

Bad Horn

The Whorl list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 16 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1357>

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.

akt — 16 Apr 2001, 09:37

Allan (not Wooly Mammoth or Bug <g>):

Primo post on Horn, made me actually think about the books for the first time in quite a while. I'd never viewed Horn quite that way, but now I think you're right. (And I also agree about Silk's sanctimonious chats with the girls--Silk's attempt to save Fava's life, however, is truly heroic.)

He is a serial adulterer, (even before the affair with Seawrack if I read the clues right) who sells the lives of Nettle and his sons to Krait to save his own life. He sneaks off on his mission without saying goodbye to his wife, tricks Seawrack and Babbie into missing the lander and deserts Evensong on the river even though he knows she can't go back to Goa or to her own people and is in serious danger. All of these actions are rationalised by a most persuasive narrator, one who constantly bemoans his lost wife. The more I read these passages, the more they sound like a drunken trucker in a bar telling all and sundry how much he loves his wife before going to the local whorehouse. (What is this thing Wolfe has with his heroes deserting their female companions by rivers or the sea, Sevarian does it with Dorcas, and I can think of few Wolfe characters who are married and faithful.)

Horn is not a terrific father either. I'm sure all of us with teenage kids can sympathise with a father getting annoyed with sulky adolescent sons, but Horn actively hates poor old Sinew, even after he follows him on the long and dangerous journey to Pajoruco. He takes pleasure in shocking his son by showing his relationship with Seawrack. He suspects Sinew of wanting to kill him, and considers killing Sinew himself. He only makes some reconciliation with his son after the fighting on the lander when he is forced to admit that his son has some good qualities.

Horn is a careless and violent man, blaming others for his own mistakes. He loses all of the supplies that he was given for his mission, and then violently beats the man who was supposed to be looking after the boat, although he had no proof that he was involved in the theft.

But worst of all is the savage and brutal rape of Seawrack. His excuse is that he was acting under enchantment from the Siren's song. (I

don't

see that standing up in a court of law: "Honest, Judge, she was asking for it. She sang at me.") I would argue that, even though Seawrack may have seduced him with her singing, the brutality of the attack comes from Horn's character. It must have been pretty bad if he is advising her not to go swimming afterwards because the bleeding may start again.

It makes you wonder what his sex life with Nettle was like, and may explain why she was willing to go off with the new, improved Silk at the end of RTTW.

(As an aside, I know that Wolfe's attitude to women has been criticised

before, but these books do seem to bring out the worst in him. Women seem to be inconvenient accessories, to be picked up or dumped at the hero's convenience. And I found Silk's chats to the teenage girls almost embarrassingly unreal)

So, I don't like Horn. This makes his transformation into Silk more noticable and dramatic, and may explain why his character is almost completely erased by the end. I say almost, because the killing of Jahlee at the end of RTTW could have been the emergence of the violent nature of Horn, showing Silk that he was not fully redeemed and not quite the saint that he thought he was. An explanation for his refusal to stay on Blue and become their leader because the danger of the corruption of power was still in him?

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

Dan Parmenter — 16 Apr 2001, 09:57 · follows akt

From: Allan Lloyd <lloyd at nexus.kc3.co.uk>

aka "Wooly Bug" :-)

Despite my reservations about the conclusion of the Short Sun trilogy, I want to talk about something which Wolfe does very well in the books, namely the transformation of sinful Horn into saintly Silk. No-one seems to have remarked upon what a totally unpleasant character Horn is at the start of OBW.

I think it's been noted in passing, though never really discussed. I certainly noticed it; indeed, I also noticed traces of it in my third read of the LS books, how Horn magnifies his role subtly, how little we hear of the other students, etc. I think that this is all consistent with what seems to me his one unmistakably redeeming quality: his insatiable urge to write. If, as I have suggested in the past, at least something of Horn remains in our protagonist at the end of RTTW it may well be his qualities as a self-propagandist. Note the similarity with another unpleasant Wolfe protagonist who writes a lot and goes through some moral development of his own.

