

Another Avern for you

The Urth list — 9 messages, 6 voices, 29 Jul 2002

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James Jordan — 29 Jul 2002, 22:07

At 05:17 PM 7/29/2002 -0400, you wrote:
Great post. Great title. Great discussion.

Maybe Ascia is what you get when Mao reads Orwell.

Though the discussion is fun, I do think that's all it is. Any writer knows Orwell and Mao and thought control; Wolfe surely knows Plato's hostility to story and myth. Attempts by extreme tyrants to cut people off from their pasts, and from story, narrative, and myth, are pretty ... well ... timeless! (Typhon did not go so far.) Trying to go much beyond this and say, "Wolfe is building on Mao, not Orwell" etc. strikes me as overinterpretation -- though we can do it here for fun, planting averns -- unless I'm missing something significant.

Wolfe's "point" is that story and narrative are inescapable aspects of human life in the real world, and that they will break through somehow even in the most mathematically "timeless" and philosophical cultures that tyrants can ever attempt. Attempts to freeze history and eliminate story are fruitless. Homer and the Bible win! Plato and Pythagoras (seventeen) lose! I'm more inclined to see this as a "Christian narrative view of reality" defeating a "Philosophical-gnostic timeless mathematical attempt to control reality."

But for Wolfe's "sources," well, it's all of the above, lupinated.

Yet, another thought also: The Marxist motif in connection with the Ascians is obvious, and as I say I don't think we need to try and pinpoint it to Mao or anyone else. But though "Ascian" sounds like "Asian," in addition to that allusion it actually means "shadowless." Shadowless, directly under the sun, seems to me a good symbol for a timeless philosophical worldview. The shadows, however, are inescapable, as is narrative and story. Stories are shadows cast by persons, with the sun behind them, so to speak. "Loyal's" story isn't much, but it's still a story. Even with the sun directly overhead, you have a little shadow. (Plato does not like shadows; he wants us out of the cave.)

Wolfe takes up shadows in "A Solar Labyrinth" (which came first?), and I wonder how much light (or shadow) that tale casts on the Ascians and Loyal. The shadows are cast by various objects, and block approach to the true center. A nice image, if intended by Wolfe (?), of how wrong narratives and culture myths mislead people into wrong patterns of life and thought. Yet some of the shifting shadow-narratives-myths move people gradually to the center.

Anyway, that's an avern from me, to add to the thousands!

Nutria

James Wynn — 30 Jul 2002, 18:45 · follows James Jordan

"Another avern for you", said Agilus

Nutria wrote:

... "Ascian" ... actually means "shadowless."
Shadowless, directly under the sun, seems to me a good symbol for a timeless philosophical worldview.

Hmmm. I thought they were "shadowless" because they were in continuous dark? Although, no doubt they interpreted it the other way. But the Ascians are under the control Erebus (Erebus according to Hesiod is the "darkness of Tartaros")

Severian is the New Sun, the roses (which are sun symbols) represent life, nenuphars whose roots extend to the darkness of the water represent death.

Surely darkness is ironically the intended implication of the name "Ascian".

-- Crush

Bratt Ian — 30 Jul 2002, 19:23 · follows James Wynn

On Tue, 30 Jul 2002, Crush wrote:

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Surely darkness is ironically the intended implication of the name "Ascian".

-- Crush

Interesting idea. I've always thought they were "shadowless" because of their lack of individuality. If we take the route that to have a shadow is to have a soul (Vampires have no reflection) and to have a soul is to be human, then the Ascians have lost what makes them human. In this case, I've always considered that to be their individuality. Although I find the darkness theory reasonable and even somewhat similar.

-Ian

James Jordan — 31 Jul 2002, 14:51 · follows Bratt Ian

At 01:45 PM 7/30/2002 -0500, you wrote:

"Another avern for you", said Agilus

Nutria wrote:

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Shadowless, directly under the sun, seems to me a good symbol for a timeless philosophical worldview.

Hmmm. I thought they were "shadowless" because they were in continuous dark? Although, no doubt they interpreted it the other way. But the Ascians are under the control Erebus (Erebus according to Hesiod is the "darkness of Tartaros")

Interesting point. But doesn't the text make is clear that they are from the equator, and directly under the sun, and that is the basic meaning of Ascian?

Severian is the New Sun, the roses (which are sun symbols) represent life, nenuphars whose roots extend to the darkness of the water represent death.

Absolutely. I would see this as true versus false sun.
But I'm certainly open to correction.

Nutria

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 31 Jul 2002, 16:01 · follows James Jordan

As regards the Ascians, Patera Nutria inscribed:

Interesting point. But doesn't the text make it clear that they are from the equator, and directly under the sun, and that is the basic meaning of Ascian?

Actually, the text makes clear that they are from north of the equator (or "waist of the Urth"), and that this is a false belief, a folk-etymology common among the people of the Commonwealth. The real reason they are "shadowless" is not given ... but note the title of the first volume of tBotNS.

baby's on fire, better throw her in the water

James Wynn — 31 Jul 2002, 16:41 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Blattid said:

The real reason they are "shadowless" is not given ... but note the title of the first volume of tBotNS.

IIRC In "Castle of the Otter" Wolfe says that a shadow implies the sun because the sun **stands behind** (as in, supports, affirms, etc) the one that casts a shadow. Also, that the "shadow of the torturer" represents death when he performs an execution because he blots out the sun.

It would have been cool if the Ascians **were** from the equator. It would have been very Lupine if they had been. I'm sure Wolfe would kick himself that he didn't think of it at the time.

-- Crush

matthew.malthouse — 31 Jul 2002, 16:57 · follows James Wynn

On 31/07/2002 15:51:21 James Jordan wrote:
[Ascians]

Interesting point. But doesn't the text make it clear that they are from the equator, and directly under the sun, and that is the basic meaning of Ascian?

Beyond the waist of the world surely means the other side of the equator?

Matthew

Adam Stephanides — 01 Aug 2002, 02:08 · follows matthew.malthouse

on 7/31/02 11:01 AM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:
Actually, the text makes clear that they are from north of the equator (or "waist of the Urth"), and that this is a false belief, a folk-etymology common among the people of the Commonwealth.

Well, it's not a "folk-etymology" in the sense of being an incorrect etymology; it's a true etymology based upon a false belief (cf. Ash's remarks in TCotA, chap. 16, pp. 121-2 of Timescape ed.).

The real reason they are "shadowless" is not given ... but note the title of the first volume of tBotNS.

Ash goes on to say "In a fable made in the earliest morning of our race, a man sold his shadow and found himself driven out everywhere he went. No one would believe that he was human." Earlier, Ava told Severian that "Ascians are not human." (TCotA, chap. 10, p. 72).

--Adam

James Wynn — 01 Aug 2002, 15:41 · follows Adam Stephanides

Blattid wrote:

Actually, the text makes clear that they are from _north_ of the equator (or "waist of the Urth"), and that this is a false belief, a folk-etymology common among the people of the Commonwealth.

Adam replied:

Well, it's not a "folk-etymology" in the sense of being an incorrect etymology; it's a true etymology based upon a false belief (cf. Ash's remarks in TCotA, chap. 16, pp. 121-2 of Timescape ed.).

So it appears GW DID consider the Equator angle and used it as an excuse to give the Ascians their name (which has symbolic implications although not everyone agrees (with me ;-D) about what the implications are)

--Crush