

Nightside again, chapter one

The Whorl list — 10 messages, 8 voices, 11 Dec 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/580>

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Jonathan Laidlow — 11 Dec 1998, 12:28

Stephen Witkoswski inspired to begin rereading Long Sun again, and I'd be grateful for your input folks:

Nightside chapter 1 - two things I noticed:

1. the word 'clockwork' is used three times in the first three pages. Patera Silk is 'that absurd clockwork figure' in the parenthesis in the second paragraph, and he watches the game 'outside a clockwork show whose works had stopped'. This is where Silk has his first theophany (love that word!). The Outsider gives him an out of body experience and reveals how he is merely a mechanical creation (figuratively) who does what he has been programmed to do? Then again on p11 at the end of the vision: 'a wind that blew ever stronger and wilder as clockwork that had never really stopped began to turn again'. This then suggests that all is artificial, created - the wind is unnatural, but guided by the clockwork maker.

I'm wondering how to reconcile this with Silk's assertion later in the chapter that the Outside will not help save the Manteion, Silk is the help that is being provided.

2. And another thing, back to the first paragraph: 'he said that it was as though someone who had always been behind him and standing (as it were) at both his shoulders had, after so many years of pregnant silence, begun to whisper into both his ears' This echoes TS Eliot's Waste Land: 'Who is that who walks behind you' (Eliot's note refers to polar explorers, but that's a red herring). Both refer to some passage in the Bible, presumably after the Resurrection where Jesus is seen by various people, but where? And why?

Jonathan

Jonathan Laidlow
Dept of English - staff pigeonholes
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
Birmingham
B15 2TT, England
0121 414 5976

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

Patri10629 — 11 Dec 1998, 13:18 · follows Jonathan Laidlow

Nice work, Stephen.

In a message dated 12/11/98 8:36:44 AM, LAIDLOJM at hhs.bham.ac.uk writes:

<<Nightside chapter 1 - two things I noticed:

1. the word 'clockwork' is used three times in the first three pages. Patera Silk is 'that absurd clockwork figure'<<

Not sure what this means. Perhaps, that Silk, as you say is a puppet of the Whorl and his church? Or does it refer to his odd tall carriage and somewhat awkward manner?

in the parenthesis in the second paragraph, and he watches the game
'outside a clockwork

show whose works had stopped'.<<

Pretty sure this refers to the winding down entropy of the whorl. It has stopped. But it is also a cue for Silk's Theophany. He is transported out of time, so to speak, by this Holy Revelation.

This is where Silk has his first theophany (love that word!). The Outsider gives him an out of body experience and reveals how he is merely a mechanical creation (figuratively) who does what he has been programmed to do?<<

Silk is a loyal obedient servant of the church. "A good man following a bad religion," as Wolfe has said.

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I take this as something like, "After the theophany, time resumed and the apparent order of the whorl continued.

I'm wondering how to reconcile this with Silk's assertion later in the chapter that the Outside will not help save the Manteion, Silk is the help that is being provided.

The clock work imagery, I believe refers to an outdated mode of looking at the universe--Ptolemy? The old Gods and the constructed artificial whorl. False gods, false paradigms.

The Outsider is from a whole other realm of being--a transcendent God. Silk through his revelation is his intervention. Christ, obviously.

Forgive if all this is obvious.

Patrick O'Leary

Patrick O'Leary's Home Page

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Jason Voegele — 11 Dec 1998, 11:48 · follows Patri10629

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Resurrection where Jesus is seen by various people, but where? And
why?

This reminds me of the passage in PEACE, in which Aunt Olivia is speaking to Katie and says:

"Who's that behind you?"

"It's just little Den, Katie. He's been there before." "Yes, but there's another, dimmer yet, behind him." "I can only see the one behind me, Katie."

