

DOORS: The hive-like society

The Urth list — 7 messages, 3 voices, 23 Jan 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3802>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 23 Jan 2003, 17:00

Adam Stephanides quoted me and wrote:
like insects, society is divided into the
mass of sterile female workers and super-fertile queens (little doubt
here)

Could you elaborate? It's been a long time since I've read the novel, but I
don't recall any indications of this.

First I'd like to give my sense of the dolls, as I've been meaning to do

since Roy Lackey wrote:
I had the impression that dolls such as Tina were given primarily, if not
exclusively, to boys. It also seemed to me that boys lost interest in them,
or were made to give them up at some point, perhaps at puberty. At any rate,
most men in the Otherworld do not seem to have retained them as adults. The
shopkeeper in the doll hospital implied that dolls sent there for repair
were not often picked up, and if they were, it was usually by the owner's
mother.

Previously I pointed out that women are pretty much against men having dolls: they will destroy
them (the dolls first). Now I will explain more about why I think this is.

My theory: The women tolerate, even encourage dolls/goddess worship for boys. A doll gives a
boy a focus, erotic and spiritual (especially in preparation for his personal self-sacrifice that
others might live). The doll does a lot of the work in preping the boy for his role as a man, filling
in during free time when the boy is away from formal education. Otherworld marriage is an
institution whereby a man pledges his zygotes to a woman in exchange for her mercy and
forbearance: it is for the man to avoid sudden random death (be it like the probably unlawful
rape at the hospital or the socially-sanctioned lure of an ice-queen on a parade float), and for
the woman to avoid being a maenad/lamia/stalker of unmarried men.

This then is the social contract. The man gives up the doll when he marries: his wife becomes
his "goddess," the one that the doll was preparing him for. The husband lives until the zygote
transfer (witness the situation with boxer Joe Joseph and his wife Jennifer: according to the
pre-nuptial she will wait until she is 35, but some think she is pressuring him for an earlier
transfer). The wife would have no interest in the man's doll, but the man's mother of course
would, since she had raised the boy like a prize pig -- she would remember the boy and his doll.

With this in mind, a man with a doll is something rather shocking. It implies arrested
development at the very least, if not some weird cult and/or socially deviant behavior.

DIVISIONS OF SOCIETY

"AND IN THE CAPITAL, THE PRESIDENT HAS--AS SHE THREATENED EARLIER--VETOED THE
FAMILY MAINTENANCE--[volume turned down] bill that would have permitted involuntary
sterilization of mothers of twenty-five or more children" (28).

Now this could be a simple "Planet of the Apes"-style gag (words of the sermon: "He said he never met an ape he did not like"). But I take it as being more thought out than that.

In the government (of the women, by the women, for the women) there has been a movement to restrict the number of children a mother can have. To me this suggests that 1) mothers have power; 2) the mother's power is proportional to the size of her brood; 3) pre-mothers want to reduce the power of mothers (at the cost of more male lives lost to fertilize more low-output mothers); 4) the mothers are blocking the attempt at reducing their power/upping the male death quota.

(I assume that the 25 children limit represents a number that is both reproductively sound [i.e., does not represent negative population growth] and supportive of a "democracy of mothers" that the bill's framers presumably want.)

When I wrote, "like insects, [Otherworld] society is divided into the mass of sterile female workers and super-fertile queens," I did not mean to imply that the pre-mothers were actually incapable of giving birth (as neuter female insects are), nor did I mean to imply that the mothers were literally queens (it seems like a representative democracy of some kind). In a hive-like society where every (female) "worker" (pre-mother) can become a "queen" (mother) there will be the sort of tensions I see in the Otherworld society.

=mantis=

Adam Stephanides — 25 Jan 2003, 14:20 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

on 1/23/03 11:00 AM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:

Otherworld marriage is an institution whereby a man pledges his zygotes to a woman in exchange for her mercy and forbearance: it is for the man to avoid sudden random death (be it like the probably unlawful rape at the hospital or the socially-sanctioned lure of an ice-queen on a parade float), and for the woman to avoid being a maenad/lamia/stalker of unmarried men.

I may be forgetting something again, but I don't remember getting the impression that unmarried men were in grave danger, Al Bailey's fate notwithstanding. In any case, marrying for the reason you suggest is trading possible death for certain death, which seems to me like a bad bargain.

