

Digest urth.v019.n026

The Urth list — 10 messages, 8 voices, 19 Oct 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1211>

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.

Kieran Mullen — 19 Oct 1998, 13:08

From: Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>

Subject: Re: (urth) Dualism & horror

Date: Mon, 19 Oct 1998 08:46:18 -0400 (EDT)

I haven't read much horror, however. Are there many horror novels that have both a supernatural Good and Evil but the Evil wins? (Not counting stories where the apparent "Evil" turns out to be morally superior to the apparent "Good".)

The classic example is the "Black Easter" series by James Blish. It's brilliant.

One candidate is "Godstalk" by P.C. Hodgell. In it the "heroes" are superhuman warriors (sort of like angels) who have been fighting Evil for millenia, and have been constantly losing. God's not really talking to them anymore, and they've been fighting a retreating action, losing world after world. Things are getting pretty desperate. It's a bit of a cheat though since the series has not really ended. But I like the world she has invented. (I'm a big fan of theological science fiction).

Hmmm... In the original "Nightmare on Elm Street" movie, the villain wins. There are countless horror stories/movies/tv shows where the villain secretly survives (shown in the last few seconds of the story). The new Outer Limits has many episodes in which the villains win (it's rather depressing and IMHO often poorly written). There are a number of sf books in which the Bomb goes off and everything ends.

Kieran Mullen

Kieran Mullen email: kieran at mail.nhn.ou.edu

Dept. of Physics and Astronomy phone: (405) 325-3961

The University of Oklahoma FAX: (405) 325-7557

Norman, OK 73019, USA <http://www.nhn.ou.edu/~kieran/>

Alice Turner — 19 Oct 1998, 20:05 · follows Kieran Mullen

Alga, your thesis that horror is inherently (will that do instead of "necessarily"?) dualistic is so thought-provoking that I hate to spoil things by finding fault with it. However, I would venture that if suburbia is the light that opposes the Great Darkness, then we've got a pretty weak dualism. This light is a dim bulb, this divinity is one of communion by water and not wine. It is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob illuminating this place. It's George Westinghouse.

No argument, but the "horror" world is not the real world. Since the author's intent is to give frissons to the reader, everything, good and bad, is exaggerated.

I will back-pedal a bit on "necessarily," but only a bit. Since the end of the 19th century, the Dark is not necessarily a Christian dark, in fact most

often it isn't. Despite the crucifix hocus-pocus, we do not think of vampires as demons of Satan; they inhabit their own Dark. Werewolves are folkloric, not Christian. Hyde, though a demon, is a metaphor for what Freud would call the id, not a damned soul. Dorian Grey hides Hyde's face behind his own (sorry about that sentence), but again it's extra-Christian.

"How about "pagan" instead of "extra-Christian"? I don't think this darkness is anything new; perhaps after the 19th century it becomes "neo-paganism", that's all. I would argue that any work that doesn't have a Christian dimension but does deal with supernatural evil is pagan; any dualism is strictly secondary and quite uninteresting. (I'm not saying that pagan works necessarily lack value or interest, of course.)

I think "pagan" is too specific. Besides, some horror writers (eg. Anne Rice) are still using the Christian tropes of the early 19th century. They're only set decoration, but the whole field is awfully stagey.

Never having read King and having not the slightest desire to do so, I'll have to withhold judgment. I do believe you're helping me understand why I've always despised the horror genre. Since I do believe in the God of Abraham, this "supernatural evil" stuff seems a trifle silly to me; I just don't get it. I know that God permits evil in the world--but it's evil done by us humans--it is not supernatural. If Satan exists, he's void, in the sense of having no substance--I believe the common metaphor is say he is like a shadow. (Hmmm....shadows in Wolfe's works...not an uncommon theme. Hmmm.)

Well, Sarge, there are volcanic eruptions, and being struck by lightning and birth defects and hereditary diseases...um, to get back to the subject, in the horror *genre* if Satan or a flunky shows up he generally does have substance. You're arguing a sophisticated religious definition that goes all the way back to the Church Fathers. I'm talking pop lit, or movies. But the Shadow, yes, in context that is interesting.

But nevertheless, Dr. Talos and his play do represent apocalyptic dualism, Armagedon, Ragnarok, whatever. And it may be a mess, Sarge, but it belongs too.

I never meant to say it doesn't. Just that it's a mess, and maybe a bit of self-parody contained within the larger work.

Yes, self-parody is a good point. Something more could be made of that--one of mantis's essays.

from Mark Milman:

But I do very much like your observation on shadows.

Et moi.

