

The Night Chough (Redux, Rebuttal)

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 Sep 2000

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Robert Borski — 01 Sep 2000, 13:01

Winged Falcon writing:

<On the subject of Oreb and the Night Chough, I'm with Alga all the way. Clearly Scylla is speaking through Oreb as Mr. Borski says, but these are just as clearly isolated incidents. All that is established in the story is something we knew before: namely, that Oreb is sometimes ridden by a god. That god, in my opinion, is not always Scylla. In fact, I defy anyone to prove to me that Scylla has ever ridden Oreb before the occasions in this story, or after it.>

Well again I strongly disagree. Besides the two incidents I've already mentioned (the dream at the end of OBW where "an angry and vindictive Scylla talked like Oreb" and the "undulant arms" of dwarfish Oreb during Green Trip II), I believe there's yet one other incident that shows Scylla is attempting to contact Horn/Silk through Incanto. This one comes at the end of Incanto's most vivid dream about Scylla yet (IGJ, 58-9). States Incanto:

At the end of each verse I read, I watched [Scylla] straining against the page with all ten arms. Very faintly I could hear her cry, "Help! Help!" And then "Beware! Beware!" like the bird in Inclito's Mother's story. I woke up--or thought I did--but the printed Scylla was still with me, crying out, "Help me! Help me!"

The bird in Inclito's Mother's story belongs to a tall man and is deemed a familiare, just as Oreb has been earlier, with the tall man clearly being either Silk or Horn (Inclito's mother may be doing the same sort of memory doctoring as all those old duffers on Urth who claimed to be pals with Fechin).

My problem with the one-time only approach that you and alga advocate is this: it does not account for why Scylla is riding Oreb during the events that transpire in "The Night Chough." Is it chance? Caprice? Ennui? An accident? Surely, Starling does not seem the sort of individual that would draw the interest of Scalding Scylla? Oh thou inscrutable gods!

Then again, look at the story's first four sentences, paying special attention to the third.

Silk was gone, the black bird reminded itself. There was no point in thinking about him.

No, it itself had gone.

Which was the same.

Given that we know Oreb has been absent from Horn and Gaon for over a year, I believe this is

what Wolfe means by "it itself had gone," signifying Oreb's temporary abandoning of Horn--perhaps to look for someone that might more readily resemble Silk. Where better to look than the city named after Silk's homebase on the Whorl, New Viron (which makes you right after all, mantis). Here Oreb is ridden by Scylla not because she's looking for cheap thrills or doing the Nevermore schtick from Poe, but because she's looking for Silk through Oreb, "which was the same."

Cavilers, beware: with one more volume to come, I believe a lot of you are going to have to eat some major chough--er, crow.

Then again, if I'm the one who winds up eating a bunch of feathers, perhaps I'll just fall that much more slowly next time I stumble.

Robert Borski

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