This then is the social contract. The man gives up the doll when he marries: his wife becomes his "goddess," the one that the doll was preparing him for.

I haven't yet reread TAD, but I was looking through it, and I came across a couple of things which cause problems for your scenario. The woman at the haberdashery tells Green that her father had still owned a doll after he was married. (125) A bodyguard sees Tina and tells Green "You got one of those? I used to have one myself." (303) This seems to me an unlikely remark if most boys own dolls: sort of like saying "You went to school as a kid? So did I." Then there's the doll hospital. Your theory would imply that most of the people who leave their dolls there to be repaired get married soon afterwards (since you say men keep their dolls until marriage). And the shopkeeper refers to the typical client as a "boy," not a man (9).

I admit, though, that I don't understand the doll hospital. Why do so many people bring their

dolls in to be repaired, paying a "pretty big deposit," and then fail to pick them up, even though they'd get their deposit back and not have to pay anything. If I were one of the owners' mothers, I'd remember the deposit, if nothing else.

"AND IN THE CAPITAL, THE PRESIDENT HAS--AS SHE THREATENED EARLIER--VETOED THE FAMILY MAINTENANCE--[volume turned down] bill that would have permitted involuntary sterilization of mothers of twenty-five or more children" (28).

Now this could be a simple "Planet of the Apes"-style gag (words of the sermon: "He said he never met an ape he did not like"). But I take it as being more thought out than that.

In the government (of the women, by the women, for the women) there has been a movement to restrict the number of children a mother can have. To me this suggests that 1) mothers have power; 2) the mother's power is proportional to the size of her brood; 3) pre-mothers want to reduce the power of mothers (at the cost of more male lives lost to fertilize more low-output mothers); 4) the mothers are blocking the attempt at reducing their power/upping the male death quota.

I'd forgotten that quote. But while it proves the existence of "super-mothers," it seems to tell more against than in favor of your theory as a whole. Powerful groups are rarely targeted for involuntary sterilization; note also that the bill has been vetoed, meaning that it had passed Congress. It's more likely that the motive for the bill is similar to that of extreme right-wing proposals in this world to sterilize "welfare mothers": that children in such large families are likely to be badly reared and/or drains on the public purse.

And I don't think the bill, if passed, would have increased the number of male deaths. It's true that, to keep the rate of population growth fixed, more men would have to become fathers. But I don't recall any indication that the society is aiming for such a fixed target; and men aren't coerced to become fathers, though there is presumably social pressure to do so.

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 26 Jan 2003, 16:25 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:

I may be forgetting something again, but I don't remember getting the impression that unmarried men were in grave danger, Al Bailey's fate notwithstanding. In any case, marrying for the reason you suggest is trading possible death for certain death, which seems to me like a bad bargain.

Whoops, we've lost track of the point that the men are marrying for love, the women are marrying for socially sanctioned reproduction. (Then again, maybe I'm wrong on that supposition.)

This then is the social contract. The man gives up the doll when he marries: his wife becomes his "goddess," the one that the doll was preparing him for.

I haven't yet reread TAD, but I was looking through it, and I came across a couple of things which cause problems for your scenario. The woman at the haberdashery tells Green that her father had still owned a doll after he was married. (125) A bodyguard sees Tina and tells Green "You got one of those? I used to have one myself." (303) This seems to me an unlikely remark if most boys own dolls: sort of like saying "You went to school as a kid? So did I." Then there's the doll hospital. Your theory would imply that most of the people who leave their dolls there to be repaired get married soon

afterwards (since you say men keep their dolls until marriage). And the shopkeeper refers to the typical client as a "boy," not a man (9).

Strange (or maybe "predictably"?), I see those quotes you give in a different light entirely. Let's re-imagine the doll as an infant pacifier to heighten the effect. The haberdashery woman makes (or makes up) her embarrassing admission in order to paper over her customer's socially strange behavior -- she is trying to say there is nothing embarrassing about it, but to me her actions speak louder than her words. The bodyguard's line is more pointed, and less to me the "You went to school . . . ?" you see it as than a "Yea, I had a binky once . . . as a baby." As for the shop keeper, I don't think I take the term "boy" as literally as you seem to: while I don't take it in the sense of a derogatory term for an oppressed class (i.e., "boy" used by whites for adult black males), I tend toward seeing it an affected form of shop talk.

