

a personal tangent in praise of Gene

The Whorl list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 09 Jan 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1535>

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maa32 — 09 Jan 2002, 06:23

I am posting this long exposition here in praise of the various features of the Short Sun that make it worth reappraisal. If you don't want to read it, feel free to skip it. If you do, I mention a sentence or two of personal facts that have no relevance to the list but I include since I composed this at one sitting off the top of my head, and add this warning as an introductory addendum:

So, do you think the genetics of plants accounts for the doubling? I do ... the question is, would Gene know enough about it to put it in there ... how much chromosomal knowledge of plants does an engineer (even though he was editor of plant engineering, I think that was a different kind of plant -- but he is a science fiction writer who has worked with cloning at some level in Fifth Head of Cerberus, Book of the Long Sun, and Book of the Short Sun) have at his disposal? He could certainly gain as much information more accurately and easily than he could about, for instance, ancient Greece. And look at how those neighbors get so pissed off when somebody approaches their trees. And how they describe people at the trial in Dorp: you are birds living in our chimney. All right, we have seen how the island was composed of huge trees, and how the narrator could never see their eyes, and how they usually appear on a big tree. People are living on top of those big trees, like birds resting on a chimney. Face it, either I'm the weirdest mis- reader in the universe, or Gene and I think alike.

And also, just so you guys know, I think the real speculation should be whether a cloned embryo has an individual soul or shares it with its originator or another clone, and if so, should we consider Malrubius a part of that equation? Could the conservative Catholic Wolfe be hinting that cloning can create an affinity between two otherwise disparate people living at different times? That is why Silk can go there at that time: Malrubius has been there, and they somehow share something that allows silk to travel there. And if you guys still don't like how I've done all this, that's ok. I think that there was a ton more to The Book of the Short Sun than any of us have as yet realized, and I think it is one of his greatest creations, whether I'm wrong about my individual theories or not. I think he's gotten a bad rap by a lot of people on this one, and that his talents exceed understanding and especially exceed SIMPLIFICATION. He likes to make things as complicated as possible. If he is going to make an easy association like flooded blue world and forested green world, which are obviously Ushas and Lune (come on, the theme of the book is about coming home and finding that you no longer belong there) he is going to make it very hard for us to figure out where we are, and very hard for us to reconcile the obvious similarities of Blue and Ushas. He is the trickiest and the greatest. (he says at one point in On Blue's Waters, the biggest mysteries are the obvious ones. To me, that says that a huge freaking blue and green planet are the same huge blue and green planet we have already dealt with) I just wanted to get that off my chest. And if all that I have done to reveal the grandeur of Wolfe's design does not please you guys, and I am accused of misreading, and beating old theories to death, (I'm only twenty-three, and sensitive to all this censure), then just remember how dead this list was until I started throwing out outrageous theories - I always find something new to talk about. (of course, that could be because everybody thought the list WAS dying) Do you really want to hurt my feelings? (And if you think I'm dumb, I really did get a 1600 on my SATs, and after months and months my last girlfriend randomly dumped me one day through