Alga wrote:

Alex, you can't say that there is only Dark in Lovecraft, for opposed to that is the normal world, represented, in Hollywood versions, by pretty suburban streets. If you don't have a norm--Innsmouth or Arkham before the horrors came--where's the scare? The American Way of Life, that's the Light. At least in novels.

I'm on Alex's side. I don't think you can say that the normal world "opposes" the Dark, in a dualistic sense, because in Lovecraft's fiction the normal world is the Dark. What we think of as normality is invariably revealed to be a delusion, or merely the narrowest slice of a much bigger, scarier universe. As for "Innsmouth or Arkham before the horrors came", it's another basic tenet of the stories that the horror was there first, inhabiting this world long before humanity turned up. Any pretty suburban streets are just a part of a transient blip in reality, cosmically speaking.

I don't pretend to be a Lovecraft expert (though I have a friend who is; I'm not going to ask him about this, however) but still, you have to have a Light that has beaten the Dark back for a while, don't you? During that blip? It does seem to me that, as a generalization, Good v. Bad works pretty well for horror. You start with a norm and discover that Things Are Not What They Seem. Easy to parody. Jane Austen did it in -Mansfield Park- a long time ago.

-alga

Mike — 20 Oct 1998, 07:20 · follows Alice Turner

Howdy all,

With regard to the military effectiveness of Terminus Est...

From: "Kevin J. Maroney" <kmaroney at crossover.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) Terminus est--another military procurement fiasco?
Date: Mon, 19 Oct 1998 12:48:45 -0400
MIME-Version: 1.0
Content-Type: text/plain; charset="us-ascii"
In-Reply-To: <199810190332.UAA06718 at lists1.best.com>

At 10:29 PM 10/18/98 -0700, Robert Borski [Sgt. Rock] wrote:

I have my doubts about whether such a sword would really work, even if we ignore the structural problems of a hollow blade (it would either be weak or very thick, I think). As you swing the blade, there is little centrifugal force being exerted at the hilt, since it's moving slowly compared to the point. Thus, by the time the mercury gets to the tip end of the blade, your swing would likely have been completed (assuming the mercury gets that far at all). On the other hand, if we assume that the mercury gets there quickly, I think it would have the effect of increasing the effort required to make the swing, since you must now accelerate the mass of the mercury along with the rest of the blade.

Think about the stroke involved in beheading a prisoner. The sword is raised overhead and brought down in a smooth circle. Gravity, not the centrifugal effect, is what moves the quicksilver. As the sword passes the point at which it is horizontal to the ground, the tip becomes much heavier, and gravity brings the mercury into the tip. Thus, the lichter can raise the sword slowly and bring it down very quickly.

It would be worse in a swordfight than a standard sword, though, for all the reasons you explained:

In any case, having the balance of the blade shifting about during combat would be very undesirable. It would make the force required to move the blade unpredictable, as would be the momentum of the blade. In other words, you might not be able to stop the swing where you want it, or move the blade quickly enough to parry. The Sergeant prefers plain steel.

So my answer to your question, Robert, is that it was military surplus.

The

army got rid of the thing as soon as it could, and sold it quite cheaply.

It's a ceremonial sword of office. Who other than the torturers would want it?

The blade is inspired by an actual "weapons" (tool is more like it), the rounded tip is from French executioners blades (as used on Ann Boleyn--sp?). The internal reservoir filled with mercury comes from Chinese BCE era executioners swords. Both apparently worked quite well for their respective tasks.

Mike

Kieran Cleary — 19 Oct 1998, 10:32 · follows Mike

mike:

The blade is inspired by an actual "weapons" (tool is more like it), the rounded tip is from French executioners blades< isn't the tip of TE flat? Interesting about the Chinese swords.

Kieran C.

North West Labs
Finisklin Industrial Estate
Sligo
Republic of Ireland

Tel. +353 71 69441
Fax. +353 71 69451
email: kieranwn at tinet.ie

Peter T. Cash — 21 Oct 1998, 23:21 · follows Kieran Cleary

Mark Milman wrote:

I, Sergeant Rock, wrote this???

"How about "pagan" instead of "extra-Christian"? I don't think this darkness is anything new; perhaps after the 19th century it becomes "neo-paganism", that's all. I would argue that any work

that doesn't have a Christian dimension but does deal with supernatural evil is pagan; any dualism is strictly secondary and quite uninteresting. (I'm not saying that pagan works necessarily lack value or interest, of course.)

While I'll grant you that Islamic and Zoroastrian works aren't typically of great importance in our culture, Sergeant, I'd hesitate to suggest that Judaism is either pagan or contains Christian elements.

