

Yet more playfulness

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 Nov 1997

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Tony Ellis — 25 Nov 1997, 10:17

25/11/97

09:46

Yet more playfulness

Alga wrote:

Note that there will be a mirror in V, when Odilo, Pega and Thetis take on Meschia, Meschiane and Jahi.

Hmmm. I can see your point that at the end of Urth of the New Sun the dead Odilo, Pega and Thetis have been deified as, loosely speaking, Earth Father, Earth Mother and Jahi figures. But are you saying that that Odilo and Pega have actually assumed the Meschia, Meschiane roles? In the last minutes of the House Absolute we learn that a naked man and woman have been spotted in the gardens: surely these are Meschia and Meschiane?

Possibly I'm taking you too literally, in which case - sorry!

Mantis wrote:

...If Severian leans too heavily upon the play when he is going through the real thing, then he is just a puppet of a pre-determined Fate; if he willfully ignores the play as he transforms the world, then he is a fool of Free Will.

Agreed. This is why I felt (and still feel) that the play ending with Severian battling Baldanders with a flaming torch is highly significant. Although in one sense Severian's success as bringer of the New Sun is pre-determined (hey, it's been on its way for the last x thousand years), in another sense it really is still in doubt. However the play is supposed to end, the fact that it always breaks off here, at a moment of conflict, reflects this uncertainty.

The same thing is going on to a much greater extent in a third text which is shrouded in such crafty silence that most readers do not know that it was read in the cell by Thecla and Severian: the original, "long lost" work (that Dr. Talos has also apparently seen), (Canog's) THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN. (No, I didn't figure this one out, despite the clues--I only learned it in an essay by Wolfe in PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING.)

Now this is interesting! Presumably this is the old theory that one of the unnamed books Severian brings for Thecla is in fact the Book of the New Sun? I've always thought this was daft: why would Thecla ask for a "long lost" book from the library? It's like asking a travel agent for holiday brochures on Atlantis.

Haven't read PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING. Are you saying that in so many words Wolfe actually says that this is the case? What are the "clues"? Please elaborate!

I think both are important--and often times, in Wolfe's fiction, things hinted yet =not= said are very important.

Quite right, of course. If I was being over-zealous in championing the Performed Play, it's because of the importance I think the battle it ends upon has, as noted above.

m.driussi — 25 Nov 1997, 16:24 · follows Tony Ellis

Reply: Item #8207739 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INTERNET#

Tony Ellis,

Re: significance of withholding ending. Absolutely--I mean, even Severian might balk if he was told up front he would have to =die= on the ship in order to succeed!

Re: "holiday brochures on Atlantis," well it might be that way, but I took it more as being a case that Thecla, finding herself on death row, suddenly got religious and wanted a copy of the bible in a land that has more or less forgotten the bible. I assume that she had received a certain amount of instruction from her tutors, and/or perhaps her parents (her father died years before, it turns out).

"Briefly, in the time before Ymar was Autarch, when the sun had begun to cool, there appeared on Urth a man now called the Conciliator, an intercessor and mediator who healed the sick and attempted to teach the people; his stories form what is now called THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN . . . "

"The fourth book [in the cell with Thecla], as the astute reader will have guessed long ago, is THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN itself"--Gene Wolfe, "Books in THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN," PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING p. 15.

=mantis=