e-mail saying: "Marc, Things haven't been going so well. You are obviously too smart for me. I'm sorry if it hurts your feelings." When asked, "can we talk about this?" she replied, "no." I am just very bad at organizing things and staying on one topic) You need a free reign on your consciousness when you read Wolfe, and you have to be able to draw from a huge base of knowledge. How smart is he? I think he's smarter than me - or maybe just infinitely clever. He isn't senile at all - he's only getting better. And if you think he's losing it, you are wrong. I still think there is something Silk had to do in the past to save the world that only Severian could help him do - and until I figure out (to my satisfaction) I won't stop throwing out crackpot theories (or at least thinking them up.) If I were as sensitive as Marcel, I would go up to my room all night and think about how nobody wants to really read Gene Wolfe carefully (on the gene wolfe mailing list, no less!) and struggle with reconciling paradoxes when we know that paradoxes answer everything. God Bless Gene Wolfe. Long live the King. Sorry. I got carried away. I really have enjoyed talking with you guys. I think I've had a ton of great ideas that really make the text more interesting (whatever happened to Borski? He had great ideas comparable in obscurity to most of mine, often with as little textual evidence as I have, too!) Enough - I just don't think you can apply Occam's razor to a tricky dude like Gene Wolfe - perhaps his greatest trick was concealing the setting from us. We have no idea where we are, why the animals have changed, who the aliens are, and he gave us all these easy tricks to ponder: Oreb is Scylla, The Secret of the Inhumani was too obvious, The narrator was obviously Silk the whole time. He's been fooling you! The obvious is true, but the obvious truths are hidden! You know Wolfe is good enough to do that! He should have won a Hugo. Why did Harry Potter IV win? What the heck?! Seriously guys, I really think we have been approaching the book in a much too facile manner (except for the fascinating commentary on its obvious didactic purpose -> usually a didactic point is the hidden part. Here, the external conflict (I'm not talking about the inhumani, but rather the Mother) is hidden, and the didactic message is obvious; it's dystopian critique is obvious; it's seemingly irreconcilable narrative voice becomes obvious; yet nothing is obvious even on re-reading because we are looking for what has already been exposed: oh, yes, scylla haunts his dream and oreb flies in a lot. Oh yes, he screws up Nettle and hyacinth's names. Oh yes, he is obviously Silk. I think that it really bears very little in common with The Book of the Long Sun -> which was comparatively open and honest even though they were trapped inside the whorl. Outside the whorl, in the vastness of space, there is no openness: even the narrator doesn't realize who he is, Hoof doesn't recognize his own father in Babbie even though he treats him so obviously like a son, and we cannot recognize our own home because we have forgotten science. OK, that's more than enough for one night. (On the other hand, wouldn't it be funny if I convinced you all, and I was utterly wrong? that is also unmistakably why gene wolfe is the greatest) Marc Aramini

Spectacled Bear — 09 Jan 2002, 10:10 · follows maa32

At 06:23 2002-01-09, maa32 wrote:

...

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That's certainly true. There appear to be so many loose ends, like the whole business of who the Mother is and what she intends, and the link between her and the Scylla on Urth. Someone on this list once said that you know you're starting to understand a Wolfe book when the ending feels like an ending and not just an abrupt halt in the narrative, and that was spot on. There's a real feeling of all those plot points joining up to form a solid arc of story, if that makes any sense.

...

(whatever happened to Borski? He had great ideas comparable in obscurity to most of mine, often with as little textual evidence as I have, too!)

And - why do we never see the two of you at the same time?

Actually, I think you are on firmer ground, mostly. All the things about trees and plant genetics and the repeated motifs like the salt and the wall are very telling; they must mean *something*, because that's how things work with Wolfe. And the speculation about Horn and Babbie too - that was always one of the most mystifying passages. Whether your theories are right or not, you have certainly found some very interesting things to think about and debate. Thanks!

Spectacled Bear.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 09 Jan 2002, 17:22 · follows Spectacled Bear

Marc,

I agree completely with you about Wolfe and about the SS books: when the list went through the immediate post-RttW spasm of discussion, I recall commenting that the books were far too complex to dismiss, the way some seemed to, without living and wrestling with them for at least a year or two. I stand by that.

... remember how dead this list was until I started throwing out outrageous theories

Well, it has been quiet lately, yes.

I just don't think you can apply Occam's razor to a tricky dude like Gene Wolfe

Well, here I agree and disagree. You can apply it where appropriate. The real problem with the Principle of Parsimony is that it's misunderstood and misused. It does not state, as often misquoted, that the simplest explanation is the likeliest; it suggests that one's solutions should not needlessly hypothesize "entities" not obviously present in the problem. I think that principle does apply - that is, our solutions to the problems GW's works present should not introduce any persons, planets, etc., not clearly present in the works.

He should have won a Hugo. Why did Harry Potter IV win? What the heck?!

Frankly, I doubt GW will ever win a novel Hugo; the fan base that votes the award is demographically pretty broad and GW's fan base is, demographically, pretty narrow. The time when "intellectual" novels could realistically win the Hugo was pretty much over by the mid-'70s.

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I like this. I don't think I can go with Blue/Green == Urth/Lune, but your point about the relative openness/closedness of the two Books is very well put.

Andy Robertson — 09 Jan 2002, 16:16 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Marc, speakng as one overintelligent guy to another, bin there, done that, go and get drunk, have a hike, do somehting non-cerebral, NOW!!!

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Otherwise, FWIW, I agree with you in many areas - except I do not accept the literal identity of the planets.

I always thought "trees eating trees" was a poetic way of talking about arboreal parasitism. Hmmmm.

But I just read "Silhouette" again - it has apportation, something very like the notules, and interestingly, motile, fighting, plants

Andy R

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

From: "maa32" <maa32 at dana.ucc.nau.edu>

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