Well, OK, this is one of the dumbest things I've written in a long, long time. I apologize for my egregious blunder. If I keep this up, I'm going to lose my stripes. I could mumble something about having really meant "Judaean-Christian", but I'd rather pretend my dumb twin wrote that paragraph. No, I'd rather pretend that my cat wrote it.

If you want to argue that supernatural evil in Judaism is a relic of pre-Jewish Semitic paganism, I'll agree with you;

Actually, I'd be very interested in learning more about that. Where would one look to find supernatural evil in Judaism? I'm not sure I can find it in the Old Testament, though it's present in the New. Sure, you've got the talking "serpent" in the Garden, but he was just a mischievous dragon, as far as I can tell. You've got the "Accuser" in Job, but he seems part of the heavenly crowd, sort of God's prosecuting attorney. If you're talking about modern Jewish literature, then the supernatural evil couldn't possibly be a pre-Semitic survival, could it?

It's in the New Testament that you get the real Good/Evil polarity, the notion of a Judgment, and the belief that if you pass the Judgment, then eternal life is your reward. I don't even think they have the same concept of "sin" in the OT. Christ casts out demons, and speaks of an "evil one" who wants to destroy the harvest. From the fact that he spoke like this, I must assume that the concept of "Satan" was not foreign to Jews of the time. But what was its origin? Did it creep in somehow between the Old Testament and the New? This has puzzled me for a long time.

but then I'll insist that Christian supernatural evil derives from a much wider variety of assimilated and co-opted pagan sources.

Sure, Christianity did a lot of assimilating and co-opting. That's what made it so successful. As you point out, the assimilation is mostly on the level of folk-belief. However, the notion of an Evil One is pretty much part and parcel of official Christian belief, and the old devil has caused a lot of trouble for theologians.

Sergeant Rock continued:

If Satan exists, he's void, in the sense of having no substance--I believe the common metaphor is say he is like a shadow. (Hmmm....shadows in Wolfe's works...not an uncommon theme. Hmmm.)

If Satan is void and without substance, there's a strong implication that all the other members of God's heavenly hosts are as well; the book of Job makes Satan's existence, if not his exact role, quite explicit.

As I said above, I'm not certain that the Accuser in Job fits the Satanic job description. One could argue that Job is best grouped with Ecclesiastes, the Psalms and the Song of Solomon as not being the same type of literature as the Pentateuch or the Prophets--nobody sensible thinks the Song is any sort of historical narrative, for instance. But I note with respect your argument that if Satan is void, then so are the angels from among whom he fell. I'm not sure which direction I want to go on that one.

I must conclude that only my cat is sure what kind of stuff Satan is made out of. Perhaps I can get him to post again about it some time. At this point, I'll just limit myself to observing that Satan being a void is a theological necessity, otherwise you get in Big Trouble, fall prey to theological dualism, and get burned at the stake. It's sort of like the Trinity.

Sgt. Rock (almost busted to corporal again)

Alex David Groce — 22 Oct 1998, 09:51 · follows Peter T. Cash

Sgt. Rock said:

Actually, I'd be very interested in learning more about that. Where would one look to find supernatural evil in Judaism? I'm not sure I can find it in the Old Testament, though it's present in the New. Sure, you've got the talking "serpent" in the Garden, but he was just a mischievous dragon, as far as I can tell. You've got the "Accuser" in Job, but he seems part of the heavenly crowd, sort of God's prosecuting attorney. If you're talking about modern Jewish literature, then the supernatural evil couldn't possibly be a pre-Semitic survival, could it?

Hmmm... The idols of the surrounding tribes are pretty much treated as without power; I can't think of an instance where they actually do anything--although the only times they would be doing anything would be in "competition" with God and even if they were seen as actual beings or shadows of some (shadowy itself...) being they'd still be null in that case...

It's in the New Testament that you get the real Good/Evil polarity, the notion of a Judgment, and the belief that if you pass the Judgment, then eternal life is your reward. I don't even think they have the same concept of "sin" in the OT. Christ casts out demons, and speaks of an "evil one" who wants to destroy the harvest. From the fact that he spoke like this, I must assume that the concept of "Satan" was not foreign to Jews of the time. But what was its origin? Did it creep in somehow between the Old Testament and the New? This has puzzled me for a long time.

Yes. The idea was definitely present in Jewish thought by the time of Christ. I forget the pieced together developmental history, but it was also identified by that time (pre-Christian) with the serpent in the garden and the Accuser in Job. I forget though, which groups held and which didn't hold the idea.

Sure, Christianity did a lot of assimilating and co-opting. That's what made it so successful. As you point out, the assimilation is mostly on the level of folk-belief. However, the notion of an Evil One is pretty much part and parcel of official Christian belief, and the old devil has caused a lot of trouble for theologians.

