

FLF

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 28 May 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3282>

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Robert Borski — 28 May 2002, 04:07

A few random notes from my weekend reread of Free Live Free that may still be pertinent, the vast majority of what I would have said having already been duly noted, primarily by Mssrs. Nutria and Ansley back in V.30.

First the characters, Nutria casting them thusly:

"Now, in WWOz the three Oz characters are animal, vegetable, and mineral. I don't know how Wolfe might be playing with this. But they are also mind, emotion, and will. Stubb - very smart; mind (Scarecrow; vegetable?) Candy - very loving; emotion (Tin Woodman; mineral?) Serpentina - very determined; will (Lion; animal?) Which leaves Barnes as Dorothy, and Little Ozzie as Toto. And of course Ben Free as the Wizard. Free is not a humbug, but I think he is trapped in 'Oz', and only escapes through death. Free does move upwards (compare the wizard's balloon)."

I'd like to propose a somewhat different mapping. (My apologies if this has been suggested before, but I couldn't find it anywhere in the archives.) Candy Garth is the very obvious Dorothy; she sings like the Dorothy of cinematic Oz and Garth seems like one of those nested names Wolfe uses so frequently (GAil, doRoTHy). Osgood Barnes, a.k.a. "Ozzy," is the wizard manqué, the seller of cheap tricks and novelties. Madam Serpentina is the witch. (Duh.) And little Stubbs, who's described as jockey size, is a munchkin. This leaves only Ben Free, the true wizard--and someone whose "magic" may also include changing water into wine and raising the dead (see William Ansley's post).

One, of course, may also impose, as the author himself does, a Popeye schema. Osgood = Popeye; M. Snake = Olive; Little Ozzy = Sweepee; Stubbs = Wimpy; and Candy = Brutus???

In addition, several of the characters have M's associated with their names. Madam Serpentina a.k.a. Marie; Osgood M. Barnes; Catharine M. Garth. But what does the M stand for? An upside down W? A very oblique tip of the hat to L. Frank Baum? (M being the next letter after L and this being Wolfe's topsy-turvy version of "The Wizard of Oz." Someone, somewhere, does say something about being in the wrong movie.)

Then there's the "house" of Ben Free--Garth also meaning yard, Stubb (from the German Stube, as Wolfe tells us) meaning room, and Barnes being where you put the cows and horses.

Shared optical difficulties also prevent quite a few of the characters from seeing properly. Osgood has a glass eye, Madam Serpentina wears contacts, Stubbs has bottle-bottom glasses, and Free is described as poor sighted but yet is able to detect someone's irises contracting in basement murk. Perhaps the latter plays off the notion as God-as-clear-sighted and the rest of us as His myopic underlings stumbling around in the dark.

Considering that FLF was written by Wolfe while on break from Urth of the New Sun, might we

describe the High Country shadow government of Ben Free as a bunch of "High-rodules"?

And lastly, considering that the overall tone of the book is that of a light Frank Capra movie, does anyone find it strange that this is the only Wolfe work to contains the words f*ck, sh*t, motherf*cker and bullsh*t?

Robert Borski

James Jordan — 28 May 2002, 15:32 · follows Robert Borski

At 11:07 PM 5/27/2002 -0500, the Borski wrote:

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This sure looks right, but I'll bet I'm right also. Surely Wolfe has read *Ringworld,* where the Oz characters are switched, so that the lion-like character lacks brains, the grotesque scarecrow puppeteer lacks courage, the Dorothy-girls lacks a heart, etc. Knowing what we do of Wolfe, and the fact that Christian imagery and also Popeye stuff is laid over the characters, I would not be surprised if both your and my schemes are "right."

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Do you think maybe the Pop-EYE overlay has something to do with the theme of seeing clearly, as you set it out? Or maybe it's just more "America" stuff.

In addition, several of the characters have M's associated with their names. Madam Serpentina a.k.a. Marie; Osgood M. Barnes; Catharine M. Garth. But what does the M stand for? An upside down W? A very oblique tip of the hat to L. Frank Baum? (M being the next letter after L and this being Wolfe's topsy-turvy version of "The Wizard of Oz." Someone, somewhere, does say something about being in the wrong movie.)

