

# Swallow as god

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Apr 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/824>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

---

Nicholas Gevers — 20 Apr 2000, 06:01

One of the more problematic passages in THE BOOK OF THE LONG SUN occurs in Chapter 7 of EXODUS, “The Brown Mechanics”. Why did Wolfe include such a long demonstration of the process for manufacturing taluses, combined with discussion of business ethics and much besides? Various people have criticised the passage as boring, extraneous, self-indulgent, etc. I’d like to venture an explanation for Chapter 7, in the hope that it’s an original insight.

Existing discussions have focused on Chapter 7’s expression of Wolfe’s personal background as a materials engineer (concealed autobiography, Wolfe as Swallow) and the paradox of how a long technical disquisition can fail utterly to explain the main wonder of the taluses, that they are intelligent and capable of volition—John Gerlach sees this as part of the strategy of Science Fantasy, the simultaneous rendition of the scientific and the magical. Swallow is really an alchemist, in that sense. And there is of course the humorous component, the plight of an unemployed robot...

But valid though these perspectives are, I’d like to add to them. Consider the topic of discussion in Chapter 7: loosely, the relationship between Swallow, the Boss, the Engineer, the Contractor, and his workers, products, and clients. The chief problem the passage raises is that of Engineer and Product, or, just as accurately, that of Creator and his creations. Swallow manufactures taluses, which Silk describes as a kind of human being; somehow, Swallow invests raw materials with life, and is master and seller of these newly living beings, and this is a morally fraught situation. But consider further: all of Swallow’s visitors are created beings in a very specific sense. Silk and Mucor began as embryos with special latent talents, and were brought to term at the behest of powerful men (Tussah, Blood) so that they might usefully express those talents. Marble is a chem, a robot, built to serve, which she continues to do as a vocation. And Oreb is a genetically or otherwise

augmented bird, changed to function apparently as an oracular medium for gods (the Outsider and Scylla). Silk, Mucor, Marble, and Oreb are like the taluses; their discussion with Swallow is a discussion of their own plights and limitations. For Swallow, read Pas, or even the Outsider, an articulate stand-in for a Creator g(G)od; for taluses, read created beings generally.

In other words, Chapter 7 is a disguised discussion of the responsibilities of the Creator and the duties of h(H)is creations. As such, it's theologically central to LONG SUN, and has many important implications, which others may choose to explore...

=====

Nicholas Gevers  
Associate Editor, Infinity Plus  
(<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk>)

---

Patri10629 — 20 Apr 2000, 13:55 · follows Nicholas Gevers

Good one, Nick. Well done.

It now makes lots of sense.

Patrick O'Leary

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