

Neighbor + Inhumu + One?

The Whorl list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 22 Aug 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/965>

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Alice Turner — 22 Aug 2000, 10:16

Nick G:

Drawing on a remark John Clute made a few days ago: are we sure of the fate of those inhumu who, however long ago, ingested Neighbor blood and thus became equal to the Neighbors in puissance? The inhumu who in Horn's time infest the City on Green clearly have a relation to them, but their qualities seem to derive from their human slaves, the "inhumans". Did the original "Neighborly inhumu" survive in some other guise? Specifically, are the Neighbors Horn encounters not perhaps inhumu themselves?

I disagree with almost all the specifics that Pat. Rat puts forth with regard to this series, but I agree with him that it is theologically conceived. To me, it illustrates the ideas of the second-century heretic Origen (who was consigned to hell on 15 counts of anathema by his fellow Church Fathers) who believed that, as angels could sin and fall, demons could repent and redeem themselves and begin to rise. Instead of a static and everlasting heaven and hell, there would be a sort of cyclical motion with, eventually, all things turning to God. (It's a little more complex, but that's the general idea.) The system that Wolfe has laid out here is fairly simple: the Neighbors or VPs stand in for angels, the inhumu for demons or devils, and human beings are shown being both noble and outrageously wicked and, especially, quarreling incessantly with one another. The ingestion of blood (and the mysterious "secret") do change the inhumu nature toward that of their victims--what's more we see the naked yearning of all three of the young inhumu to be "real" girls and boys, to aspire upward toward humanity (this would be how Origen put it--humanity is the middle state between devil and angel).

So (sorry to be so longwinded), I think the answers to both your questions is no, but with qualifications. I don't think there's going to be any revelation about actual physical change--Harn is not an inhumu in any way, IMO, nor are the Neighbors. But I do suspect there is going to be something about partnership. Somebody in the last few days suggested that the visit to Urth was triggered by Horn's working in tandem with Rigoglio. I doubt it. I think an unhumu(u) must always be present for Horn to swing this telekinetic trick (though it is true that the venue derived from Rigoglio in this case). And the ability was contributed by a Neighbor. Still, yours is a more intriguing notion of the "secret," than any of the Golden Rule platitudes offered so far!

Do any others share my impression that Wolfe wishes us to equate the City of the Inhumu with Nessus? Are they congruent in being accursed?

Congruent, yes; he practically slams us over the head with it. Accursed, hmmm, see above.

-alga

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

Alex David Groce — 22 Aug 2000, 11:17 · follows Alice Turner

Hmmm... Alga's mapping to Origen's ideas is interesting, but I'm not convinced. Universalism doesn't strike me as being particularly Wolfean, given the number especially of short stories that are quite comfortable in damning a protagonist ("Bed and Breakfast" certainly doesn't carry much hint of demonic free will). Also, despite some obvious intentional points, a simple mapping of the inhumans to demons or the Neighbors to angels seems false--the Neighbors seem more like post-Urth Severian, of the "human" order of creation, but transfigured. The inhumani are different in that their nature is a mirror of their prey (their will is reduced but present) but they are in this a biological analogue also of Wolfe's chems and machine intelligences--a mirror in this case of their prey rather than their makers, of course. This doesn't strike me as very Origenist, in that except in Severian's visit to get the New Sun I don't think we see anything that is really meant to be of an angelic nature.

Oreb: I'm still puzzling over which God rides Oreb--and part of me says "the Outsider, silly." Does "The Night Cough," which I haven't read, make this more explicit? I also find it very interesting that Oreb, who I think we can all agree is very much a Holy Spirit figure, is also the primary comic relief in Long and Short Sun. I think this is fitting with his Spirit of Truth nature as well, and it reminds me very faintly of the way Muriel Spark and Flannery O'Connor make use of terrifying or comical Holy Spirit symbolism.

And by the way, unless I'm recalling incorrectly (which is quite possible) Origen wasn't precisely "consigned to hell"--a number of his propositions (from De Principis mostly, I think) were condemned, but a number of church figures have defended him as a fundamentally orthodox fellow carried away with intellectual speculation at times, and certainly no rebel against Church authority in his day.

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

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Tim Boolos — 22 Aug 2000, 08:26 · follows Alex David Groce

--- Alice Turner <pei047 at attglobal.net> wrote:

snip

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Just a note on Origen. His heresy charges did not have to do with the redeemability or not of demons (that is in line with Orthodox Theology), rather with the "pre-existence" of souls and a sort of cosmic recycling that Alga alluded to, among other things. Origen was only considered a heretic towards the end of his life. His early teachings are still held in regard among theologians.

As far as Inhumani/demon parallel I found their wanting to be a 'real' boy or girl (as well as the allusion near the end of OBW to their being no more dangerous than crocodiles) to be more like the wistful passages in C. S. Lewis' "Screwtape Letters". Lewis' Screwtape recognizes that humans are superior to the demons and on occasion wishes he could have some of the human advantages, but also recognizes and uses human weakness and tendency to stray to trap and enslave them. Not a perfect allegory, I'll admit, but one that connected a little for me.