Well, you'd think that would be right up his alley, wouldn't you? :)

As I said above, I'm not certain that the Accuser in Job fits the Satanic job description. One could argue that Job is best grouped with Ecclesiastes, the Psalms and the Song of Solomon as not being the same type of literature as the Pentateuch or the Prophets--nobody sensible thinks the Song is any sort of historical narrative, for instance. But I note with respect your argument that if Satan is void, then so are the angels from among whom he

fell. I'm not sure which direction I want to go on that one.

I must conclude that only my cat is sure what kind of stuff Satan is made out of. Perhaps I can get him to post again about it some time. At this point, I'll just limit myself to observing that Satan being a void is a theological necessity, otherwise you get in Big Trouble, fall prey to theological dualism, and get burned at the stake. It's sort of like the Trinity.

I think sort of the standard description would be the stuff of good, perverted by ill-will--you get into dualism if you suggest there's any other kind of stuff to be made of. Void, but active with malice. I've been trying to think of a Wolfe work with some supernatural evil in it--Abaia and Erebus don't fit the description; I think there's a faint hint of it at times in Long Sun--Mucor and the vampires aren't supernatural, but suggest it (Mucor make's me think of the kid in the Exorcist...) THE DEVIL IN A FOREST is actually the best I can come up with--the little idol. Since Wolfe thinks the Greek gods may have been some kind of beings, it's not too far out to have an idol be demonic.

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

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)
Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)
'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President
608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>

Mark Millman — 22 Oct 1998, 12:07 · follows Alex David Groce

On 22 October 1998 at 6:21 am GMT,
Sergeant Rock (Peter T. Cash) wrote:
Actually, I'd be very interested in learning
more about [supernatural evil in Judaism].
Where would one look to find supernatural
evil in Judaism? I'm not sure I can find it in
the Old Testament, though it's present in
the New. Sure, you've got the talking "ser-
pent" in the Garden, but he was just a mis-
chievous dragon, as far as I can tell. You've
got the "Accuser" in Job, but he seems part
of the heavenly crowd, sort of God's prose-
cuting attorney. If you're talking about mod-
ern Jewish literature, then the supernatural
evil couldn't possibly be a pre-Semitic sur-
vival, could it?

To which alga (Alice Turner) responded at
12:52 pm GMT:

[T]he most famous (and popular too, in the
feminist millennial crowd) supernatural He-
brew figure is Lilith, akin to the Sumerian Liltu,
and Adam's first wife. She ditched him be-
cause he insisted on the missionary position
during sex while she wanted to be on top from
time to time. (This was edited out of Genesis--
the rib story follows.) She was then demonized
into a) the mother of a huge breed of demons
b) a demon who preys on newborns. Typical
male revision. Anyway, she is quite similar to

Babylonian Jahi (literally Revelation's Whore of Babylon), whom we met in Dr. Talos's play.

And Alex David Groce added at 1:52 pm GMT:

Hmmm... The idols of the surrounding tribes are pretty much treated as without power; I can't think of an instance where they actually do anything--although the only times they would be doing anything would be in "competition" with God and even if they were seen as actual beings or shadows of some (shadowy itself...) being they'd still be null in that case...

As alga points out, the example that comes most readily to mind is Lilith. Although her story has been edited out of Genesis, it can be found in the Talmud, along with a lot of other material that was either deemed unsuitable for inclusion in the Bible or was treated as sub-canonical--folkloric materials and the like.

A good example of a being mentioned in contrast to God in the Torah is Azazel (in Leviticus 16, as part of the discussion of atonement ritual). The so-called scapegoat is a mistranslation; the Hebrew phrase "goat for Azazel" is somewhat similar to "the goat that departs or escapes", and was so rendered by William Tyndale in his 1530 Bible translation. The goat for Azazel was released into the desert carrying the sins of the people; I believe that Azazel was then supposed to consume it in some fashion. So while Azazel gets pretty short shrift, it does seem that he (a) has a function; (b) has enough substance or capability to exercise it; and (c) consumes sin. I don't know whether either ancient or modern opinion holds that the consumption of sin implies that Azazel may be evil (i.e., being evil, Azazel must feed on evil), however.

As Alex points out, most of the surrounding pagan Semitic idolatrous gods are mentioned merely as abominations or things to be avoided--Moloch falls into this category, as do Ba'al and others less well-known.

