Tricky, tricky, tricky!

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 Nov 1999

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William H. Ansley — 09 Nov 1999, 00:30

Gene Wolfe just loves being tricky. I noticed an example in OBW as I was looking for something else. Horn is describing Seawrack's jewelry to Babbie, wondering whether she was real:

"Red earrings, too," I told him. "Or pink. I caught a glimpse of those through her hair. They may have been coral."
His look said very plainly, Well, _I_ saw no such thing.

The first time I read this I thought it was just an amusing touch, but on coming back to this passage I realize that, of course, Babbie is right. Seawrack had no such earrings. What Horn saw were her gill slits.

There is a mystery here, as well, or part of one. When Seawrack vanishes from Horn's boat, he begins to doubt that she was ever really there. To determine if she was real, he turns to Babbie. "I questioned him then, and from his answers knew that the young woman I had seen had been real." The mystery is, just how intelligent does Horn think Babbie is? He often talks about him as if he were an animal, albeit highly intelligent, but here Horn seems to regard Babbie as having an almost human ability to communicate (unless this "conversation" was actually a hallucination).

Perhaps an even more important question is: How intelligent is Babbie, really? If such a question can be said to have any meaning.

William Ansley

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