

Black Hole (New/Short/etc) Sun, etc.

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Oct 1999

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Alex David Groce — 12 Oct 1999, 19:05

Various random points:

(1) On the Black Hole engulfing history--it seems to me that the problem with Asimov's Foundation/Robot mess was that it completely undermined the original series--Asimov was going for the ultimate "scientific" approach to society, planning that really works. And the first three Foundation books were clever plays on how sharp Hari Seldon's plan was and how it works even when it looks like its failing, etc. Then the tie-in books worked on showing how Seldon's plan only worked because of psionic New Age dictators in the 2nd foundation who turned out to be (behind curtain #3) the puppets of All-Powerful Mind-Reading Robot Daneel. In other words, the Decline and Fall (with science saving the day via REAL social science) becomes a fantasy of history with Secret Masters behind Secret Masters. The thematic nicety of the first series is ruined.

Wolfe, on the other hand, seems to me to (despite learning some things, one would guess, about writing and the world) fit together thematically from his earliest great works to his latest--in the sense that he, like Bach, revisits his central themes and elaborates on them without undermining earlier works-- it seems to me this unity of vision is a large part of what makes Wolfe not just a good writer but a genuine artistic genius on the order of a Proust or Eliot (there's another side, talent, which is why even though Lovecraft has the repeated elaboration of constant, even obsessive themes, he's enjoyable but still a bit of a hack). Typhon having started the Whorl on its journey in no way undermines what we understand about Typhon, but enlarges our vision of the products of his megalomania (and makes it more complex by reminding us that a monster might have a "family" that's a mix of decency and even worse monstrosity). The Christic aspects of Silk do not undermine similar aspects in Severian--they are different visions of human servants of the Increate/Outsider/God. That the central figure of NEW SUN is to be somehow worked into Short Sun doesn't suggest to me that Severian is likely to be cheaply used to "tie things together"--rather that, while NEW SUN (and LONG SUN) are complete and beautiful in themselves, they are also, after this, to be the equivalent of the individual fugues in "The Art of the Fugue"-- made part of a whole, and thus capable of enriching each other immensely.

I also suspect that Wolfe will approach it in such a way as to make SHORT SUN comprehensible, if somewhat less so than the other two stories, on its own, without resorting (as Asimov did) to ill-disguised info-dumps.

(2) If the Whorl has been traveling for 1000 years, then it might somehow have been turned around. However, the Neighbors (ah, yes, Nutria--they "drove" the inhum off with goodness--seems so clear once you see it) are an odd result for post New-Sun. Even though I offered it earlier, I'll be surprised if Blue = Urth (or Green = Moon). Anyway, does anyone say "Green is massively smaller than Blue?"

(3) Typhon's culture paordies (whether translated or not) aren't just Evil Overlord fun--Typhon's

a fairly practical evil overlord (and, although wicked as the day is long, not, to all appearances, one with an unusually large appetite for sadism as opposed to megalomania). If you want to prevent cargo from uniting, it's hard to find a better model from Urth(Earth) than low technology cultures with very different religions and customs and systems of government (or high technology ones, for that matter, but the way we got that high technology has had the effect of lessening some of those differences--for good and ill). And, since Typhon probably hasn't the time to make up a lot of cultures (or the inclination) he just grabs some handy ones and miniaturizes them. Instant Babel effect! Given Typhon's global dominion, he can even grab people from relevant groups to avoid wasting time with genetic tinkering, and just brainwash them into forgetting their old homes.

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

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