Mark Millman

Alex David Groce — 22 Oct 1998, 12:49 · follows Mark Millman

Mark Millman wrote:

A good example of a being mentioned in contrast to God in the Torah is Azazel (in Leviticus 16, as part of the discussion of atonement ritual). The so-called scapegoat is a mistranslation; the Hebrew

phrase "goat for Azazel" is somewhat similar to "the goat that departs or escapes", and was so rendered by William Tyndale in his 1530 Bible translation. The goat for Azazel was released into the desert carrying the sins of the people; I believe that Azazel was then supposed to consume it in some fashion. So while Azazel gets pretty short shrift, it does seem that he (a) has a function; (b) has enough substance or capability to exercise it; and (c) consumes sin. I don't know whether either ancient or modern opinion holds that the consumption of sin implies that Azazel may be evil (i.e., being evil, Azazel must feed on evil), however.

Ah. It's Azazel I was trying to think of--a most mysterious being. I don't know a lot about the ancient context, but I know Azazel now is usually used as a symbol of evil. For instance, read Walker Percy's "The Thanatos Syndrome." If I'm correct, either that mention or later discussion talks of the place where Azazel dwelt as the ultimate waste, barren and (fairly literally) God-forsaken. I think Azazel is definitely represented as a real, alien entity (to men), and there is at least an implication of evil.

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

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)
Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)
'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President
608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>

Michael Straight — 22 Oct 1998, 17:17 · follows Alex David Groce

On Wed, 21 Oct 1998, Peter T. Cash wrote:

Actually, I'd be very interested in learning more about that. Where would one look to find supernatural evil in Judaism? I'm not sure I can find it in the Old Testament, though it's present in the New.

Is it only in Christian tradition that Daniel 10 is interpreted as evidence of supernatural battles between good angels and evil angels?

Daniel has a vision of an angelic being who says to him:

"Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13, KJV).

I know some Christian traditions interpret these "princes" as supernatural beings (I think this is the passage from which some Charismatics get the concept of "territorial spirits"), but I don't know if this counts as an example of Jewish belief in supernatural evil or if that interpretation only comes along with Christian cosmology.

Now that I think about it, there is another example.

In Genesis 6:4 where it talks about "sons of God" bearing children with "daughters of men" there was, before the Christian era, a Jewish tradition that these "sons of God" were evil spirits and that it was by way of these evil spirits (rather than from some "original sin" of Adam, an

idea that I don't think really took hold until St. Augustine) that evil entered the human race. I'm afraid the only citation I have for this is a passing mention in an essay on the doctrine of original sin.

In both these examples, of course, evil spirits are subordinate to God ("sons of God", fighting God's agents rather than God himself), so they do not appear to be instances of dualism in Jewish thought.

-Rostrum

Alex David Groce — 22 Oct 1998, 17:55 · follows Michael Straight

Michael Straight wrote:

Is it only in Christian tradition that Daniel 10 is interpreted as evidence of supernatural battles between good angels and evil angels?

Daniel has a vision of an angelic being who says to him:

"Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia" (Daniel 10:12-13, KJV).

These are sometimes known as the "genius" of a particular people, are they not? It seems to me that Wolfe has commented on these, although I'll be darned if I know where, and I may be confusing him with someone else (a likely suspects would be Russell Kirk). Anybody else recall this?

Now that I think about it, there is another example.

In Genesis 6:4 where it talks about "sons of God" bearing children with "daughters of men" there was, before the Christian era, a Jewish tradition that these "sons of God" were evil spirits and that it was by way of these evil spirits (rather than from some "original sin" of Adam, an idea that I don't think really took hold until St. Augustine) that evil entered the human race. I'm afraid the only citation I have for this is a passing mention in an essay on the doctrine of original sin.

Well, maybe fleshed out by St. Augustine--I think it's present in good old St. Paul. If the Epistle to the Romans (and Hebrews--though Paul may not have been responsible for this one) doesn't contain something like the doctrine of original sin ("Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come."--Romans 5:14, KJV) I'll eat my hat, and Karl Barth has even less of a leg to stand on than I thought. As to these sons of God, Wolfe once suggested they were the Neanderthals. R. A. Lafferty is practically obsessed with them (and also seems to equate them with Neanderthals). In general, those passages are some of the weirdest and wooliest of the OT, and what's really going on here is anybody's guess.

In both these examples, of course, evil spirits are subordinate to God ("sons of God", fighting God's agents rather than God himself), so they do not appear to be instances of dualism in Jewish thought.

Well, the NT "dualism" is only real dualism interpreted one (I'd say the wrong) way. The orthodox idea of Satan falls well short of full-fledged dualism (as Sgt. Rock points out, he's a shadow), although he is used in a dualist sense in fiction all the time. By everyone from great

writers (Hawthorne to some extent) to modern day horror hacks.

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

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)

Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)

'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President

608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366

<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>