Then again, if we could translate "malicapata" as "he performed his own unmaning and died as a result," and we could establish that this was a typical consequence of goddess worship (seems easy enough), and such selfish suicide was widespread in Otherworld, many pieces would fall together. But that is a new topic for a different post.

I do not insist that all dolls belonged to pre-bridegrooms, nor that only men give them up. I am trying to solve the puzzle of why we are told more than once that Otherworld women become destructively violent at the sight of a man with his doll.

Which brings us to the question of how could species-perpetuating reproduction happen if it is literally suicide for the male? (Granted that spiders and bees and ants and all sorts of others do it this way.) It seems to me that some men would mate/die for Love (Eros) along the goddess worshiping lines, and others might mate/die for suicide (Thanatos) . . . so what is the suicide rate among men? What if this number were channeled into fertilization programs, where each one donated enough zygotes for a woman to have many more than 25 offspring? (How many more, anyway? Total 50?) Could this suicidal minority support the species? Seems possible.

So what do all the men do? The married ones do not seem to be secluded in harems or anything: Joe is a boxer. (To spell it out: Jennifer is afraid he will die in the ring rather than in her arms.) In the parade we seem to see men as soldiers, men as politicians giving each other flowers and cigars, so they can fulfill these roles, too, and the text is silent over whether or not marriage is required.

(Back to the street parade: My supposition is that a married man would not be allowed to watch that parade, somehow; and/or if a married man was targeted by the ice queen, she would see his wedding band and ignore him, i.e., de-target him, and probably signal the police to pull him out of the parade for public drunkenness. But this is just supposition.)

About the "Family Maintenance" bill in Otherworld Congress, Adam wrote: I'd forgotten that quote. But while it proves the existence of "super-mothers," it seems to tell more against than in favor of your theory as a whole. Powerful groups are rarely targeted for involuntary sterilization; note also that the bill has been vetoed, meaning that it had passed Congress. It's more likely that the motive for the bill is similar to that of extreme right-wing proposals in this world to sterilize "welfare mothers": that children in such large families are likely to be badly reared and/or drains on the public purse.

Really? I thought that Microsoft/Bill Gates was targeted for "sterilization" precisely because of power. (Since I'm stressing the sociopolitical power of motherhood in Otherworld I think it is misleading to think of "eugenics" programs against non-elites in our world.)

(Hmmm. I saw "family maintenance" as translating to "making families available to more women"; a broadening of the franchise. You posit "family maintenance" as meaning "maintain or restore the strength of the family by limiting its size," if I understand it correctly. And supposing that political talk translates at all!)

But I see no evidence of a welfare system at all in TAD. I do not see motherhood in Otherworld as stigmatized in any way -- to the contrary, it seems to be something so alluring that women (not all, mind you) are willing to commit murder. So while I can see your eugenics reading, I cannot see the social situation it seems to rely upon; otoh, the eugenics reading does not address the drive of Otherworld women to become mothers when it is not entirely a biological necessity.

I'm happy you can see the "super-mothers," although I'd rather you see them as just the mothers that I think they are. I sense that you still cannot see the rather desperate pre-mothers: Gloria Brooks (maybe), the ice queen (definitely), and even Fanny. I don't think we actually meet any Otherworld mothers in the text, but we certainly meet two pre-mothers. There is also wife Jennifer, of course, and her tempered but present drive.

If you want the line about the bill to be just a "Planet of the Apes" gag to get across the alien side of Otherworld, (women with zygote holding tanks; mothers who routinely birth more than 25 children) I can see that without argument.

And I don't think the bill, if passed, would have increased the number of male deaths. It's true that, to keep the rate of population growth fixed, more men would have to become fathers. But I don't recall any indication that the society is aiming for such a fixed target; and men aren't coerced to become fathers, though there is presumably social pressure to do so.

