

Jonas

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 26 May 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1644>

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Robert Borski — 26 May 1999, 13:29

Because it's been slow lately, I hereby offer UNDINES Excerpt 6:

Cyborg Jonas, like so many of the characters in *New Sun*, represents a composite figure, being in part based on Hans Christian Anderson's "The Tin Soldier," and in part on L. Frank Baum's Tin Woodsman. But what about Jonas's human side? Are there archetypes or literary forebears that Wolfe draws upon to amplify this aspect of his character? I believe there are, and that each, while incorporating the notion of wandering as expiation, plays off Severian's Christlike persona. For in many respects, Jonas, who has been traveling up and down the seven continents of the world, looking to reconnect with the Hierodules, and "tinkering with clumsy mechanisms," embodies the figure of Ahasuerus the Wandering Jew. Ahasuerus, we recall, was alleged to have mocked Christ on his journey to Calvary and was therefore condemned to wander the earth until the Second Coming. Severian, representing Christ, has not only come again, but been befriended by Ahasuerus/Jonas--an act of redemption by the latter that finally liberates him from exile; like Dorothy now, he can return home, and does so via Father Inire's mirrors.

But Jonas's admission about "tinkering with clumsy devices" also recalls the Gypsies--aka *tinkers*--who according to legend have been condemned to eternal wandering because they provided the nails for Christ's crucifixion. Given as well the Gypsies' traditional association with metalworking, is it possible the grinder who at one time attempts to sharpen Terminus Est is somehow connected with Jonas? The grinder, who has been encountered by Severian and Dorcas north of Thrax, is part of a "caravan of tinkers and peddlers," but becomes frightened when he lifts the mercury-filled blade. Now recall Severian's words when he first attempts to do the same: "She shifted as though I wrestled a serpent." Or to put it another way, *as if the metal were alive.* Could this then be Wolfe at his most ironic, hinting that this peripatetic tinker who's afraid of "living metal" is somehow related to cyborg Jonas, who also embodies living metal? A further connection might be found in Miles's razor, which Severian describes as "one of those little blades that country people use, razors their smiths grind from the halves of worn oxshoes." It may even have been made by the aforesaid tinker. Yet another possibility still: the grinder may be the human killed when Jonas's landing ship crashes, and from whom he harvests his organic parts. But how can this be? Hasn't the crash in question taken place in the past, thereby vitiating this supposition? Not necessarily. For isn't Jonas, a former servitor of the Hierodules, from Yesod? And wouldn't his sense of time, like that of his creators, run counter to ours? This would allow for Jonas/Sidero to have crashed in the future, harvested what he needed from the killed tinker, and then lived his life backwards (at least from our frame of reference) until the point he encounters Severian, who assists him in his quest to return home, thereby ending his long period of exile.

Ahasuerus, in other words, apparently never read Thomas Wolfe.

Robert Borski

Michael Straight — 26 May 1999, 16:36 · follows Robert Borski

On Wed, 26 May 1999, Robert Borski wrote:

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Perhaps the best Wolfe-fan-fiction Mr. Borski has written to date.

-Rostrum

Michael Andre-Driussi — 26 May 1999, 14:16 · follows Michael Straight

Robert Borski,

But how can this be? Hasn't the crash in question taken place in the past, thereby vitiating this supposition? Not necessarily. For isn't Jonas, a former servitor of the Hierodules, from Yesod? And wouldn't his sense of time, like that of his creators, run counter to ours? This would allow for Jonas/Sidero to have crashed in the future, harvested what he needed from the killed tinker, and then lived his life backwards (at least from our frame of reference) until the point he encounters Severian, who assists him in his quest to return home, thereby ending his long period of exile.

Well, this reading moves very far away from or around the evidence (however one wants to interpret said evidence) found in the antechamber. That is, if Jonas is somehow or other related to the crash-prisoners ("that name was common in lands where I was young"), and they have been living in the chamber for umpteen generations after their crash (even assuming there is a difference between "their" crash and "his" crash) . . . well.

Re: living backwards in time. While I myself often write of Yesod timeflow as going in a direction "opposite" that of Briah, I tend to think that visitors to either universe go with the local flow: Severian does not begin regressing toward foetushood in Yesod; O, B, & F do not consume waste and excrete foodstuffs <g>. More to the point: the time travel employed by O, B, & F seems to be via the flying saucer; they are not living backwards in time, they are travelling back to a point (Severian's court), then living in realtime (his reign on Urth); then travelling back to a more distant point, then visiting (Baldanders) in realtime; and so on.

Then again, yes, I agree that Jonas has elements of the Wandering Jew about him, and this aspect is nicely solved when he steps into the mirrors after having met with Severian.

Finally, for my own purposes I decided that the second class of androids, the smaller ones like Jonas, would have names based on a metal different than Iron; so I thought "make it Silver" with the idea that they were higher ranking/non combatant types. Copper, Brass, Bronze, etc., might also apply (they carry connotations of degrees of value; which Iron does not)--but since Jonas's metal is silvery, I thought Silver good enough.

Of course, this "Silver class" concept dovetails with the Wandering Jew aspect, too . . .

=mantis=