I think mantis cited the Eliot reference when I first mentioned this. In fact, straight from the archives:

<mantis>

I have to admit that this rings bells
in the literary dept. of my brain--T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," wherein the same haunting
question is derived from the journals of English adventurers climbing Mt. Everest and having
hallucinations from lack of oxygen. (It also evokes the missionaries in the jungle garden of
Nessus sensing the presence of Severian and Agia.) But, to get back to PEACE, I suspect that
the dimmer one is the reader."You." </mantis>

I don't have anything new to add to the discussion, since (sigh) I've never read The Wasteland,
but I thought I'd throw something out there for you all to chew on.

Jason Voegele
voegele.6 at osu.edu

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

Alex David Groce — 11 Dec 1998, 11:58 · follows Jason Voegele

Jonathan Laidlow wrote:

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Road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-31. I think it's in there same reason Eliot used it--an explicit reference to Emmaus, probably here to indicate (in part) the "resurrection" of the true church, through Silk, in the Whorl..

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)
Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)
'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President
608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>

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William H. Ansley — 13 Dec 1998, 01:40 · follows Alex David Groce

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Jason Voegele
voegele.6 at osu.edu

I'm afraid I just can't let this pass, even though I suppose I am picking nits. In the passage quoted above from *_Peace_*, the person speaking to Katy is not Aunt Olivia, it is Hannah, Weer's mother's (and grandmother's) cook, as a girl. This passage occurs when Weer is remembering when Hannah told him (when he was a boy) a story that her (Hannah's) mother's maid-of-all-work, Katie, had told her. Katie can 'see' Weer listening to the story and "another, dimmer yet, behind him." Hannah can tell her that Weer (little Den) is there because she 'knows' that she is telling him the story. (Why can Katie see Weer and the one behind him? Because she is Irish and has second sight?) The "dimmer" one is, I agree with mantis, the reader, who is reading the story that Katie told Hannah who told Weer who wrote it down for us to read, thereby telling it to us.

I came to this conclusion myself, long ago, after reading *_Peace_* for the 3rd or 4th time and puzzling over this passage. The realization that Wolfe was, in effect, talking about *me* here hit me with the force of revelation at the time. I found it a much more effective trick than the one Wolfe used in *_Exodus from the Long Sun_* where the alert reader discovers that the person telling the story is Horn (when he refers to himself as "I" at one point). (I have to admit I wasn't a very alert reader; I didn't really notice this until it was pointed out to me in this list.)

I won't claim that my interpretation of the passage is the only correct one, but to me it the only one that makes sense.

William Ansley

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Kevin J. Maroney — 13 Dec 1998, 14:50 · follows William H. Ansley

At 01:40 AM 12/13/98 -0500, William Ansley wrote:
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I noticed it and assumed that it was a copyediting mistake until I got to the end! I don't know what that says about me. Wombat, a.k.a. Kevin Maroney kmaroney at crossover.com Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction
<http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/olp/nyrsf/nyrsf.html>

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

Derek Bell — 14 Dec 1998, 20:20 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

In message <199812131953.LAA19875 at lists1.best.com>, "Kevin J. Maroney" writes:

I noticed it and assumed that it was a copyediting mistake until I got to the end! I don't know what that says about me.

Me almost three - when it was pointed out on the list, I realised that Wolfe was up to some very sneaky things. I had to admit that at first I was a bit disappointed in the Long Sun series, thinking at first that Wolfe's talent had diminished. I was delighted to discover that though he was chanting plainly, he was still up to his old tricks. (Leaving clues and indirect implications in the text; making philosophical & theological

arguments in the text.)

Hmmm... Is it just me or has anyone else resorted to religious imagery in describing Wolfe's strategies?

I suppose Wolfe's least satisfying work was *Pandora*, by Holly Hollander, but even there he had a few subtle references[1] & jokes, but nothing comparable to *TBoTNS* or *TBoTLS*. Wolfe also wrote it as an allegory; or at least it's capable of being read as an allegory about love, the different kinds of love.

Derek

[1]I think I caught a couple of musical references related to Chicago.

