

eating trees

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 29 Mar 2002

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maa32 — 29 Mar 2002, 17:05

This is primarily for Blattid (or whoever asked me about "sentience" in conjunction with the trees). In response to proof that the trees eat things: I can't find it right now (my notes are not with me) but there is a scene in On Blue's Water where Horn is talking about green and says that the trees eat other trees, then he says the strangling female lianas are the scariest things on Green. It's in the first book. I'll keep looking for the exact quote. I'm sure some other people remember it.

The trees are in cahoots with Horn, and therefore empathize with his goal and want to help him liberate Silk's psyche. One of the scenes that argues against Babbie being Horn is the Horn claims he is sentient: "ONCE, when Seawrack and I were on the riverbank, I felt that there were three of us after an hour or more of this uneasiness, I realized that the third person I sensed was merely Babbie, whom I had by a species of mental misstep ceased to consider an animal." SFBC BOTSS 79 Immediately after this, Babbie comes tooling around: "In half an hour [Babbie] was back, still swimming strongly but not making anything like the progress he had earlier because he was pushing a SMALL TREE ahead of him , roots and all" ... "For a moment there I thought I saw somebody ... a face, very pale, down under the water. It was probably a fish, really, or just a piece of waterlogged wood." (80) The tree can be used to explain the sentience of that the narrator senses - the tree is the other presence he feels just that "ONCE": In this same scene, the song of the mother starts, and he says "there was that in it that sounded very far away indeed. I have since that that the distance was perhaps of time, that we heard a song on that warm, calm evening that was not merely hundreds but thousands of years old, sung as it had been sung when the Short Sun of Blue was yet young, and floating to us across that lonely sea with a pain of loss and longing that my poor words cannot express" (81). This is the scene where we have Babbie as sentient, and a tree, roots and all, shows up, and this transtemporal song starts playing. All in one scene in Chapter 5: The Thing on the Green Plain. Indeed, at the end of the previous section, Horn makes a point of pointing out that there was a bunch of weed, but absolutely no driftwood in the water. In the next section he says:

"and yet it seemed irrational that so vast a quantity of vegetable matter should go to waste. Pas, who built the Whorl, would have arranged things better, I felt, little knowing that I would soon encounter one of the gods of this whorl of Blue that we call ours in spite of the fact that it existed whole ages before we did, and that it had been only a scant generation since we came to it." (82). Vegetable matter is always on his mind. All the time.

Horn also comments about ways of killing the inhumu in Chapter 4: the Tale of Pajarocu, and he states that they decay very rapidly: "These people, like people everywhere here, seem to fear that an inhumu may live on even with its head severed. That is not the case, of course; but I cannot help wondering how the superstition originated and became so widespread. Certainly inhumu have no bones as we understand them. POSSIBLY their skeletons are cartilage, as those of some sea-creatures are. On Green, Geier maintained that the inhumu are akin to slugs and leeches. No one, I believe, took him seriously; yet it is certain that once dead they decay very quickly, though they are difficult to kill and can survive for weeks and even months without the

blood that is their ONLY food."(62) Doesn't this schema of the inhumu seem derivative of a hardy vegetable system: survive without all their limbs, need food every couple of months, may have a keratin cell wall, and decay very quickly? Perhaps at one time the early inhumu could survive if you cut off their heads: and plants can certainly do that if their upper extremities are removed. Another argument for low-g is that the inhumu have weak, weak legs. Which is why I see them as vines rather than the trees: those vines probably don't have extensively branching or strong roots. Leeches are like those liana vines; only animal rather than vegetable.

Also, Brother and Sister at the end of *On Blue's Waters* see the Vanished people sometimes, and they talk about the vanished Gods, at which point the narrator tells them about "the one" in the forest. Read this next passage carefully: "Another halt, and this one must be for the night - a hollow among the roots of (what I will say is) just such a tree as we had on Green. It is what we call a very big tree here, in other words." (222). He knows about the god there because he slept under it.

Later there is a scene in *In Green's Jungles*, Chapter 25: The God of Blue:

"I don't see how I would be harmed by knowing whoyour gods were, unless you mena that it would be better for me to work it out for myself." (464). These "gods" have previously been discussed in a purely Christian context - but they are the trees who control everything going on (perhaps the agents of God, but the trees none the less).

