

Cosmoautic Ruminators

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 May 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1416>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 03 May 2001, 09:06

Sepia (excellent choice!) wrote:

It seems that I was being overly simplistic in my attempt to portray Blattid as nit-picking over semantics.

Nah. I'll nit-pick over semantics at the drop of a hat.

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_`).

Fair enough -- though on the "trustworth scale" I was setting up, I think it would be more-or-less equivalent to #4, scenes in the Narr's ms which no member of the editorial staff would have witnessed or have other "access" to the truth of. One can probably fudge and say that (a) he might be more (or less) likely to lie conceal when speakin to them than in writing a ms. [most of] which he didn't expect to actually reach Nettle, and (b) their memory of his spoken words is less trustworthy than his written words, but it's still not quite to the level of #5 (where the editors actually contradict the Narr).

We might also establish a category for places where the Narr actually contradicts himself, though I can't think offhand of an example.

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

Bless you, my son 8*)

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

... 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 thanr 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 inhumi are prerequisite for both.

I'm not clear on why one need assume the necessity of the inhumi for the Neighbors -- as native lifeforms of this system, they may well have common abilities and/or characteristics lacking in [even a Neighbor-transmigrated] human. That is: Bluvian and Greenish life probably have much more in common with each other than does either with Urthian life. (Though Wolfe does seem to make -- here and in most of his work [at least that part that includes alien life forms] -- the good ol'fashion' 1930's SF assumption that life wherever it appears throughout the Universe will be chemically so similar that aliens can dine on human flesh and/or blood and find the meal tasty and nutritious.)

Otherwise we have to find a new reason to explain why the Neighbors took inhumi along with them.

I'm not at all clear on this. Do you mean

- 1) why the Neighbors took inhumis along when they investigated the _Whorl_, or
- 2) why the Neighbors took inhumis along when they "left"?

If the latter, I don't think they did (which implies that they _don't_ need inhumis for their travelling, which in any case they can apparently do while awake, and in far more control of where they're going than the Narr has achieved by the end of SHORT).

If the former, I recall the Neighbors dropping some cryptically Lupine hints as to why they brought inhumis to the _Whorl_, but I couldn't repeat them offhand. (Perhaps I should withdraw from this discussion until my copies of SHORT come back so I can cite things...)

(Of course, the Neighbors were able to transmit Horn's consciousness into Silk's body with the aid of their ring,

Implication: At least _some_ of the Neighbors' abilities are based on _some_ kind of "technology" rather than "harnessing the power of the inhumis".

... but the narrator's ability to bilocate afterwards only strengthens my conviction that the inhumis act as 'amplifiers' for abilities possessed and bestowed by the Neighbors.)

I agree with "bestowed," but see no textual cause or basis for "possessed."

... 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.

"Simple" is of course a relative term; in this case, I meant not "without complication" but "without complicating," i.e., without adding anything not directly spoken to by the text. Presuming that Mr Wolfe is in control of his material (which is necessary, or we can just bid hermeneutic farewell along with oncaymeon), we know that

- o he likes to set puzzles
- o he doesn't repeat clues (he finds it insulting when other writers do)
- o he likes to hide things in plain sight

(the first and last from years of experience with Lupine texts; the middle from interviews)

So _if_ there is a solution, and _if_ Wolfe intends for us to find it, _then_ it will be deducible from statements present in the text, though not easily. The classic example of Lupine hermeneutics is the argument for Number 5's real name in the first part of "Fifth Head"; if you don't know this one, check out John Clute's book STROKES (I think that's where it is).

Believing that the inhumis can only breed on Green

... which I should back off from. Rather, the inhumis _say_ they can only breed there: and I suspect that they are at least as unreliable as the Narr. More likely they can breed only under certain climatic conditions not present on Blue (higher temp?), but which might in fact be present aboard the Whorl.

implies that the Neighbors have to return to replenish their "stock," or that they have found some other workaround.

... or that they don't _need_ "stock." I regard this as highly questionable and await support from the text.

(Maybe they didn't want to take inhumani along but ended up doing so anyway;

Again, when they "left" or to the _Whorl_? The latter, they say they did deliberately.

[...]

(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)

I'll have you know that I've never read Hegel and only one thin volume by Heidegger (though both have their place on my shelves awaiting time and sufficient willpower -- likely to happen sometime after I manage Proust...).

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