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Kevin J. Maroney — 14 Dec 1998, 15:57 · follows Derek Bell

At 08:20 PM 12/14/98 +0000, Derek wrote:

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I seem to recall someone mentioning that one of Wolfe's contemporary novels includes, among other things, an elaborate and almost completely invisible analogy/allegory of the War of the Roses. Was that *Pandora*?

(Yes, I know that question should go onto the Urth List.)

Wombat, a.k.a. Kevin Maroney kmaroney at crossover.com Kitchen Staff Supervisor, New York Review of Science Fiction <http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/olp/nyrsf/nyrsf.html>

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Michael Straight — 15 Dec 1998, 08:36 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

On Fri, 11 Dec 1998, Jonathan Laidlow wrote:

1. the word 'clockwork' is used three times in the first three pages. Patera Silk is 'that absurd clockwork figure' in the parenthesis in the second paragraph, and he watches the game 'outside a clockwork show whose works had stopped'...The Outsider gives him an out of body experience and reveals how he is merely a mechanical creation (figuratively) who does what he has been programmed to do? Then again on p11 at the end of the vision: 'a wind that blew ever stronger and wilder as clockwork that had never really stopped began to turn again'. This then suggests that all is artificial, created - the wind is unnatural, but guided by the clockwork maker.

Interesting. I don't know if I've ever heard to someone say that if the universe is a created thing, then it is "artificial" or "unnatural."

Of course "clockwork" may just be Silk's metaphor for how everything seemed to stop suddenly and how he saw himself in relation to Everything. Not necessarily an assertion that all is mechanical, but an attempt to describe the oddity of everything behaving mechanically for a

moment.

A fourth instance you don't cite is Silk's impression that the "shining clockwork had gone some trifle awry." This might imply Silk or Horn interpreting the vision in light of their later knowledge of the Whorl's manufactured nature. Is it the Whorl that is clockwork or the whole universe?

Then again, "clockwork" might be a carryover from Silk's pre-enlightenment cosmology about Pas creating the Whorl.

Note also that the first paragraph identifies the enlightenment narrative as the way Silk "talked about it afterward" -- so that tells us where Horn gets it, and is a very subtle clue that everything we read about Silk's inner life may be from how he related it to others.

I'm wondering how to reconcile this with Silk's assertion later in the chapter that the Outside will not help save the Manteion, Silk is the help that is being provided.

You seem to be saying that if the universe were artificial clockwork, then the Outsider would be able to control it. That seems backwards to me. Classically (as Alga pointed out) the idea of a "clockwork" universe was meant to imply that God winds the universe up and then never interferes with miracles or theophanies. So maybe the theophany shows the universe is a bigger, weirder place than the "clockwork" of the Whorl and you can't rule out the possibility of divine intervention. Or maybe theophanies that happen between the ticks of the clock don't count. Or maybe Silk just had a small stroke.

The Outsider, by the way, doesn't say he won't help save the Manteion, he says he already has helped save the Manteion by sending Silk.

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In Silk's words I hear neither Eliot (who asks "Who is the third who walks always beside you"--much closer to the passage in PEACE than to this) nor the road to Emmaus (in which a stranger is met along the road and is revealed as Christ in the breaking of bread), but Isaiah:

"He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when he hears it, he will answer you...and when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it'" (Isaiah 30:19b, 21).

Note that the voice is heard in the context of answer to prayer, as Silk's enlightenment (and Silk himself) was an answer to Pike's prayer.

-Rostrum

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Derek Bell — 15 Dec 1998, 19:15 · follows Michael Straight

In message <199812142101.NAA22981 at lists1.best.com>, "Kevin J. Maroney" writes:

I seem to recall someone mentioning that one of Wolfe's contemporary novels includes, among other things, an elaborate and almost completely invisible analogy/allegory of the War of the Roses. Was that _Pandora_?

It might be - I'm afraid that I'm a bit weak on that part of history. (That was the war between the houses of Lancaster & York, right?)

Maybe I'm reading too much in to _Pandora_, but there seem to be two puns referring to the same genre of popular music.

Derek

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