

Textual criticism of TBOTSS; disturbing thought

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

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Adam Stephanides — 18 Jun 2001, 20:29

on 6/15/01 2:21 PM, Adam Stephanides at adamsteph at earthlink.net wrote:
The components are:

2. The third-person "Horn" sections written by the editors.

2 is a narrative based on a combination, in unknown proportions, of a participant's testimony, imperfectly recollected by its hearers (there is no indication that Horn's recollections were transcribed at the time he spoke them) and conjecture by the editors.

I missed something here: the third-person account of "Horn's" final meeting with Remora is based not on "Horn's" recollections but on Remora's testimony. This raises a tough question. The passage on pages 406 and 407, from "His hands were still now" up to "Returning with a worn volume" -- what is the source for this? Remora is absent for nearly all this passage; he only "caught the last few words." The source is not Silk, since "Following that interview, he was seen only by Daisy" (410) and Daisy's account of this meeting says nothing about this. (*) The only other witness to this passage is Oreb, and he is surely not the source. So what are the possibilities? I see only three.

1) After the portion of the interview we are given, Silk told Remora of "Horn's" last conversation. But it's hard to see why he would have done this.

2) There was an eavesdropper, not mentioned in either the text of the chapter or the epilogue--a hypothesis of desperation.

3) Most likely: this entire moving passage is the editors' invention. Horn said something to Oreb, ending with the words "When at last I was given the chance to actually do something for him, I failed" or something similar, but we know nothing else.

Not only is this a moving passage, but it contains important indications of "Horn's" state of mind which are not duplicated elsewhere, as far as I know. It also contains the information that the Greater Scylla "taught me how to communicate with her sister here," (407) from which several deductions have been drawn. I don't even see another source for Horn's asking the Greater Scylla how to find Seawrack (Juganu tells Hoof that Horn made a bargain with the Greater Scylla, but doesn't say what Scylla's side of the bargain was). If the above paragraphs are correct, and if Wolfe has not simply blundered, then all this is useless in terms of finding out "what really happened."

Furthermore, if the editors would invent such crucial information, how much of what is contained in the passages based on Horn's recollection can be relied upon? Can any of it be? These are radical conclusions, and I'm not pleased with them. But I don't see offhand how to escape them.

So it appears that the third-person sections are neither an omniscient narrator's reliable account (as the reader who has not yet read the Afterword is likely to assume) nor an attempt by the editors to "flesh out" Horn's oral recollections, in the manner of non-fiction books such as Bob Woodward's in which conversations are "reconstructed" (as I had assumed); but a combination of the latter with totally fictional material, in the manner of, say, *The Killer Angels*, a novel based upon the Battle of Gettysburg, which uses real historical figures such as Lee and Longstreet, and has them doing things they really did, but also attributes to them conversations which there is no evidence ever took place. So mantis's designation of these sections as fan fiction, which I had rejected before, is at least partly correct.

Since the question "what difference does it make?" has just been raised again in reference to Horn's authorship of TBOTLS, I'll add that in this case I think it makes a lot of difference. In TBOTLS, Horn's Silk was the only Silk we had. But in TBOTSS, we need to know whether conclusions we draw regarding the "Horn" seen in the third-person sections of the book can be applied to the "Horn" seen in the first-person sections (other than as evidence of how the editors viewed the "Horn.") (**)

Rereading the book's ending with these considerations in mind brings up another point upon which I have to backtrack, at least partly. The giveaway words at the end of chapter 30--"Silk nodded."--were "really" written by the editors. And since in the Afterword they avoid repeating this identification, it's not evident what they meant: that Narr has always been Silk (as opposed to Horn or Silkhorn) since the "transference" to the new body? That Narr was Silk at the end of chapter 30, and will remain Silk? That Narr was Silk at that moment, but not necessarily in the future--i. e. that it is Silk's "personality" speaking, but that Horn's personality remains? I still think the best interpretation is that Horn's personality, though not his memories, are gone by this point; but I have to admit the issue isn't as clear-cut as I thought it was.

--Adam

(*) Daisy's narration ends "And he: 'To the stars.' Soon after I left them...". This allows a temporal gap during which Silk could theoretically have told Daisy of the conversation. But in the first place, why should he have? At this point Daisy is only a "friend and fellow student" of Hoof's, and has no connection with "Horn's" manuscripts. He might conceivably tell Daisy that "Horn's" last words were that he loved his sons, but there is no reason for him to tell her the rest of the conversation. In the second place, if Silk, through Daisy, were another source for the editors' account, why would they not mention it in the Afterword, where they discuss the sources for the third-person passages?

(**) I would argue that the character seen in the first-person sections written by the editors is in fact the same as the character seen in the first-person sections written by the Narrator, and different from the character seen in the third-person sections; but I'm not going to go into that now.

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