

Horn into Silk

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 18 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1370>

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Adam Stephanides — 18 Apr 2001, 19:27

on 4/18/01 1:32 PM, James Jordan at jbjordan4 at home.com wrote:
I'm still not sure who the narrator is supposed to be at the end of the book. If anything, that's the point of Wolfe's failure as far as I'm concerned. I did not care to "meet Silk" again in such a way. ("Hurray! It's Silk again!" Gimmeabreak!) It also seems rather pointless, since the novel SEEMS to be about Horn's development, and just to wipe him out, or submerge him into Silk -- well, it does not work for me!

I'm not generally a fan of religious-allegorical interpretations of Wolfe, but in the case of SS, there's a strong case for seeing "Horn"'s realization that he is Silk as a symbol of rebirth in Christ. Literally, Horn and Silk are two different people, but symbolically they are the same person before and after being redeemed. After all, Silk's recognition of who he is literally wipes out all the sins Horn committed in his own body, most notably the rape of Seawrack; it also frees Silk from the guilt of adultery (though not of fornication), since he's not married to Nettle. And the sins that Silkhorn committed in Silk's body can be explained as due to the presence of Horn's spirit, which departs before the moment of realization.

As I've said before, I've never read the New Testament, which is a disadvantage in interpreting Wolfe. But I happened to come across a passage which is so apposite to this point, and also to Allan's post about "bad Horn," that I'll quote it here. It's Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 7:15-24:

"I cannot understand my own behaviour. I fail to carry out the things I want to do, and I find myself doing the very things I hate. When I act against my own will, that means I have a self that acknowledges that the Law is good, and so the thing behaving in that way is not my self but sin living in me. The fact is, I know of nothing good living in me--living, that is, in my unspiritual self--for though the will to do what is good is in me, the performance is not, with the result that instead of doing the good things I want to do, I carry out the sinful things I do not want. When I act against my will, then, it is not my true self doing it, but sin which lives in me.

In fact, this seems to be the rule, that every single time I want to do good it is something evil that comes to hand. In my inmost self I dearly love God's law, but I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law which my reason dictates. This is what makes me a prisoner of that law of sin which lives inside my body.

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death!"

The resemblance to Horn in his more self-abasing passages is striking.

--Adam

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