

lost in the big woods

The Urth list — 6 messages, 6 voices, 01 Jan 1998

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Joe Eull — 04 Feb 2002, 23:29

Regarding sex in the sun books:

I think that Severian's description of his relationships with women has done a lot to cement Wolfe's reputation as sexist. The scene you're talking about is a particularly affecting one. Without re-reading, Severian seems to hate Jolenta for her relationship with Dorcas, and more importantly for the lust she engenders in him is a reflection of her desire to be desired. He says she made a tribadist of Dorcas, and nearly an algophilist of himself. (lesbian, ghoul-lover respectively). My girlfriend at the time stopped reading the book at this point and handed it back to me saying it was disgusting. I don't blame her, Severian is talking about killing her and raping her dead body for spite. The subject of sex in Wolfe deserves extended treatment. Although I don't consider his writings sexist, I've had some uncomfortable thoughts about his work. Still, this scene is important. Urth, at the time of the red sun, is a barbaric place and Severian is a product of the society. I think if the writer had held back on his depictions it would have been dishonest.

Marc mentioned reading

The Claw of the Conciliator in the fifth grade or so. That's a pretty scary description to a young boy.

I wouldn't have been able to follow the book in grade five. I think we were probably reading it about the same time, though. I'm 34 and read it at twenty, in 1988. How did you hear about it?

Here is one more that might be just coincidental: Horn falls in that big pit >on the island. If you buy my theory that this recreates the vanished people by hybridizing man and tree, then Horn acts as an impregnating phallus "lost in the big woods".

As for buying the theory: I'm agnostic about it. For my money, there's a strong possibility that Blue is Ushas, and I think you've done some interesting work justifying the premise. I think only additional reading and discussion will work out the details. As I've written here before I've been gestating on tree symbolism in Urth otNS for too long. One thing I came across was this concept from the Kabbalah about Zaddiks. A zaddik is a righteous man. Zaddik is the ninth letter, just as Yesod is the ninth sephiroth. Although I can't find my notes on this right now, I recall that there has to be a pillar from our world to Yesod, which is created by these righteous men. Severian's quest it would seem is about recreating this pillar. Note the similarity of Tzadkiel and Zaddik. The ship Severian travels on looks like a tree, which stretches from Urth to Yesod (note a similarity also between the ship which stretches from the old world to the new in Peace's St. Brendan's Land). Severian becomes a Father here (phallus/pillar) and engenders a new sun. How does this connect to Horn in his pit? Horn is a "fallen" man. In his pit he is helped by a neighbour (only time we see ones face) and an inhum. According to your theory a neighbour is created from Horn, and his name is Horn also. This involves a genetic crossing with trees (hope I'm correct here). Could there be another engendering happening here? The one in UNS is one which connects an ending to a beginning. You might say that's true here as it connects the

conclusion of the work to it's beginning. I think some questions have to be answered first.

How has Horn been "every being of his kind"? (pg 272 pb OBW). This is said by the neighbour Horn to Horn before he is resurrected in Silk. Horn has been (so far) a son, student, lover, fighter, colonist, husband, father, mill builder, adulterer, sailor, quest taker....and more. Except for the last, many New Vironese men could probably claim to be all these things (replace miller with smith or cooper if you like). What do the writers mean by "his (?) search for the fabled town of Pajarocu" in the Afterword to RTTW (pg 409 tor hc). Typically, my analysis just brings up questions I can't answer but I have to say I like your theory more and more.

Joe.

PS: is the Neighbour whorl one of the sephiroth?

Jeff Wilson — 05 Feb 2002, 05:30 · follows Joe Eull

From:

"Joe Eull" <lo_phan17 at hotmail.com>

Regarding sex in the sun books:

I think that Severian's description of his relationships with women has done a lot to cement Wolfe's reputation as sexist. The scene you're talking about is a particularly affecting one. Without re-reading, Severian seems to hate Jolenta for her relationship with Dorcas, and more importantly for the lust she engenders in him is a reflection of her desire to be desired. He says she made a tribadist of Dorcas, and nearly an algophilist of himself. (lesbian, ghoul-lover respectively). My girlfriend at the time stopped reading the book at this point and handed it back to me saying it was disgusting. I don't blame her, Severian is talking about killing her and raping her dead body for spite.

"algophilist" is more what we call masochism. It sounds more like Jolenta toyed with Severian, to see how much misery he would endure for a chance to sleep with her than anything remotely like necrophilia.

Jeff Wilson

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matthew.malthouse — 05 Feb 2002, 11:54 · follows Jeff Wilson

On 04/02/2002 23:29:06 Joe Eull wrote:

Regarding sex in the sun books:

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How do you come to algophilist = ghoul-lover?

I parsed that as pain lover, ie sadist, or aproaching that.