"Social pressure" like the ice-queen float in the parade? "Coercion" like that implied when the ice queen says, "I'm not one of those people who put a gun to your head . . . If you should change your mind"? Or the naked coercion when she goes after him with a knife? (23) Is the following passage indicative of social pressure or coercion?: [Dr. Pille talking about the ice queen incident and why Green was diagnosed as an "alcoholic" which the hospital workers call "sex change"] "Breach of promise is quite serious, as you must know. If I had said you were sound except for your concussion, you'd have been taken to another hospital, and eventually to prison. By classifying you as an alcoholic, I was able to keep you at United and keep you off of psychoactive drugs" (101).

(The dark humor: by rights, Green should have been sent to the hospital prison for his [ignorant] behavior, yet North, with his violent rap sheet and ties to secret societies, has still been assigned to the simple hospital. Shows the social weighting of their crimes, I suppose.)

But I think we can agree that TAD is not at its core about population growth, be it "Malthusian nightmare" ala Harrison's MAKE ROOM, MAKE ROOM (where sterilization becomes a tool to tame overpopulation), or its opposite, the infertility crisis die-off.

Since Adam Stephanides and Roy Lackey have both rejected my sense that there are non-virginal gays in Otherworld, it may well be that they are right. (I thought that there was something other than tears that would activate a sexually arousing doll.) Maybe I read too much Delany as a teenager, but the gay substratum seemed to me to be more than Green avoiding a (what I suppose to be gay) proposition on Earth (207), and Green saying "I'm not gay" to the antique-collecting woman (233). (I could have sworn Green said it another time earlier on in Otherworld, but I can't find it now.) And more than just TAD being a novel written in the 1980s where sex = death for men.

But still, to make my point clear even as I recognize that it may not be supported by the text: I thought that Sheng was offering a garden of Earthly Delights in his "paradise" underground (with all those mattresses), that it was "Sheng's Grotto" with more than tea, opium, and playing cards being offered (note the "male root" given -- so Green can get "males"?). Sheng as a panderer to sensual pleasures not offered by above ground society. "Welcome to the Underground," as it were.

In addition to that, I find something very shady about North witnessing Al Bailey's "doing" by Gloria Brooks . . . that he would be so passive when his friend/recruit is being killed seems odd.

(More about Bailey: since the post-coitus/post-ejaculation death is more like dying by AIDS, then how come Bailey is an instant KIA? Well maybe some guys do shuffle off in the big O . . . or maybe she just gave him the mercy killing with a pillow, a murder the victim would not resist, knowing that it was merciful. Explains that whole "gun to the head" thing: like Theresa Russell's line in, iirc, "The Black Widow" -- "Are you going to die, or are you going to die happy?")

So then I started wondering if North wasn't perhaps gay. He might have been going to have a tryst with Al (lethal or otherwise), with "bum a cigarette" as the cover story for others. North might have killed Bailey (he certainly seems homicidal enough with Green, even in nonsexual situations) and then blamed it on Gloria: after all, North is the witness and we know how crazy he is.

A lot of North's behavior strikes me as being homo erotic, but then again much alpha male behavior strikes me the same way (again, too much Delany? Too much William Burroughs.).

(To guard against reading homo eroticism where none is present, I was just now trying to remember that quote where Paul Newman is drunkenly saying to va-va-voom wife Elizabeth Taylor something like "Is it wrong for two guys to like each other, is that a crime?" But whoops! That's Tennessee Williams. <g> I'm doomed.)

Ejaculation as the death-trigger, I can see that easily enough. And yet, wow, what a <forgive me> Catholic Christian utopia nightmare! No fornication, no auto eroticism, sexual congress is performed one time for reproductive purposes.

(Oh yeah, another reason why Otherworld women might resent the goddess: she is not a goddess of motherhood, she is a goddess of love -- her whole deal is multiple lovers, a trait which would not fit well in Otherworld society.)

Enough wheel-spinning on this retread. Onward to Attis!

=mantis=

Jeff Veyera — 26 Jan 2003, 17:51 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis-

I read TAD a little differently.

I ascribe women's hatred of the dolls to hatred of competition. In Otherworld, competition is literally killer. In our world, a woman typically competes against other women for the affections of one man. In Otherworld, where copulation equals death for the male, she must not only compete with the other unattached women, but ALL women who wish to have a child. On top of

this, men, fearing death, have taken to Goddess worship and the safe companionship of dolls to fill the void typically filled by women. Is it any wonder they'd be so angry at the very sight of a doll?

