

Adam and Atom

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 01 Apr 1999

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m.driussi — 01 Apr 1999, 15:38

Roy,

The focus on the play and its authorship seems to place it entirely in the realm of fiction.

Maybe it is more like the Periodical Table of Elements. A document describing real and hypothetical things, however hampered by the language and understanding of the time.

Who authored the elements? Well, nobody mortal--they were uncovered (in a way we can no longer say continents were "discovered") by various people at various times. Why does the earliest version differ so much from the latest version? Further refinement. Now that we have the Table and atomic theory, as we cast our eyes back to the ancient Greeks it seems like some of them were very close to the Truth as we now know it--did =they= discover it and then lose it? No, they did not, but they were among the pioneers who began the process by which the Table came into being.

My point being that the play is a Truth (Briah/Yesod, the whole deal) rendered in terms that its illiterate audience can grasp in some way, shape, or form, at one entertaining sitting.

As for the universe of the hard choice, or "why Urth must be destroyed so that Ushas can be created." That is the central point of the entire Urth Cycle, after all. While we might all wish for the rivers of milk and honey of the New Jerusalem in =this= universe, skypeie for everyone in the here and now with no guilt and no regrets, still the text resists such utopia. But it isn't as if Severian doesn't =try=: for example, in the lazaret at the front, Severian suddenly tries to heal everybody at once.

The Claw shuts down.

What this means =exactly= depends upon several factors, including how you interpret the Claw (dumb object or intelligent other) and/or the nature of healing it provides (it seems to leach from Severian's life force--thus, it might be physically impossible for him to heal a whole tent full: it would kill him and make them feel only slightly better. The Claw as circuit breaker.). But here is one case where Severian tries and is thwarted.

Without getting religious about it, the text also makes it quite plain that death is not a terminus; so, not in anyway to diminish the grimness of the Flood, nor to shy away from the "Anti-christ" aspects of Severian; but still--who weeps for the countless krill eaten by the whale?

Again, we are talking about a fiction. The best fiction involves Conflict. Tragedies involve Suffering and Sacrifice. Utopias are inherently Boring. Easy Solutions are Not Satisfying.

=mantis=

Roy C. Lackey — 03 Apr 1999, 19:19 · follows m.driussi

On 4-1-99 mantis wrote:

<snip>

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Thanks for your response. I wasn't looking for a happily-ever-after ending. It's just that, once the god-like powers of the agents of Yesod over space and time that are postulated in the texts are granted, then almost anything is possible. Severian pines for Thecla throughout the Urth cycle. Death is no obstacle, as you say. He can have her, as an eidolon, as she was at his "trial" and as he himself becomes. He can go back and save and know his mother. He can have things any way he wants, apparently just because he's "special". If the agents of Yesod were unwilling (but certainly able) to do those things for Severian, he, at the pinnacle of his powers brought by the New Sun, was able to do it for himself. He can work miracles. He can walk the Corridors of Time. So why doesn't he? He, conveniently for Wolfe, never seems to think of these things.

The Hierodules bow down to Severian. Why? He wouldn't even be on my long list of candidates for world savior. The only reason given in the text is his "perfect memory". When did that become a criterion for saviors, much less the supreme one? Severian is a thoroughly despicable lout, cruel, callous, stupid, woefully ignorant, a murderer, and has the morals of a dog. Eata was a better man; he could rise above his upbringing and leave it behind. Severian never does. Jonas was a better man, and he wasn't even a man. Severian is blown about like a tumbleweed all through the Urth cycle, seldom in control of his own life for any length of time, a perpetual victim of circumstances. In that, he is very like Green of There Are Doors, but without Green's innocence.

Roy

Alex David Groce — 04 Apr 1999, 01:40 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Apr 3, 7:19pm, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Yes and no. Severian perfect saviour? Definitely not. (Hence Wolfe's various denials that Sev. is exactly a Christ figure.) But... Sure Severian is often a lout, and unlike Silk, the reader won't necessarily come to even

-like- him. On the other hand, as I think PEACE and BOTNS would suggest, Wolfe probably doesn't see Severian as an anti-hero, but as like a real man. In this, I think there's a point--not

an anti-hero, but a dark everyman. Wolfe protagonists are often murderous, cold, confused, or mad--from "Seven American Nights" to "The Death of Dr. Island" to "The Doctor of Death Island" to "Tracking Song." Sure, there are innocents--Tib in "The Eyeflash Miracles," and in a more complex but essentially innocent portrait, Silk (I very much like Alga's comparison to Dostoyevsky's Myshkin). But in general, Wolfe tends to focus on very flawed characters. A prime example would be the man in "The Ziggurat."

However, I don't think he means us to reject these figures--rather, to see ourselves in them, with veins of dark and light. A picture of a (to sue the religious terms that are relevant) sinful but redeemable man. And I think it's clear that there IS moral growth in Severian throughout the BOTNS. The final talk with Palaemon, in my opinion, establishes that for the pre-Urth Severian, at least.

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

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Michael Straight — 05 Apr 1999, 16:59 · follows Alex David Groce

On Sun, 4 Apr 1999, Alex David Groce wrote:

On Apr 3, 7:19pm, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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You make a good case for why Wolfe would write about someone like Severian, but I'm not sure it answers the question of why the Hierodules would choose Severian as a savior.

Are you suggesting they have a similar agenda? Perhaps Tad has a wager with with Satan?
"Betcha I can even make a saint out of this guy." "A torturer? No way--yer on."

-Rostrum