

Narrative Mistakes in TBOTSS

The Whorl list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 25 Jun 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1463>

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Patrick O'Leary — 25 Jun 2001, 10:08

On Thu, 21 Jun 2001, Adam Stephanides wrote:

2) Narr says that "I cannot correct all or even most of them [his mistakes] without tearing the whole account to shreds and starting again."

I think this is crucial, central.

For the BOTSS is a story/diary founded a critical mistake.

It professes to be the Story of Horn in search of Silk.

It appears to be the diary (hold off on the appendices for the moment) of one man.

It seems to be a tragedy: the autobiography of a failure.

But.

It is actually the story of Silk in search of himself.

It is the diary of two men (in one body).

The autobiographer is telling the story of the wrong man!

And Horn is not a failure but a hero who cannot credit himself as such without admitting who he is.

The narrator does not know the story he is telling.

In fact, the narrator is much invested in his denial, that is: in not knowing the story he tells.

I think much of the narrator's remarks about the "mistakes/errors" in the text can be explained by these central paradoxes and his painful quandry: to tell his story truthfully he must admit his self-deception. But he is only safe by clinging to his delusion so he continually tosses off wrenching "truthful" confessions (His rape of Seawrack, his devil's bargain in the pit with Krait, his adultrous marriages as Raja). It's almost as if he were protesting too much: "I am weak. I am a sinner. I am unworthy of this quest or the Hero I seek." Ironically, compulsively confessing to another man's sins to avoid facing his own.

And, most critically, these are the truths he dare not confess: "I am dead."

Or, more accurately, "Horn died so that I might live.
I tried to kill myself."

And, perhaps, "Hyacinth is gone forever."

Fascinating that the truth finally arrives in Confession: Remora shrieves Silk and forgives him for not admitting who he is.

The Book of The Short Sun is a virtuoso performance of narrative uncertainty and delusion.

There are intriguing similarities to "Pale Fire" (The story of a madman who thinks he's a King, the meglomaniac critic who fancies his analysis worth much more than the Text, and a total misreading of the poem), similar, yes, but different. For whatever pomo, self-conscious hijinks Wolfe is up to, his novel is never just a tour de force. It is founded on a moral dimension that Nabokov himself would never approach, never admit to. Thus the cool vaguely repellent distance with which we watch him twist his characters like butterflies on pins. Something Wolfe never does.

But I ramble.

Patrick O'Leary

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

Steve Strickland — 25 Jun 2001, 20:47 · follows Patrick O'Leary

Excellent!

----- Original Message -----

From: "Patrick O'Leary" <poleary at cecom.com>

To: <whorl at lists1.ba.best.com>

Sent: Monday, June 25, 2001 9:08 AM

Subject: (whorl) Narrative Mistakes in TBOTSS

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