Dunno, of course. But I have toyed with Marie as some kind of cypher for the Church/Mary. Ben Free is some kind of "Americanized Christ figure," and the new group he forms is a kind of new

Church, and Marie is part of it.

Then there's the "house" of Ben Free--Garth also meaning yard, Stubb (from the German Stube, as Wolfe tells us) meaning room, and Barnes being where you put the cows and horses.

Sounds right, especially if this "house" of persons "elected" by Ben (Christ) Free is some kind of new "America"-church.

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I took it as the blindness (imperception) of sin (they all have besetting sins) that some kind of "grace" needs to overcome. Free also has poor physical eyesight (thus being like those he is saving), but has clear in-sight, which is what the characters need to arrive at.

Considering that FLF was written by Wolfe while on break from _Urth of the New Sun_, might we describe the High Country shadow government of Ben Free as a bunch of "High-rodulcs"?

Perhaps. But given that it was written then, I think we are entitled to look for some of the same themes, such as obviously travelling the corridors of time.

Nutria

Jerry Friedman — 28 May 2002, 20:30 · follows James Jordan

--- Robert Borski <rborski at charter.net> wrote:

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be pertinent, the vast majority of what I would have said having already been duly noted, primarily by Mssrs. Nutria and Ansley back in V.30.

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very loving; emotion (Tin Woodman; mineral?) Serpentina - very determined;

will (Lion; animal?) Which leaves Barnes as Dorothy, and Little Ozzie as Toto.

Well, I like Little Ozzie as Toto.

And of course Ben Free as the Wizard. Free is not a humbug, but I think he is trapped in 'Oz', and only escapes through death. Free does move upwards (compare the wizard's balloon)."

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been suggested before, but I couldn't find it anywhere in the archives.)

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manqué, the seller of cheap tricks and novelties. Madam Serpentina is
the
witch. (Duh.)

Which witch? Both (or all three)?

And little Stubbs, who's described as jockey size, is a
munchkin. This leaves only Ben Free, the true wizard--and someone whose
"magic" may also include changing water into wine and raising the dead
(see William Ansley's post).

This makes as much sense to me as anything, but to me the resemblance to The Wizard of Oz
is mostly that it's four characters having adventures on a quest and ending up conferring with
someone who can tell them some answers and grant wishes. As Nutria implied, I doubt there
are good correspondences between characters in the two works.

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schema. Osgood = Popeye; M. Snake = Olive; Little Ozzy = Sweepee; Stubbs
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Wimpy; and Candy = Brutus???

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Wolfe's
topsy-turvy version of "The Wizard of Oz." Someone, somewhere, does say
something about being in the wrong movie.)

Now that M is an interesting one.

Then there's the "house" of Ben Free--Garth also meaning yard, Stubb
(from
the German Stube, as Wolfe tells us) meaning room, and Barnes being
where
you put the cows and horses.

I hadn't noticed that! Then Madame S. would be the wild snake that slithers in now and then, or
the ancient Greek "house snake" (which I know about from a highly reliable historical source:
The King Must Die.)

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seeing properly. Osgood has a glass eye, Madam Serpentina wears
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Stubbs has bottle-bottom glasses, and Free is described as poor sighted
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yet is able to detect someone's irises contracting in basement murk.
Perhaps
the latter plays off the notion as God-as-clear-sighted and the rest of
us as His myopic underlings stumbling around in the dark.

A good one, but how does Candy fit in? She sees clearly, but can't control the appetites of the
flesh?

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the

New Sun_, might we describe the High Country shadow government of Ben Free as a bunch of "High-modules"?

And lastly, considering that the overall tone of the book is that of a light Frank Capra movie, does anyone find it strange that this is the only Wolfe work to contains the words f*ck, sh*t, motherf*cker and bullsh*t?

Heh heh. I guess people don't swear in the future, the past, or alternate timelines.

Jerry Friedman