

Dr Talos's Play

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Nov 1997

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Tony Ellis — 24 Nov 1997, 08:26

24/11/97

09:13

RE>Dr Talos's Play

Paul C Duggan wrote (re raising sons from stones):

I had originally thought that that was a reference to Jesus words about being able to raise up stones as sons of abraham...

Actually, that makes just as much sense as my theory. I wonder which is right?

Re Nephilim:

Huh? Part of the Bible but not the "christian universe"? I guess most assume they perished in the flood (except for grendels mother :-).

Christianity teaches that there was only one Son of God. And as for perishing in the flood... if the Son of God can walk on water, then why not the Sons? :-)

CRCulver wrote:

LOL, look up Nephilim in "The Devil's Dictionary," that wonderful satire by Ambrose Bierce, and you'll see that you and that definition agree in opinion.

Sadly I don't have a copy. Care to share this definition with Paul C Duggan and I?

Mantis wrote:

Re: the length of the play and the completeness of the drama we are shown. First off, please count the number of times the stage direction "stage darkens" appears--this traditionally indicates the end of one "act" and the beginning of the next "act."

It also indicates the division between one "scene" and the next "scene", which is what I would call these divisions. An "act" normally consists of a number of scenes, these do not, but each changes the locale.

...I count five, myself, but I also think the play has been cut off: so six acts, at least.

Ironically, if the divisions are acts, five would be an appropriate number. Horace established the five-act play, and it became the model for Renaissance drama, which Dr Talos's play resembles more than any other kind.

In any event, I still don't see any justification for extrapolating a symbolic "divine week", I'm afraid.

However, let me confess that in doing a little more research to defend my theory that what we see of the play is all there is, I instead found evidence which shoots my theory down in flames! In the chapter in Claw that follows the play, Severian says that what what was supposed to

happen at the point Baldanders broke free was that "Baldanders would rest the flambaux from me, pretend to break my back, and so end the scene." This indicates, I can't deny it, that there are indeed more scenes to come.

Mantis goes on to say, with some justification:

Second, if this =really= is all the play that there is, then how do you explain the presence of the following characters in the list preceeding the play: Angelic Beings, The New Sun, The Old Sun, The Moon?

I can't, Mantis, and I should have spotted this - but then, neither do you explain why Severian ends his transcript where he does. Or why, in Shadow, Severian describes as "the final part" of the play a scene that is precisely the final scene of the transcript. If the play doesn't end here, why is Severian saying it does?

The simplest explanation I can come up with (apart from the one in which Gene Wolfe fails to proof the final draft of Claw properly) is that Severian is talking about the play =as it was performed= rather than as it existed as a whole. The play the peasants saw ended with Baldanders breaking free, and so, by mischance, does the play the House Absolute sees, so this is the play Severian reports to us. He does say, in Chapter XXIV of Claw, that he wants to record the play "as it might have been recorded by some diligent clerk in the audience." And what we get is indeed the play that clerk would have seen.

"How else can the play end but on a knife-edge, with the New Sun battling Darkness and everything else still in doubt?"

Uh, is this a trick question? <g> It can end with the triumph of the New Sun, naturally! Be careful--you are assigning allegorical qualities to a play already steeped in mythos: the battle at the truncation is not between "the New Sun" (a character on the list who has not yet appeared in the play--though he probably was spotted by the countessa) and "Darkness" (a character who does not exist in the play); rather, it is between the Familiar (a torturer) played by a torturer and Nod (a titan who would retake the throne of Zeus) played by a titan who would retake the throne of Zeus

It seems hardly fair of you, Mantis, to criticise my reading of the battle as overly allegorical when actually I'm making your own point that the play "is constantly being acted out in the course of all five books." Of course "Darkness" and "the New Sun" don't appear in the play as characters, but they are still the main contenders in the Book of the New Sun story on which the play is based. I could just as easily criticise your critique for bringing in "Zeus" when he manifestly doesn't exist in the play.

I think we have to see the play as two plays: the Whole Play, which exists mainly in Dr Talos's head (but also "on the fragments of soiled paper we passed from hand to hand that afternoon"), and the Performed Play the play that is actually enacted. The Whole Play may have any number of additional scenes, we just don't know, but the Performed Play is the one Wolfe shows us, and for that reason, I think, the one we are supposed to think about.