

Copperheaded Lilith

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 May 2001

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Roy C. Lackey — 09 May 2001, 03:20

Here is my spin on "Copperhead". As others have mentioned, the "boys" mentioned by the naked woman are, indeed, Cain and Abel, as well as the murdered man and his murderer in the story's version of our modern world. As is all too characteristic of Wolfe's characters, the NP isn't paying attention when he ought to be, even though the woman was answering the question he had just asked her. She was telling him about the place where she came from, which was the OT book of Genesis. As Wolfe usually does when he retells a story from mythology, or elsewhere, he twists the story to suit his purposes. The boys the woman mentioned were literally Cain and Abel. As both Endymion and Paul Duggan have noted before me, the difficult phrase "Vhas a grouse.", I translate as "[He] Was a grouse." In American slang, a grouse is a person who habitually complains. She was referring to Adam, and she is, as mantis intimated, Lilith.

When the NP, in his new-found Pride at the Power of his position, inadvertently pressed a button on the Changer and exchanged the copperhead snake in the leaves for its cognate in The Garden, he got Lilith, Adam's first wife, who represents Sin, in general, and Lust, specifically. The irony is that when Lilith grabbed the Changer and pressed the button, *she* exchanged the NP for the old Adam she disdained, who "grunted" over her, who is the very tall man at the end of the story. And he is a man, not God; Wolfe conflates the biblical passages alluded to so that it is the new Adam who does both the cursing and who "shall crush your head under my heel."

I'll leave it to Nutria or Alex to expand on the religious ramifications.

-Roy

Michael Straight — 09 May 2001, 08:38 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Wed, 9 May 2001, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Although I'm not sure how (if?) it fits with the creation narratives in Genesis, the Lilith myth seems to take place before the Fall. There is a tradition that before the Fall, humanity and all of nature were different, more glorious. This accounts for Adam's godlike appearance, his authority to condemn Lilith, and for the weirdness of the place where the new President ends up; he's in the unfallen Eden where the trees sing and the the ram's horns make music.

-Rostrum