

Hermeneutic Crocagators

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 02 May 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1415>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 02 May 2001, 08:27

I wrote then Jason wrote:

[re: inhumi taken along with the Nieghbors]

They're not "hypothesized," dammit. The Neighbors say so, in RETURN. (Don't ask me for a page cite, though; my copies of SHORT are out on loan and won't be back for a while.)

Fine; assume the Neighbors never lie and that the narrator is 100% trustworthy. That's a reasonable hypothesis, but nevertheless an assumption.

I disagree; it is not a reasonable hypothesis, and I make no such assumption.

There's a pretty simple hermeneutic principle here: I do assume by default, unless there is some specific reason to believe that either the Neighbors or the Narr are giving false information, that a given statement is true. If we don't make this assumption, then there's no particular reason not to say "the whole damn thing is a lie."

Taking this to a more complex construction, Mr Wolfe has done something in the "Short" books that give us a set of hermeneutic possibilities not normally present in an "unreliable narrator" text: by providing us with explicit "editors," he has provided us with the ability to distinguish at least five and possibly more degrees of trustworthiness in the Narr's statements (including his quoting of others):

1. Those directly corroborated by the "editors."
2. Those corroborated indirectly by the "editors" -- e.g., they cannot directly corroborate Horn's experiences with Seawrack in OBW, but they can corroborate her existence.
3. Those concerning which the "editors" would know the "truth," and have the opportunity to contradict the Narr, and do not, e.g., most of his experiences from the battle with Soldo on. (Of course, here we have the problematic possibilities that one or more of the editors might themselves have some reason for concealing the truth and letting the Narr's statement stand.)
4. Those concerning which the "editors" would have no direct knowledge, e.g., those concerning his experiences from the time Horn departs for Pajarocu until he hooks up with Hoof, or is it Hide? (I find them about as distinct as Donald Duck's nephews...)

5. Those concerning which the "editors" directly contradict the Narr. (But note that we still have to judge for ourselves whose statement, if any, is "correct," and whether the other party is mistaken, lying, or something else).

The important aspect of that assumption (or "fact," whatever) lies in the effects of the interaction of abilities that enables astral travel, or bilocation. Maybe the Neighbors can do some things by themselves, others only with the inhum.

Possibly, but I suggest that (barring some compelling reason to believe so) this is needlessly multiplying entities.

Maybe thinking about the relation between Horn's ability to bilocate in terms of his movement into Silk, as it were, and the presence of inhum might shed some light on the pesky question of astral travel.

Perhaps the Narr is able to bilocate only after Horn's transmigration into Silk's body, and then only with the (witting or un-) assistance of an inhum*, precisely because he is not a Neighbor? To put it differently: the question is not "why is he able to do this only under these circumstances," but "why is he able to do it at all," and the circumstances under which he can do it should then be regarded as clues rather than restrictions.

I'm also curious about Quetzal's lineage, but that seems to be a minor thread.

Agreed. Certainly there is very little in "Short" that bears directly on Q.

> He [Quetzal] might have been born on Green, however.

The word seems to be "must." It appears that the inhum can only breed on Green.

We don't really know much about the abilities of the Neighbors. They might be able to replicate inhum breeding conditions.

Ahem. And the key words in my cited remark are "seems" and "appears." Certainly the Neighbors might be able to do this; then we must ask, Is there any evidence in the text that they (a) can and (b) have any reason to? I don't wish to be difficult, but I'm against erecting towers of speculation when simpler explanations are or even might be available; and I think it's clear that we're too "young" in exploring these books to be able to say that we've exhausted the simple explanations.

Again, the question here is-- if Quetzal was born on Green, by what means did he make his way to the Loganstone.

Failing evidence otherwise, I see no reason to dismiss the Neighbor's statement cited earlier. Have you any specific textual reason to doubt that Q was brought there by the Neighbors?

There are implications that it has been only a short time -- I believe I first got that impression on the island with the not-very-ruined Neighbor-place in BLUE.

Agreed. However, a short time could mean centuries, or decades, depending on the technology involved and the degree of ruin. Since we don't know (or, more precisely, since I can't recall any statements on this matter) the inhum lifespan, this could involve generations.

Or might not: the only thing we know for certain is that an inhum who was active shortly after Sinew was born has produced at least one generation of offspring and is still active enough to have returned to Blue around the time of the opening of OBW.

Still speculation, but pertinent for determining whether intelligence passes to grandchildren.

Unless we can find either a specific case of a grandchild (which I suspect may be difficult), or a combination of evidence pointing to (a) the longevity of inhum and (b) the age of the ruins (which I suspect is impossible), I see no way to do anything _but_ speculate on this.

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

Jason Ingram — 02 May 2001, 21:32 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

It seems that I was being overly simplistic in my attempt to portray Blattid as nit-picking over semantics. I'm glad that I provoked him to present a valuable hermeneutic analysis. I might add another category: scenes which the editors present based upon their private conversations with the narrator (roughly half of _Return_). Here we have reconstructed scenes based upon statements by the narrator, which the narrator seemingly didn't have a chance to edit; a sort of camera obscura corroboration that is itself questionable.