He is a serial adulterer, (even before the affair with Seawrack if I read the clues right) who sells the lives of Nettle and his sons to Krait to save his own life. He sneaks off on his mission without saying goodbye to his wife, tricks Seawrack and Babbie into missing the lander and deserts Evensong on the river even though he knows she can't go back to Goa or to her own people and is in serious danger. All of these actions are rationalised by a most persuasive narrator, one who

constantly bemoans his lost wife. The more I read these passages, the more they sound like a drunken trucker in a bar telling all and sundry how much he loves his wife before going to the local whorehouse. (What is this thing Wolfe has with his heroes deserting their female companions by rivers or the sea, Severian does it with Dorcas, and I can think of few Wolfe characters who are married and faithful.)

Well, Severian couldn't realistically continue a relationship with his grandmama, now could he? And who left who? There's the off-camera years with Valeria, but that never seemed very convincing to me, especially given her portrayal in URTH.

But worst of all is the savage and brutal rape of Seawrack. His excuse is that he was acting under enchantment from the Siren's song. (I don't see that standing up in a court of law: "Honest, Judge, she was asking for it. She sang at me.") I would argue that, even though Seawrack may have seduced him with her singing, the brutality of the attack comes from Horn's character. It must have been pretty bad if he is advising her not to go swimming afterwards because the bleeding may start again. It makes you wonder what his sex life with Nettle was like, and may explain why she was willing to go off with the new, improved Silk at the end of RTTW.

I've long wanted to have some discussion of rape in Wolfe's novels. That sounds rather unsavory, but it comes up often enough in his stories that one starts to wonder about his views on it. The Seawrack incident, as you point out, seems like a pretty damning indictment of Horn, yet the song clearly did play a role.

Allan (and it is Allan and not Adam {Alga!}
or Mr Lloyd, please. I don't want to take a Wolfean nom-de-plume; if my wife discovered I was signing myself Woolly Mammoth or Bug she wouldn't stop laughing all week. These names are very psychologically revealing, you know.)

Yes, I'm very aware that I have named myself for a product made from insect goo (as silk is) and once used for phonograph recordings. It's all rather "fannish" I suppose, but occasionally I find it amusing. I used to laugh out loud at whoever it was who signed as "Sergeant Rock", being an occasional DC war comics fan.

Shellac

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

William Ansley — 16 Apr 2001, 23:55 · follows Dan Parmenter

At 10:43 AM +0000 2/19/00, Allan Lloyd wrote:
And Crowley's "Daemonomania". Words fail me. Is there any discussion of Crowley's work on the web? On a second reading, I've just started to realise how much of the historical part which I had assumed was fantasy is based on John Dee's actual life and works; and how much the realistic present day sections are mutating into fantasy as Crowley's world changes. I can't wait for the final novel in the sequence. Does anyone have any idea how long it is likely to be before he finishes it?

At last, a perfect opportunity!

The answer to your question is yes and no. There is a Crowley discussion group* on line, but there hasn't been much discussion for quite a while. This is at least partly because there are only seven members in the group right now, which seems to be below the critical mass.

This group is in the form of a Yahoo! Club. You can receive messages by email but you have to visit the web site to post messages. However, the emails contain links to take you directly to the proper web page. You can see the archive of the messages so far at the link below:

<http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/johncrowleyreaders>

If you want to join you will have to send an email to Teresa Toro, the club founder, asking her to invite you.

And now my apologies to the list. I know some of you have already received invitations to join this "club;" I am sorry if my bringing it up again is inconvenient or annoying. I am posting this message to the list because I know there are many who did not receive an invitation, especially lurkers. I apologize for cross-posting this message, but I want to make sure that I reach people who may only be subscribed to the Urth list and are interested in signing up.

I think this has the potential to lead to a good discussion group, despite the off-putting fact that is it called a club and the off-putting commercial connotations of it being associated with Yahoo!, but it seems certain that it will only work if there are more members.

