knife into any other person as readily as I would gut a fish" (411) seems to be asking for trouble. Isn't being nearly murdered by a rival once enough for Nettle?

Again, ouch. I hadn't even considered that. Perhaps the Narr is overestimating his Silkish ability to bring peace...

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Adam Stephanides — 12 Apr 2001, 20:21 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

on 4/12/01 12:10 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:
Adam hath writ:

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Perhaps an actual statement of how long it was between the wedding and the departure would have been nice, but we know perfectly well that Mr Wolfe doesn't like to tell what he can hint at.

But, as I've pointed out, we do have an actual statement, and it doesn't fit your scenario. Daisy tells us that when she saw Silk for the last time, the wedding was "a few days ago," (410) and Silk tells her they are leaving that night (411). If we need to allow more time for Nettle to read the manuscript (and I'm not convinced we do), it must come between her arrival in New Viron for the wedding and the wedding, not after the wedding.

--Adam

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