

Ziggurat as Delusion or SF

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 05 Feb 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2117>

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Dennis G. Berdanis — 05 Feb 2000, 17:44

I've read a lot of the interesting posts concerning the *incest* slant, and they definitely make me think. It's interesting to look back on things like the twins hiding from that perspective and see things differently than when you read the story the first time.

From the incest standpoint the scenes I see differently.

1. One twin hiding in the chimney and one under the bed. The aliens/girls attacking Emery with no apparent reason and biting him. Even shooting him in the first place.
2. Brook died in the initial battle. Jan confronted Emery about the abuse, she ended up grabbing the rifle and didn't know how to work it, Brook grabbed it and knocked Jan out but was shot and died. All of the later discussions with Brook, had Brook praising Emery (if my memory is correct) "You handled that so well" type convos. That would be part of Emery's delusion.
3. The twin having her own delusion to explain away the abuse. The aliens made me take off all my clothes, etc.

What I am more interested in, however, are people's opinions if this is truly a sf story.

1. What caused our future society to abandon men and only allow female births? Would it be the traditional "Men destroyed the world and can't be allowed to do it again. Women would never do that?" That would explain the women's fear of men. I believe there was a new Outer Limits episode a few years back that dealt with women experimenting with allowing men back into society in the future and deciding against it. The handful of men corrupted the women, so no more were cloned.
2. Why would this future society of women be so prone to violence? I can understand them robbing the cabin and vehicles to repair their ship. Why would they be so determined to shoot anything they didn't understand? Why would they force the twin to go to their ship and strip down then return her? For her eggs as other's have speculated?

These questions apply no matter which viewpoint of the story is taken.

1. Why did Emery keep saying the coyote was killed with a cyanide gun. What is a cyanide gun exactly? How would he know it was killed with this type of gun unless he did it?]
2. Is it proper to call a place to store a dead body a bier? I kept expecting Emery to give his son and the coyote a viking funeral and torch them, but he only stored them yet called it a bier.
3. What were Emery's plans for the coyote. I never understood, other than Wolfe symbolism, what plans Emery could have for the frozen coyote body?

Thanks for any comments. Enjoyable read. Very thought provoking.

Dennis/Endy

Alex David Groce — 06 Feb 2000, 11:03 · follows Dennis G. Berdanis

Dennis G. Berdanis asked some questions, I think I can answer a few:

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Hard to say what precisely caused it--however, the idea is not new to Wolfe-- "In Looking Glass Castle" and "Many Mansions" both involve future female-only societies. In general, I think Wolfe's take on such societies is that they are indicative of a terrible failure of humanity to deal with its nature.

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I think part of this is Wolfe's sly way of pointing out that men and women all _that_ different: the "Brownies" aren't pacifistic or over-trusting, and their behavior (intentionally I suspect) calls to mind the paranoid and panic stricken behavior of a lot of crews of crashed spaceships in alien territory over the history of sf. Remember: presumably at some point, their society CHOSE to eliminate men, so Emory is an almost mythical monster from the past in their eyes.

1. Why did Emory keep saying the coyote was killed with a cyanide gun. What is a cyanide gun exactly? How would he know it was killed with this type of gun unless he did it?]

I finally looked this up on the web. I'd heard the term before and knew it was some kind of animal trap, but couldn't remember the specifics:

"Also introduced in the 1940s was a revolutionary, deadly new predator weapon. The "coyote getter" is a pistol cartridge-powered cyanide gun that shoots a puff of deadly sodium cyanide dust into the mouth of any carnivore, omnivore, or carrion-eater that tugs on its scented wick. On contact with the moisture in the animal's mouth (or eyes, or wherever it hits) gas is released and the animal is gassed to death (or blinded). A highly effective killer, the coyote getter quickly gained widespread use. Eventually it was usurped by a newer model, the spring loaded "M-44" coyote getter, which is still used today. Over the years coyote getters have killed countless thousands of predators, non-target animals, and even a few humans."
(<http://http://arrrs.envirolink.org/ar-voices/eyeeye.html>)

Emory can tell because presumably the coyote is still beside the trap. THIS is, as far as I can tell, all that's involved in Emory's "killing" the coyote. He taught it not to fear human smell and so it took the bait.

3. What were Emory's plans for the coyote. I never understood, other than Wolfe symbolism, what plans Emory could have for the frozen coyote body?

He wanted to give it a proper burial, as with his son. He felt (rightly, but in a limited sense) responsible for its death.

It's (in part) Emory's empathy for the coyote and his feeling of responsibility at its death that makes it hard for me to swallow the "Emory is damned" (see Nicholas Gevers' "Three readings") interpretations of this story. "Follow the Wolfe" for me does not lead to Emory as delusional or evil.

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

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William H. Ansley — 06 Feb 2000, 23:56 · follows Alex David Groce

Alex David Groce <Alex_Groce at gs246.sp.cs.cmu.edu> wrote:
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This supports my opinion that Emory's claim that he killed the coyote is completely absurd, for at least two reasons.

1. Coyotes have become, in most places, quite adept at living with humans. They eat livestock and garbage and have even been reported to attack small dogs. There is no reason to suppose that a coyote today would fear human scent.
2. Even if we ignore point one, coyote getters have been used very successfully for decades. Either the people who set them know how to disguise their scent effectively or coyotes take the bait, despite the human scent.

Emory, for whatever reason, wants to feel responsible for the coyote's death, even though such a feeling is completely unreasonable.

Or, if we accept the "Maximum Delusion" hypothesis, Emory says he killed the coyote because

he actually did kill it directly (with gun or axe, perhaps) and he is hallucinating the cyanide gun sequence to assuage his guilt, but he can't escape it completely.

I have to say, however, that if Wolfe really intended the "Maximum Delusion" reading of the story to be an "equally valid" one, then I wish he hadn't written it in the first place.

William Ansley

Jim Jordan — 10 Feb 2000, 13:09 · follows William H. Ansley

At 11:56 PM 2/6/00 -0500, you wrote:

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William Ansley

I really don't think we have to credit it. The motivation for this reading in the first place was to "deliver" Wolfe from the "scandal" of writing a story that is "negative" about women. A better reading shows this is not a real problem. The Max Del reading just does not work with the facts of the story as they are presented. Parallels between the three women and the three women, of course, are present.

I think Gevers has done a good job, in general, of pointing to ambiguities in the story. I just don't think this particular approach is valid.

Nutria