I also wonder whether it is ejaculation or intercourse with a woman which brings on death. I suspect the latter, or one nocturnal emission would be the end of civilization.

This would also lend more strength to my argument above, and to your notion that North might be homosexual. It would certainly follow in any society where heterosexual sex meant death that a large number might prefer the alternative.

--

Michael Andre-Driussi — 26 Jan 2003, 18:49 · follows Jeff Veyera

Jeff Veyera wrote:

I ascribe women's hatred of the dolls to hatred of competition. In Otherworld, competition is literally killer. In our world, a woman typically competes against other women for the affections of one man. In Otherworld, where copulation equals death for the male, she must not only compete with the other unattached women, but ALL women who wish to have a child. On top of this, men, fearing death, have taken to Goddess worship and the safe companionship of dolls to fill the void typically filled by women. Is it any wonder they'd be so angry at the very sight of a doll?

I can go along with that, but I'd add that there must be plenty of Otherworld women who do not want children, either because they do not want to commit murder or simply because they do not want the hassle of parenting. That is to say, I think that TAD shows a world where reproduction involves pre-fathers following Love/Death and pre-mothers following Power, and the other men and women being pretty much the mass of non-reproductive society, getting on with their lives.

I also wonder whether it is ejaculation or intercourse with a woman which brings on death. I suspect the latter, or one nocturnal emission would be the end of civilization.

Ah, well we are in agreement on that one: two against the world! But their argument, iirc, is that Otherworld males are as biologically different from Earth males as O-females are from E-females -- so O-males are chaste and pure (until a pre-mother does something which activates them) where E-males are not . . . which leads Roy Lackey to suggest, iirc, that the masculinist revolution in Otherworld could scarcely form.

This would also lend more strength to my argument above, and to your notion that North might be homosexual. It would certainly follow in any society where heterosexual sex meant death that a large number might prefer the alternative.

Right, but in theory the Otherworld gays could be "Platonic" lovers (where Platonic is in its Victorian sense of being completely non-physical, as opposed to the, ahem, satyricon of Plato's Retreat or the gay understanding of the party in Plato's SYMPOSIUM). So they could be virgin gays.

=mantis=

Adam Stephanides — 30 Jan 2003, 14:40 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

on 1/26/03 10:25 AM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:

I do not insist that all dolls belonged to pre-bridegrooms, nor that only

men give them up. I am trying to solve the puzzle of why we are told more than once that Otherworld women become destructively violent at the sight of a man with his doll.

Actually, I think I basically agree with you on that point. A man who holds onto his doll is choosing an ideal woman over a real woman, and hence depriving a real woman of a chance for motherhood.

Which brings us to the question of how could species-perpetuating reproduction happen if it is literally suicide for the male? (Granted that spiders and bees and ants and all sorts of others do it this way.) It seems to me that some men would mate/die for Love (Eros) along the goddess worshiping lines, and others might mate/die for suicide (Thanatos) . . . so what is the suicide rate among men? What if this number were channeled into fertilization programs, where each one donated enough zygotes for a woman to have many more than 25 offspring? (How many more, anyway? Total 50?) Could this suicidal minority support the species? Seems possible.

Well, the math is easy to do. Assume, to be liberal, that the average mother has fifty children (since the average lifespan of human women is no higher than in our world, it could scarcely be higher). Assume also that the sex ratio of babies is fifty-fifty, since there's no indication of anything else. Then each father produces an average of twenty-five males to replace himself, which means that for the population to reproduce itself the suicide ratio among men has to be at least 4%. That seems awfully high to me.

About the "Family Maintenance" bill in Otherworld Congress, Adam wrote:

I'd forgotten that quote. But while it proves the existence of "super-mothers," it seems to tell more against than in favor of your theory as a whole. Powerful groups are rarely targeted for involuntary sterilization; note also that the bill has been vetoed, meaning that it had passed Congress. It's more likely that the motive for the bill is similar to that of extreme right-wing proposals in this world to sterilize "welfare mothers": that children in such large families are likely to be badly reared and/or drains on the public purse.