William Ansley

*There , of course, may be much Crowley discussion on the Internet elsewhere that I am not aware of.

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

Adam Stephanides — 16 Apr 2001, 23:05 · follows William Ansley

on 2/19/00 5:43 AM, Allan Lloyd at lloyd at nexus.kc3.co.uk wrote:

A very good post, Allan.

Despite my reservations about the conclusion of the Short Sun trilogy, I want to talk about something which Wolfe does very well in the books, namely the transformation of sinful Horn into saintly Silk. No-one seems to have remarked upon what a totally unpleasant character Horn is at the start of OBW.

I actually raised some of these points in a post entitled "Horn as antihero?" (in the Whorl Archives, vol. 10, between a post dates 3/31/00 and one dated 4/1/00), although I was not as hard on him as you are. I talked about Horn's betrayal of his family to Krait and rape of Seawrack; also about his digging up inhumani to use against the Hannese, which I said could be considered equivalent to biological warfare.

He is a serial adulterer, (even before the affair with Seawrack if I read the clues right)

What are these clues?

who sells the lives of Nettle and his sons to Krait to save his own life.

This gave me quite a shock when I first read it; but in Horn's defense he'd been isolated and without food and water, and so was extremely vulnerable to Krait's psychological manipulation.

Horn is not a terrific father either. I'm sure all of us with teenage kids can sympathise with a father getting annoyed with sulky adolescent sons, but Horn actively hates poor old Sinew, even after he follows him on the long and dangerous journey to Pajoruco. He takes pleasure in shocking his son by showing his relationship with Seawrack. He suspects Sinew of wanting to kill him, and considers killing Sinew himself. He only makes some reconciliation with his son after the fighting on the lander when he is forced to admit that his son has some good qualities.

Horn does indeed have some sort of a complex about Sinew. Otoh, the dialogue on p. 368 of RttW makes it clear that Sinew is indeed troubled, at least; it is not all Horn's imagination (though how much of it was caused by Horn's dislike of Sinew we don't know).

But worst of all is the savage and brutal rape of Seawrack. His excuse is that he was acting under enchantment from the Siren's song. (I don't see that standing up in a court of law: "Honest, Judge, she was asking for it. She sang at me.")

To be precise, it is Seawrack who says that the song excuses the rape (unless Horn is lying, of course). As Rostrum points out, Horn himself takes full responsibility.

Overall, you've given me a lot to think about. I would have to reread OBW again with your points in mind to decide whether I thought your harsh judgment was justified.

And Crowley's "Daemonomania". Words fail me. Is there any discussion of Crowley's work on the web?

The urth list had a big discussion about Crowley a while back; but it was before DAEMONOMANIA came out, iirc, and didn't say much about the other two books in the sequence. It was mainly about LITTLE, BIG, with excursi into "Great Work of Time" and THE DEEP. There's a Yahoo club devoted to John Crowley, but it has very little activity.

If you're seriously interested in Crowley, get the Crowley chapbook mantis recently announced on the urth list. (I'll be posting more on it on the urth list.) Aside from anything else, it contains a seven-page interview with Crowley himself in which he discusses in detail the thinking behind the Aegypt series.

I can't wait for the final novel in the sequence. Does anyone have any idea how long it is likely to be before he finishes it?

In the interview I mentioned above, Crowley says that "the last book ... will be set in the present, 2002 or so." Make of this what you will.

Before it appears, there'll be a standalone novel, already completed, entitled THE TRANSLATORS. There are conflicting reports on rasfw as to its nature: Kevin Maroney believes it's "a science fiction novel with angels as major characters" (I just realized that angels, or beings called angels, do seem to show up rather a lot in Crowley's work--aside from the Aegypt series, there are the angels in GWOt and the "angels" in ES), but another poster quotes LOCUS as saying it's a mainstream novel.

--Adam

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