Matthew

Michael Straight — 05 Feb 2002, 15:53 · follows matthew.malthouse

On Mon, 4 Feb 2002, Joe Eull wrote:

The subject of sex in Wolfe deserves extended treatment. Although I don't consider his writings sexist, I've had some uncomfortable thoughts about his work. Still, this scene is important. Urth, at the time of the red sun, is a barbaric place and Severian is a product of the society. I think if the writer had held back on his depictions it would have been dishonest.

It seems possible to me that Wolfe's treatment of sex may be related to Christian doctrines about sexuality. The main orthodox understanding of sex seems to be that though sex is a good thing, in fallen human beings, sexuality gets warped in all kinds of bad ways. A lot of SF writing (e.g. Heinlein) seems to think almost any kind of sexual desire or activity is healthy and good. Or at least that many kinds of sex that are well outside the mainstream for our society is (would be) healthy and good.

So it may be that Wolfe continually probes at the ickiest kinds of sexuality in reaction to that, to get readers to realize that they don't really think that any sort of sexual desire is good and healthy (which is obvious once you state it that baldly, but you do still run into people who seem to think the only thing wrong with sexuality is repressing or denying ones desires).

-Rostrum

Jerry Friedman — 05 Feb 2002, 20:37 · follows Michael Straight

--- Joe Eull <lo_phan17 at hotmail.com> wrote:

...

As I've written here before I've been gestating on tree symbolism in Urth otNS for too long. One thing I came across was this concept from the Kabbalah about Zaddiks. A zaddik is a righteous man. Zaddik is the ninth letter, just as Yesod is the ninth sephiroth.

Strangely enough, I made this same mistake when I was Hebrew school, but the eighteenth (not ninth) letter of the Hebrew alphabet is tzadi or sadhe (with a dot under the s) or however you like to transliterate it, not zaddik or tzaddiq or however you like to transliterate it. Its sound was originally an "emphatic" s, whatever that is, but now it's the sound of English ts. The root tz-d-q originally meant correct or right, if I'm not mistaken, but words built on it mean "righteous man", "justice", "charity", "prosperity", etc. I don't think this root is connected with the name of the letter, but I might not be "tzodeq".

(Some might care to compare "tzedaqah", correctness, with its Latin translation "caritas", dearness, and thus start on comparing Jewish and Christian ideas of charity.)

If "sephiroth" is a regular word, the singular is "sephirah".

Although I can't find my notes on this right now, I recall that there has to be a pillar from our world to Yesod, which is created by these righteous men. Severian's quest it would seem is about recreating this pillar. Note the similarity of Tzadkiel and Zaddik.

I think this is a real connection, that is, "Tzadkiel" might be transliterated as "Tzadqiel" (or sadhqiel or whatever), and would mean something like "God's righteousness". I'm not sure because there's another Hebrew letter with a k sound. (I'm also not sure about those -iel names.)

[snip things I'd have to think more about]

How has Horn been "every being of his kind"? (pg 272 pb OBW). This is said by the neighbour Horn to Horn before he is resurrected in Silk. Horn has been (so far) a son, student, lover, fighter, colonist, husband, father, mill builder, adulterer, sailor, quest taker....and more. Except for the last, many New Vironese men could probably claim to be all these things (replace miller with smith or cooper if you like).

Now that's a good question. The person you *could* say that about is Severian.

What do the writers mean by "his (?) search for the fabled town of Pajarocu" in the Afterword to RTTW (pg 409 tor hc).

I think Marc got this one. They're talking about the person they knew who looked like Silk, and questioning whether he's the same person as the Horn who searched for Pajarocu. ...

PS: is the Neighbour whorl one of the sephiroth?

Seems quite reasonable Or it could be reached by walking the corridors of time.

Thanks (and thank you, Marc) for answering my green-mankiller question.

Jerry Friedman

Andy Robertson — 01 Jan 1998, 03:36 · follows Jerry Friedman

----- Original Message -----

From: "Michael Straight" <straight at email.unc.edu>

The subject of sex in Wolfe deserves extended treatment. although I don't consider his writings sexist,

It seems possible to me that Wolfe's treatment of sex may be related to Christian doctrines about sexuality. The main orthodox understanding of sex seems to be that though sex is a good thing, in fallen human beings, sexuality gets warped in all kinds of bad ways.

Wolfe seems to me to be admirably realistic about sexual matters, except in TBOTNS, where Severian's sexual crippling is fundamental to his being.

It seems that Severian is sterile, and that he cannot become fertile until he has been judged fit to be Autarch, and then either given license to propagate his genes or castrated.

But he is the last Autarch, and his progeny, if any, will inhabit Ushas.

His avid fornications and his incestuous love are the flipside of this future fertility, and are appropriate to the dying Urth.

hartshorn

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