I'm enjoying the theological discussions tremendously. Like Patera Nutria I am ordained, but in the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church which shares many theological notions (and rejects some as well) with the Catholic Church. However, I would not like this board to be exclusively devoted to counting angels on the head of a pin.

Emrys

At 11:17 AM 8/22/2000 -0400, you wrote:

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FWIW, I find the inhumani rather like Cordwainer Smith's underpeople in some ways. I don't think they represent the demonic realm in the symbolic substructure of the series; rather, they mirror the evil in mankind. A much closer, and very obvious, mirror of angels and demons are the gods of mainframe: promixate agents of the all-controlling Pantocrator. The essence of the demonic, in Christian thought, is to tempt and to teach falsely, and I don't see the inhumani in that role at all. A secondary aspect of the demonic is to oppress, but in Christianity that is definitely secondary (while in Manichaeism it is primary, since power is the basic category there); and the inhumani don't get to do much oppressing either; or rather, they have learned oppression from their human and neighbor associates. The only thing specifically demonic about them is that they are parasites.

Additionally, I interviewed GW rather closely about his theological beliefs, because I wanted to understand the Memoirs of Severian better. He claims to be fully orthodox as a Roman Catholic, and learned from St. Thomas and of course Chesterton. Of course, he can USE the more heretical aspects of Origen's thought in a novel if he chooses, but I don't see real evidence for this. He denied employing gnostic thought as the substructure of the Severian books, which I had at first thought he was doing -- and of course, we're in the same fictional universe here. So, I'd be surprised if Slimina were right on this.

BTW, thanks from me too, Alga, for the quick list of all the limping heroes! Fascinating how frequently the motif is encountered, even though it means different things in various mythic contexts.

Oreb: I'm still puzzling over which God rides Oreb--and part of me says "the Outsider, silly." Does "The Night Chough," which I haven't read, make this more explicit? I also find it very interesting that Oreb, who I think we can all agree is very much a Holy Spirit figure, is also the primary comic relief in Long and Short Sun. I think this is fitting with his Spirit of Truth nature as well, and it reminds me very faintly of the way Muriel Spark and Flannery O'Connor make use of terrifying or comical Holy Spirit symbolism.

I tried to speculate on how Oreb could be "ridden" by both Scylla and Outsider (and, I suggested, be also related to Kypris). Actually, the solution is quite simple. The Outsider IS God, and is outside the creation. Thus, He can enter and either override or work with anything inside the creation at any time. The gods of mainframe simply take people over like robots, and I guess Oreb also (on occasion, anyway). The gods are part of a continuum of being, and are more powerful than men. The Outsider is outside the whole continuum, and is more subtle. Recall The Ruler in "Westwind," who says, "I prefer not to interfere directly," or words to that effect. The Outsider can use Scylla any way He wishes (whether she like is, or is aware of it, or not), and thus is behind Scylla's riding of Oreb when she does so.

I don't know if the Spirit as Comic Relief is in Chesterton, but of course, Christianity as THE Comic Relief is pure Chesterton, and thus a huge part of Wolfe's thinking. Oddly, Wolfe's books end in ways that can suggest tragedy, the pagan opposite of the Divine comedy. But they always point beyond the end of the story to a final happy ending (e.g., the green man). FWIW.

Patera Nutria

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Jim Jordan — 22 Aug 2000, 22:14 · follows Jim Jordan

At 08:26 AM 8/22/2000 -0700, you wrote:
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Emrys

There's so much in Wolfe that it would be a real shame to discuss only the theological aspects. I've tried to call attention to those aspects here, just as a matter of contributing my expertise. I'm wary of overreading Wolfe along these lines, but I probably fall into that trap anyway -- as do all of us in various ways!

Patera Nutria (Presbyterian)

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John Clute — 23 Aug 2000, 12:19 · follows Jim Jordan

In-Reply-To: <200008230256.TAA15037 at lists1.best.com>

Nutria:

To speak very broadly indeed, which I think is sometimes necessary with Wolfe, it does strike me that the tonus (as distinguished from the intellectual doctrinal structuring) of Wolfe's major works is anything but Christian. Except maybe in certain parts of the book we are now considering, the melacholia is profound: _In Blue's Waters_, and many of the later stories, are acts of heroism (it seems) against a very deep sadness, which Christians (and others) might put a term to. I myself would tend to cod gnosticism here: it feels like the occlusion or bondage of the blinding world, to me.

We may see _Return to the Whorl_ continue the transformations of tonus audible (I think) in the current book; but I wouldn't exactly bet on a triumph of THE comedy.

But this is a topic without closure. And premature at this point, though it is the sort of consideration all the decipherments must be a road to.

(I've just now noticed a later message from you which makes it very clear you have some broadly similar thoughts about the subordination of all schemas (even those we can legitimately pin on Wolfe himself) to the summae which is the felt work of art, sort of thing.)

Best,
John C

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