I should preface my comments below by stressing that I don't really disagree with Dan'I's conclusions.

Regarding Occam's razor and bilocation: (quoting Blattid)

Perhaps the Narr is able to bilocate only after Horn's transmigration into Silk's body, and then only with the (witting or un-) assistance of an inhum*, precisely _because_ he is not a Neighbor? To put it differently: the question is not "why is he able to do this only under these circumstances," but "why is he able to do it at all," and the circumstances under which he can do it should then be regarded as clues rather than restrictions.

I agree with this method; it seems more parsimonious to argue that the narrator has the same ability to bilocate as the Neighbors, and that the inhum are prerequisite for both. Otherwise we have to find a new reason to explain why the Neighbors took inhum along with them. There are plenty of other reasons, but why needlessly multiply explanations? (Of course, the Neighbors were able to transmit Horn's consciousness into Silk's body with the aid of their ring, but the narrator's ability to bilocate afterwards only strengthens my conviction that the inhum act as 'amplifiers' for abilities possessed and bestowed by the Neighbors.)

Blattid:

I don't wish to be difficult, but I'm against erecting towers of speculation when simpler explanations are or even _might be_ available; and I think it's clear that we're too "young" in exploring these books to be able to say that we've exhausted the simple explanations.

I think it would be difficult to find any simple explanation that fits the available evidence. Believing that the inhum can only breed on Green implies that the Neighbors have to return to replenish their "stock," or that they have found some other workaround. (Maybe they didn't want to take inhum along but ended up doing so anyway; this would introduce turbulence into other readings.) I'm reluctant to press this point, but it occurs to me that *if* Green were the only breeding ground for inhum, then a number of inhum infused with Neighbor-abilities (whatever those are) would likely be running around. Intriguing notion . . .

(next I quote blattid then myself; skirting both Heideggerian discussions of the difference between "seems to be 'must'" and "might" and Hegelian debate about "appearance" and the value of speculation)

> Again, the question here is-- if Quetzal was born on Green, by what means did he make his way to the Loganstone.

Failing evidence otherwise, I see no reason to dismiss the Neighbor's statement cited earlier. Have you any specific _textual_ reason to doubt that Q was brought there by the Neighbors?

I must have been confused about the nature of the Neighbor's statement. I didn't think that they had claimed to have dropped an inhum* off upon the Whorl. If they did, could someone please cite a page number?

I'll endorse the rest of Dan's post, and refrain from speculatin' in public . . .

Jason--I'll adopt the nom de whorl of 'Sepia', if it's available.

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Robert Borski — 03 May 2001, 12:30 · follows Jason Ingram

Quoth the newly-monickered Sepia:

<Believing that the inhumi can only breed on Green implies that the Neighbors have to return to replenish their "stock," or that they have found some other workaround. (Maybe they didn't want to take inhumi along but ended up doing so anyway; this would introduce turbulence into other readings.) I'm reluctant to press this point, but it occurs to me that *if* Green were the only breeding ground for inhumi, then a number of inhumi infused with Neighbor-abilities (whatever those are) would likely be running around. Intriguing notion . . .>

I've always argued this was a distinct possibility--that the inhumi can breed on Blue in either sewer or stagnant water, the same way leeches or the albino crocagators of New York do. Horn (who thinks that feathers fall at a different rate of speed than iron) is convinced it is otherwise and Jahlee semi-endorses this, but I believe both are lying. And while containing sewage or designing better waste treatment facilities is well within the realm of possibility (note Inclito's civil engineering skills), draining every wetland or pool of muck is not (think "weapon too heavy to handle".) I believe it was William Ansley who brought up the mosquito parallel and it remains apposite.

<<Failing evidence otherwise, I see no reason to dismiss the Neighbor's statement cited earlier. Have you any specific _textual_ reason to doubt that Q was brought there by the Neighbors?>>

< I must have been confused about the nature of the Neighbor's statement. I didn't think that they had claimed to have dropped an inhum* off upon the Whorl. If they did, could someone please cite a page number?>

P. 235, RTTW. Vadsig is talking to Horn about her wish to visit the Whorl.

"To go to the Long Sun Whorl I would like. Always of it you talk, and cook, and my old master and mistress. In Grotestad they were born, mysire, but never it I have seen."

I told her it was possible she would.

"There the Vanished People went?"

I nodded.

"To greet us it was?"

"You might put it so, though they were sensible enough to find out a good deal about us--and infect us with inhum--

"Bad thing!"

"Before they ventured to greet even a few of us."

"Bad it was," Vadsig agreed with Oreb.

"To leave inhum among us?" I shook my head. "It was a small price to pay for two whorls, and it enabled the neighbors to gauge much more accurately the differences between our race and their own."

Robert Borski

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