

Dr. Talos' Play

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 16 Nov 1997

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CRCulver — 16 Nov 1997, 15:33

Friends,

Has there ever been a serious study of the myriad themes and elaborate symbolism in the play of Dr. Talos in Claw of the Conciliator? I've read it several times over, yet still cannot understand the symbolic qualities of certain roles. All in all, however, the play is a work genius, but the arcane style eludes me.

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"Ignorance, that light of fools steers a wayward path"
-Brendan Perry

Tony Ellis — 19 Nov 1997, 09:22 · follows CRCulver

19/11/97

09:09

RE>Dr. Talos' Play

Christopher R. Culver wrote:

Has there ever been a serious study of the myriad themes and elaborate symbolism in the play of Dr. Talos in Claw of the Conciliator?

No, so let's start one!

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certain roles.

I'm not sure that we're supposed to look for any deep symbolism in the characters of the play. This is a story about the end of one world and the beginning of a new one, and in that sense the play as a whole "symbolises" Severian's story - as the opening lines of the chapter say, it is based on the lost "Book of the New Sun". Interestingly, we don't actually get to the incidents dramatised in the play until "The Urth of the New Sun".

As we might expect from a play called "Eschatology and Genesis", this is also a re-telling of the Genesis story. The Biblical Genesis story is itself a re-telling of earlier Sumerian genesis stories, as I'm sure Wolfe knows. There is even a throwaway reference to a Greek genesis myth: in Greek mythology the survivors of the flood are told to repopulate the world by throwing stones (the bones of Mother Earth) over their shoulders, and in the play we have:

MESCHIANE: It might come to life. I heard something once about raising sons from stones.

The names Meschia and Meschiane... I have an idea that these are the names of Adam and Eve

in another (Hebrew?) genesis myth. Any ideas?

A lot of stories didn't make it into the collection of texts we know as the Bible, but have just the same provenance. These can be found in the Apocrypha, and one of them is the story of Lilith - Adam's first, discarded wife, today a byword for a demonic seductress. In the play, this is clearly Jahi.

Nod, the giant, is one of the Nephilim. Go back to the Biblical Genesis story and you'll find the Nephilim described as the offspring of angels and the "Sons of God" - one of those little details which reminds us that this story originated as Sumerian creation myth. Who were the Sons of God? Nobody knows for sure, but they obviously have no place in the conventional Christian universe.

I have plenty more to say, but no more time... I look forward to everyone else's input!

m.driussi — 20 Nov 1997, 02:15 · follows Tony Ellis

Reply: Item #0905837 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET00#

A few quick notes (because I just can't stop myself):

1) I say the play has seven acts and they probably describe a divine week, with the final act coming on (New) Sunday. The Autarch is Saturn (Saturday); Jahi is Venus (Friday); and so on. We never see the last act of the play, which is too bad, but it would be an interesting exercise to "reconstruct" it from the reality of deluge Urth/post-deluge Ushas.

2) alga has said before that the play is more about the =Persian= creation myth than either the Hebrew or Sumerian. (Does Sumer have Titan-like Nephilim? I don't recall offhand, unless those shadowy "judge" characters of the underworld who never really appear in the main stories.)

3) I think the play is quite gnostic at the mythic level; I think it shows a lot of the dynamic between Severian and women (especially Agia and Dorcas, who really are Lilith and Eve) at the psychological level; I think it is constantly being acted out in the course of all five books.

=mantis=