

Wyrd.

This essay will discuss the novel Wyrd. It will explore some of the concepts that are found in the novel and attempt to extend the issues to a point at which they become more clear, and prove the assertion that, just as Wyrd is a fast moving narrative that spans continents and ages, it is a novel of ideas.

Wyrd was, in length, a short to medium novel that was written by Sue Gough. Briefly, it was the story of Berengaria, Saladin's daughter and wife of King Richard. After her husband's death, she was moved to a French nunnery with her handmaiden and son, the prince (incognito). There she kept an explicit and wise diary, recording the events in her life. She founded a healing order, and invented a cordial that was surprisingly popular among the village folk. She continued to practice Viking religion in subtle ways, and encouraged spiritual openness, as opposed to the dogmatic teachings of the time, vesting confidence and a sense of worth in her fellow devotees. However, she was plagued by her evil anti-thesis, the Abbe De Ville, who encouraged her son to join in a 'children's crusade' -- and unwise and dangerous religious march. Pat, her son, was eventually sold as a slave in the middle east, but the Abbe did not know this and told Berengaria the 'news' of his demise. Unable to cope with such a revelation, she died and was entombed, as a mummy, with her book beneath the priory. Found by two archaeologists in modern times, her book was recovered and her tomb destroyed. Sent to a group of Australian women (in order to keep it out of the claws of the modern De Ville, Professor Horniman), the book found its way into the hands and heart of Trace, a street kid from Sydney, come north as part of a modern children's crusade. Unwilling to return to the slums of Kings Cross, Trace had found her way to the women's homes and beguiled herself of them. To conclude the story, Professor Horniman attempted to steal the book, and it was destroyed. All of this was spoken by one Dr Renouf (a possible future Trace and modern day Berengaria), in an attempt to draw together the warring factions of the middle east.

One of the most primary themes in the book, apparent even in the summary, is the repetition of events: recurrence and echoing of past events and people. The binding threads of time, so to speak, are constant and absolute: even in different times, the same forces are still at work throughout the novel. The change of setting is incidental, and the characters are a constant equalling force. The children's crusade, the concepts of war and peace, good and evil are all tied together in the plot, past mirroring future. However, another theme that is important is the power of the undecided (* - Wyrd, the blank Viking rune, is the rune of 'maybe'), and the outcomes are different -- Professor Horniman was defeated, De Ville was not. Although this only led to Horniman's defeat, it was substantial, and the cosmic superbeing could have turned to favour the powers of 'good' (Berengaria, Trace, the Wyrd sisters/the three women) or 'evil' (De Ville/Horniman, war, etc). The future is merely a continuation of the past, but events may be replayed. Change only occurred with respect for the future, the past remained stained, but was a valuable lesson. The repetition of events occurred mainly because lessons of the past were unheeded, and present changes are the force behind its cessation. The blank rune, the undecided future, the last, blank page in the old Queen's diary, are all a means by which these events can occur: change and exploration of possibilities is vital to allow continuation. Who controls the past controls the future only in that the past is part of the present and the present is what controls future events.

Another theme, discussed mainly in the book's feminist undertones, is one that is heavily discursive of the rules of society. Religious dogma, meaningless legal writings, unwritten rules placing different people in situations beyond their control, and the concept of elitism -- our class system, are all discussed, if briefly, in the texts. Non conformity was all but preached: it clearly stated that the rules of society, the laws we make for ourselves, are not compatible with the needs of the people. Religious laws were obeyed to the letter in the main time frame and our own, to a lesser extent because times have changed: Berengaria was a nun, and De Ville was an Abbe. The laws that govern Christianity are mostly good, but intervention on the part of the church, often with the best of intentions, can lead an uneducated and oppressed society (like that of, say, medieval England or France) into ruins. In the novel, Berengaria was seen to actively opposed rules she thought were 'wrong', and refused to submit to the system: a self perpetuating autocracy, in which the supreme power lies in the ability to bluff and blunder through situations, and keep a crowd entertained. Her major disadvantage, at least at that time, was the fact that she was a woman: strong, intelligent and a leader, yes, but existing in a time and reality that did not judge a person by such qualities. Power in our society is driven by corruption, in many cases, and hope for the future lies in the powers that be. The same was true, to extremes, in Berengaria's time, but her knowledge and charisma were not about to be bound by half-truths and lies (the lies seeded by her time's power system). In any time and any system there are the high, the middle and the low. The aim of the high is to stay there, the middle want to get there, and the low want to survive. With a few exceptions, a system that acknowledges and works with this social and economic hierarchy is one that allows for very little personal growth: true now and then. Her system and ours are clearly corrupted by this and the novel clearly demands that we do something about it. The unwritten, unknowable future is a powerful force here: the future is the right place to escape to.

Another powerful and recurring issue is that of knowledge: it's power, importance, and ultimate truths. Learning and self healing are important factors discussed by Berengaria in her life and writings, factors that affected people in many different ways. She understood the importance of understanding and wisdom and shared it with others, who gained those qualities and shared it with others.....etc. Learning is a mighty influence that can heal wounds and spread enlightenment. In many ways it is the only force by which to fight corruption, but seeds must be planted. The complete amalgam of knowledge discussed in the novel is contained almost wholly in Berengaria's book, which planted it's seeds in many ways. It shared it's message of healing and medicinal lore with nurses and other assorted healers; it shared it's knowledge of love and spirituality with the emotionally recluse, encouraging growth and healing; it shared it's artistic beauty and knowledge of the assorted wonders of our planet with the artistically inclined, enhancing their lives and through them: ours. The concept of the search for the self is another constant in this novel: people with no identity grow and learn to become their own person, unique and independent: through knowledge. It is through knowledge and understanding that peace can be won: the hope lies not only in the unknown but in the ability to make it the known: through knowledge.

This novel is very fast moving. The constant swapping of time frames and scenery are affective in drawing the reader in and swiftly making the novel's compact point. It is also a novel of ideas: the concept of recurring history and unknown future, the rules of law and the laws of nature, and the importance of knowledge. Even having unravelled the threads of metaphor and elusive historical reference that the author has woven into the story, the message remains the same at the outset. Times change but people don't --

despite the uplifting mores of this novel, the battle of good versus evil continues.