

Silk as toy of mother

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 30 Dec 2001

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maa32 — 30 Dec 2001, 02:03

Thanks for the kind words about my idea of female spys in the Book of the Short Sun, Alice. I myself am fascinated by the appearance of Dr. Crane's ghost near the end of Return to the Whorl. Ok, here are some of the important associations with Seawrack that I think indicate she has more power over the narrator than is at first apparent: In On Blue's Waters, the narrator considers the song of the Mother and thinks of it as a song of time, while specifically stating that Seawrack's song seems a song more like "wind". With all of the foul wind blowing from the sea throughout the book, it seems that the wind goes against his boat at very interesting times: while he and Seawrack while away the hours before reaching the island, the wind stops to prolong the time they spend together. Horn believes the song of the mother was employed to improve his reception of Seawrack. Right before the narrator is going to return home to see Nettle at the end of Return to the whorl, all the wind beats fiercely against him, delaying him and causing him to stay in the town of New Viron until he can get a boat. Often, mention of Seawrack's song involves mention of the wind and the weather. While not significant by itself, the wind becomes important in the augury that "silk" performs with Olivine. His prophecy there involves clouds, whirlwinds, and darkness twice over. All right, none of that means too much by itself. Then, we have the strange thoughts of Horn right before he is freed from the pit in On Blue's Waters, before Krait reveals that paradoxes resolve everything (he who tries to save his life will lose it, he who casts it away will save it). Horn thinks of his blue painted string man, who he thought he was so skillful at controlling. Then he says how jealous he was that his Mother could control that blue painted string man much more effectively without even trying. In Return to the Whorl, in Chapter 8, Sad Experience Teaches Me, "Silk" thinks of his famous song "fair young girls live to deceive you" and thinks of himself as a blue coated puppet. The blue painted puppet spies a tempting woman in the garden as he steals an apple. If Horn regrets that he cannot control the blue painted puppet and admits that the Mother controls him more effectively, then perhaps Silk (or whoever the narrator is) has been a puppet all along for the Mother, who Horn can no longer control.

The passage from the Chrasmolologic writings that the narrator reads from in Chapter 12 of Return to the Whorl during Olivine's sacrifice is interpreted by Silk (with those weird finger motions on the cheek that he does) as "Wild whirlwinds are to rise. ... if he didn't believe we needed a warning, I doubt that he would have provided it. ... Clouds? I can't make much of that. It may mean perfectly ordinary clouds, such as we see every day. It may also refer to the god's veiling the minds of those he intends to destroy. ... The whirlwinds, clouds, and double darkness therefore refer not merely to this whorl, the Long Sun Whorl, but to Blue as well" While Seawrack has been associated with winds before, clouds have not really been mentioned except in the storms that the wind instigates. Interestingly enough, in the previous chapter, Windcloud the Neighbor testifies for "Silk", admitting that "Silk" works for the Neighbors, and "Humourously" declaring that the narrator has not been working against his own kind. We learn that the Neighbors infected humanity with inhumani, in order to judge the character of the visitors in their system. Perhaps Windcloud, whose vanished people used to worship the mother, knows that Silk could be a tool of the Mother, played by a fair young girl as effectively as if he were a marionette in the hands of the mother. Windcloud gives a fairly unflattering analogy for

humanity when he compares them to fishcatcher birds who infest a chimney without permission (and from Inclito's mothers story about people getting stuffed in chimney's, there is nothing too positive associated with them). Perhaps Windcloud's people and the Mother are still interested in controlling humanity through Silk/Horn. In the neighbor Windcloud's name, the symbolism of the wind and clouds from the augury are joined (and "silk" observes that he cannot see the eyes of the neighbor Windcloud, and has never been able to see their eyes - whereas Babbie talks with his eyes when he returns in Return to the Whorl, and it is Babbie who attacked Seawrack before the Song of the Mother placated both Horn and Babbie into accepting her.) Also, while I cannot locate the exact place where it occurs in the text but I have it written in a note, the narrator comments at one point that some character's mother attempted to guide his decisions and actions, and "my own Mother had done the same, and I am not sure it was always for the best". (that is probably a paraphrase from my notes: I will look for the precise quote).

Is all that nasty wind blowing enough to indict Seawrack? What about all those corpses she feasted on before, and Krait's claim that "she lies all the time"? Seawrack's ring might invoke the neighbors. Are they all working against humanity, or for it? Tough to say. Hopefully these word associations are intelligible to most people ...

(Interestingly enough, the dictionary definition of Silk includes something about blooming corn - I didn't think of the Silk on corn until I happened to look at it. Pretty cool, considering that whole corn aspect of salvation in the text, huh?)

James Jordan — 01 Jan 2002, 17:12 · follows maa32

This was a really interesting post, and I don't know what to make of it (yet; I'll wait for others to interact).

But I have a thought: Wolfe expressed to me that Mother Goddess worship is the essence of paganism. Those weren't his words, but the gist of our conversation. If you want to see Wolfe's understanding of this in action, think of the castration scene in the "Soldier" books. Philosophically, Mother Goddess worship is simply pantheism in action: the universe as Mother Earth is the ultimate thing in existence, so that violence and "evil" are as "natural" as peace and goodness. The true God is the Outsider, the Creature of nature.

From Wolfe's standpoint, Mother Earth is created by Father God, and because of human sin, is fallen. Mother has her role, but as a creature of Father. Sin means disorder, while redemption means the restoration of proper order. Paganism means to ultimatize and worship the creation (nature) rather than the Creator.

Based on the evidence as you present it, I'm thinking that this kind of conflict is in the background of the Short Sun Books. Perhaps PATERA Silk continues to be the Father's Agent, sought by Horn, but there is also the Mother and her agent Seawrack contending for his allegiance. Idolatry was arguably the major theme in the Long Sun books, but expressed as polytheism. It would make sense for Wolfe to continue that theme in the Short Sun books, while going deeper behind polytheism to Nature/Mother worship.

Horn searches for Father Silk in the heavens; while Mother dwells below, in the Deep. In between in the land, where the contest is joined.

Which side are the Neighbors on? Evidently in their own history they experienced the same kind of contest, sometimes falling into Mother-Nature worship; but in the main, the Neighbors seem to be like tutorial angels rather than seducers. That is, the Neighbors don't seem to be puppeteers, seeking to enslave humanity (as a puppet is enslaved or ensorcelled); but rather they seem to be encouraging free and mature decision-making on the part of humans.

Along these lines also: wind and storm are surely powers of Mother, but they are also manifestations of theophanies of the Creator. Thus, Windcloud's name may not indicate that he serves the Mother, but that he serves the Outsider. One would have to weigh the evidence to see if both aspects of this imagery are present in the books.

Just some thoughts. Nothing in stone here!

Nutria