The narrative differences between *On Blue's Waters* and *In Green's Jungles* are obvious. A shift to the present rather than the past as the primary tense Silk writes in, a sudden shift into third person to describe his old experiences on Green as a "tale", and a much, much, much more cheerful and conservative outlook on life and violence. Horn was a violent man; Silk really isn't. You must recognize that the narrators of the two are almost completely different; this is obvious from the end of *ON Blue's waters* where Silk re-reads what Horn has written and says he starts talking about the things he should have written more about: Hari-Mau's smile and other cheerful details that Horn would never think of. Also, this is where the narrator claims "I should have lived my lives differently" and claims that he caught the ball and one the game. Clearly, Silk is in control now. Part of Horn is still there, but the majority of his essence has fled into Babbie because Horn WANTS to. He says goodbye to his family and the trees help him out.

I could pull out a million quotes that support where vegetable matter is personified with human qualities, but over and over you could say that was simply "symbolic" language. Next time you read through the text, pay attention to how vegetable matter is described. It's quite consistent and enlightening. And you could say that all this psuedo-religion actually refers back to God and his angels rather than the trees. Now I have accounted for BAbbie's early humanity with the presence of a living tree: roots and all. How many times do I have to set up scenarios in parallel? Wolfe doesn't always include exposition; he sets up an almost infinite series in a metonymic relationship and you have to infer the paradigmatic conclusions to make sense of the text. Of course, this brings in interpretive relativism: I may interpret all the series in one way, you in another. But I don't think you can argue against the textual basis for the sentience of the trees, or their relationship to the vanished people. We don't see them spit out copies - that is my own inference based on the importance of hybridization in the text - I am "applying" the hybrids, just as someone could apply the color schema set up by Olivia when she wraps her little coffin basket in a blue ribbon and you can infer that Peacock is going to kill her because his name is associated with Blue. It doesn't directly say Peacock kills her - you have to put it together.

Marc Aramini

Marc,

Your argument (deleted) has convinced me that your theories regarding the trees are worth serious attention. I will make this one of my foci in my next reading of the "Short Sun" books.

What I'd still like is some explanation of why any of this leads to the conclusion that Blue is a future Urth/Ushas. It seems quite consistent without that.

--Dan'l

Roy C. Lackey — 30 Mar 2002, 18:17 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Date: Friday, March 29, 2002 11:06 AM

Marc wrote, in part:

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Uh, what I have quoted from Marc's post, above, is somewhat of a misrepresentation of the text. The pagination of the SFBC edition apparently differs quite a bit from that of the original OBW, where the pages in question range from 137-140.

First of all, what is described above is not all in one scene. The scene on the riverbank is a flashforward to a time after, obviously, Horn had met Seawrack, who he had yet to even lay eyes on. Second, Babbie's return to the sloop after a half hour did not follow the scene on the riverbank, as implied above, "immediately" or at all in the sequence of events. Third, the pale face Horn thought he saw underwater was very likely that of Seawrack, who had already lost her arm to Babbie, who was clearly hanging around the boat, and who would make her appearance the next day. Finally, the two ONCE statements emphasized and linked above are unrelated; they refer to two different events in the narrative, one before and one after Horn met Seawrack.

-Roy

Jerry Friedman — 03 Apr 2002, 23:50 · follows Roy C. Lackey

--- maa32 <maa32 at dana.ucc.nau.edu> wrote:

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on Green. It's in the first book. I'll keep looking for the exact quote.

I'm sure some other people remember it.

This proves that the trees on Green are herbivorous, not carnivorous.

...

Horn also comments about ways of killing the inhumu in Chapter 4: the Tale of

Pajarocu, and he states that they decay very rapidly: "These people, like

people everywhere here, seem to fear that an inhumu may live on even with its

head severed. That is not the case, of course; but I cannot help wondering

how the superstition originated and became so widespread. Certainly inhumu

have no bones as we understand them. POSSIBLY their skeletons are cartilage,

as those of some sea-creatures are. On Green, Geier maintained that the

inhumi are akin to slugs and leeches. No one, I believe, took him seriously;

yet it is certain that once dead they decay very quickly, though they are

difficult to kill and can survive for weeks and even months without the blood

that is their ONLY food."(62)

Interesting. Horn himself told us about Patera Quetzal's eating or drinking beef tea. Was it just for comfort, not nutrition?

Doesn't this schema of the inhumu seem

derivative of a hardy vegetable system: survive without all their limbs, need

food every couple of months, may have a keratin cell wall, and decay very

quickly?

There's nothing about surviving without all of their limbs unless you believe that Silkhorn is mistaken. Also, keratin is an animal protein--the one fingernails, hair, and Horn are made of, but not the one cartilage is made of--and quite different from cellulose, the carbohydrate that plants' cell walls are made of.

Perhaps at one time the early inhumu could survive if you cut off

their heads: and plants can certainly do that if their upper extremities are

removed. Another argument for low-g is that the inhumu have weak, weak legs.

I believe flying animals often have weaker legs than non-flying animals. ...

Jerry Friedman