

Dr. Talos' Pl

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 20 Nov 1997

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Tony Ellis — 20 Nov 1997, 15:19

20/11/97

15:28

RE>(urth) Re: Dr. Talos' Play

Mantis wrote:

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.

Nice idea, but I don't see anything in the books to support such an elaborate scheme. More importantly, it actually contradicts what Severian tells us. He never suggests that the play is divided into acts at all, and the script given in Claw of the Conciliator certainly doesn't begin "Act I Scene i" or anything.

We never see
the last act of the play, which is too bad,

Again, I have to disagree. There are a number of passages in the books which strongly suggest that what we see of the play is all there is. In Chapter XXXII of Shadow, Severian says that "In the final part" he holds court as inquisitor over the rest of the cast, while Baldanders slowly frees himself. This is precisely the final part of the play as given in the Claw of the Conciliator script.

After Baldanders frees himself in the performance in Shadow, Dr Talos tells the audience "at the conclusion of our play you will see what occurs now that the monster is free at last" again suggesting that the really isn't much more to come.

Finally, in Claw, Severian prefaces the play at the end of Chapter XXIII, saying that he wants to give an "approximation of the text". That doesn't sound like someone who's going to break off part way through for no readily apparent reason.

What makes us feel that the play is incomplete is that it invariably ends with Baldanders leaping into the audience and everyone still in peril on stage! But I think this is still part of the play, and still part of the play's curious mirroring of the Book of the New Sun story. Here I agree with Mantis:

I think it is constantly being acted out in the course of all
five books.

When Baldanders breaks his bonds, Severian, in character, fights him. This fight recurs all through the books, from Severian's dream to the actual fight at the end of Lictor. I suspect it also symbolises Severian's overall fight against Darkness as the New Sun: he fights Baldanders with a torch.

It's significant, too, that he is playing a torturer at the time: we are told later that humanity can only be saved through pain. (Wolfe also says this, in Castle of the Otter.)

The fight to save humanity is millennial, perhaps never-ending. How else can the play end but on a knife-edge, with the New Sun battling Darkness and everything still in doubt?

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;

Interesting point. (Although I take it "Agia" is a typo for Jolenta!) Severian is protective of Meschiane, but tempted by Jahi, etc etc.

Michael Straight — 20 Nov 1997, 15:01 · follows Tony Ellis

On 20 Nov 1997, Tony Ellis wrote:

What makes us feel that the play is incomplete is that it invariably ends with Baldanders leaping into the audience and everyone still in peril on stage! But I think this is still part of the play, and still part of the play's curious mirroring of the Book of the New Sun story. Here I agree with Mantis:

Also, isn't there some mention when Severian first meets Talos and the rest of the acting troupe that ALL of Dr. Talos's plays end with Baldanders leaping out and frightening the audience so that they will run away and, ideally, drop some of their valuables for the troupe to scarf up?

Perhaps Mantis's speculations about the play are more appropriately thought of as concerning the Urthian works of literature and/or drama from which Dr. Talos's play undoubtedly descends.

-Rostrum