

Mystery Play?

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Nov 1997

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Gordon Brain — 25 Nov 1997, 19:51

I tend to agree with Mantis that the full play is not shown. The dramatis personae are listed in order of appearance. The fact that Angelic Beings, New Sun, Old Sun & Moon are at the end of the list but have not yet appeared on stage, implies that they are due to be seen in a subsequent (and possibly last) scene.

Baldander's actions at the end of the first performance may well have been planned by Dr.Talos in order to acquire 'dropsies' from the audience, but the indications are that this was not meant to happen at the House Absolute. Severian states as much, and describes how the scene was meant to end. Note he says 'end the scene', not end the play. The logic of the subject matter also implies that the play is meant to end with the coming of the New Sun and Urth's rebirth (hence the back to front title: Eschatology and Genesis).

My first reactions on reading about the play were that it reminded me of a medieval Mystery Play. These were performed out of doors, with scenes mounted on a wagon-stage. Their subjects were usually biblical, including The Creation, The Fall & Redemption Of Man, The Last Judgement and so on. God, archangels, devils were portrayed, usually by males but with the occasional nude female as Eve or Bathsheba. They were in the vernacular with no attempts at historical realism and were apparently often witty and satirical. In other words popular entertainment of their time. I think that this is the kind of effect that Wolfe has recreated here, but with ideas and symbolism relevant to the future age.

There was also a tradition of Morality Plays, in which the characters were abstractions such as The World, The Flesh and The Devil, Universal Wisdom and Death. There are similarities here with Talos's introduction to the first performance, referring to the players as Strength, Courage, Vice, Death etc.

I do like the idea of a posthistoric Mystery Play, with angels, giants, laser pistols and spaceships. I'd love to see it performed by some inventive theatre company. I know of a few that could probably do it justice, but I don't suppose there are enough people aware of the mythology of the late period Commonwealth to make it worth their while!

Gordon