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The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 16 Jan 2000

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Alice Turner — 16 Jan 2000, 10:49

I still say that the secret (probably) is that when humans learn to live with each other in love and charity (not enslaving one another, for instance), the inhumani will follow suit, being imitators of humanity. That's why Quetzal is ambiguous, because he learned from Patera Pike.

If that is the secret, I will eat my rat...er...hat.

-alga

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

Josh Levitan — 16 Jan 2000, 20:29 · follows Alice Turner

David Langford wrote:

Where does it say that Borges gives enough information? My reading of "The Sect of the Phoenix" (also translated as "The Cult of the Phoenix") is that it's a joke, practically a shaggy dog story, deliberately blurred by anti-information. Drop the teasing physical details about "the cork and the slime", or push them sideways into metaphor, and ...

[Does Borges need spoiler space on this list? Oh well:]

Borges writes that there's enough info to figure it out in the prologue to "Artifices," the second half of FICCIONES. On page 105 of the new(er) Grove Press paperback -- "In the allegory of the Phoenix, I imposed upon myself the problem of hinting at an ordinary fact -- the Secret -- in a [sic] irresolute and gradual manner, which in the end, would prove to be unequivocal; I do not know how fortunate I have been."

Because every other story in this collection is at least staggeringly well-written, and some of them among the best I've ever read (like "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"), I'm going to give Borges the benefit of the doubt here and place the blame on my weak intellect.

... it does seem very much as though the Mystery Rite, which is despised, trivial, not talked about, abstained from by the very virtuous, yet somehow never dies out and may indeed have become instinctive, is ordinary human sexual intercourse.

Actually, looking over the story again, that fits really nicely. See, it IS my own stupidity, not Borges' fault. I just got thrown off by mentions of the rite being performed with "cork, wax, or gum arabic," or silt. I don't really see how cork, wax, gum arabic, and silt are metaphoric representations of the sexual organs or the act. Maybe I'm reading a crummy translation. Is there any way that those things can be used in intercourse -- perhaps as primitive birth control or lubrication or something? Or is Borges just throwing in red herrings?

Josh, who still needs a Vironese name...