Really? I thought that Microsoft/Bill Gates was targeted for "sterilization" precisely because of power. (Since I'm stressing the sociopolitical power of motherhood in Otherworld I think it is misleading to think of "eugenics" programs against non-elites in our world.)

Again, I may be forgetting something, but I don't recall any evidence in the book of the mothers' sociopolitical power. And while I know what you mean, "eugenics" isn't really the right word for what I'm getting at (after twenty-five children, it's a little late for eugenics).

(Hmmm. I saw "family maintenance" as translating to "making families available to more women"; a broadening of the franchise. You posit "family maintenance" as meaning "maintain or restore the strength of the family by limiting its size," if I understand it correctly. And supposing that political talk translates at all!)

Actually, I hadn't been thinking of the bill's title at all. But now that you mention it, I think that the reading you attribute to me fits better than the one you prefer. Of course, bills here frequently have anodyne titles which don't reflect their contents, let alone the motives behind them (USA Patriot Act, anyone?); presumably it's the same in Otherworld.

But I see no evidence of a welfare system at all in TAD.

While it may not be mentioned explicitly, I think it's safe to say that one exists. Firstly, in matters not gender- or reproduction-related, Otherworld society seems similar to America in the late 1940s or early 1950s. We had a welfare system then, though much less extensive than the

Great Society, so it's reasonable to suppose that Otherworld does. Secondly, Green thinks at one point that a society dominated by women would care more about children than ours does. Though realistically there's no reason why Green should be in a position to know (he seems to observe very little that's not related to his quest for Lara), I get the feeling we're supposed to regard his ruminations on Otherworld as reliable. So if postwar America and Otherworld differ in this regard, I'd expect the difference to be in Otherworld's favor. Third, and most importantly, the practical aspect: a woman living on her own, raising twenty-five children, could not possibly support herself unaided (unless she were rich).

I do not see motherhood in Otherworld as stigmatized in any way -- to the contrary, it seems to be something so alluring that women (not all, mind you) are willing to commit murder. So while I can see your eugenics reading, I cannot see the social situation it seems to rely upon; otoh, the eugenics reading does not address the drive of Otherworld women to become mothers when it is not entirely a biological necessity.

I didn't say that motherhood per se was stigmatized; rather, having many children and being an excessive charge on the public purse is stigmatized (again, as welfare mothers are here). In many societies in our world, women have a strong desire to be mothers, though it's not biologically necessary; as for the question of "murder," women presumably tell themselves, and are told by their culture, that the fathers' deaths are necessary for the preservation of the species (as they are).

I'm happy you can see the "super-mothers," although I'd rather you see them as just the mothers that I think they are.

On p. 2, Lara tells Green that mothers on her world bear "Perhaps three children. Perhaps three dozen." This implies a broad range, and suggests to me that twenty-five is above average.

I sense that you still cannot see the rather desperate pre-mothers: Gloria Brooks (maybe), the ice queen (definitely), and even Fanny.

I don't recall Gloria, but my impression is that the ice queen is too young to be really desperate. I'd attribute her sudden violence to a combination of her great triumph of attracting a man to her float being suddenly snatched away, combined with Green's unfavorably comparing her to the goddess (as she must think as she undoubtedly thinks, not realizing that for Green Lara is a flesh-and-blood woman). And Fanny is happy to give up the putative advantages of motherhood in favor of being able to "do it over and over" with Green (309). Which is not to say that women in Otherworld don't strongly desire to be mothers, as I said.

And I don't think the bill, if passed, would have increased the number of male deaths. It's true that, to keep the rate of population growth fixed, more men would have to become fathers. But I don't recall any indication that the society is aiming for such a fixed target; and men aren't coerced to become fathers, though there is presumably social pressure to do so.

"Social pressure" like the ice-queen float in the parade? "Coercion" like that implied when the ice queen says, "I'm not one of those people who put a gun to your head . . . If you should change your mind"? Or the naked coercion when she goes after him with a knife? (23) Is the following passage indicative of social pressure or coercion?: [Dr. Pille talking about the ice queen incident and why Green was diagnosed as an "alcoholic" which the hospital workers call "sex change"] "Breach of promise is quite serious, as you must know. If I had said you were sound except for your concussion, you'd have been taken to another hospital, and eventually to prison. By classifying you as an alcoholic, I was able to keep you at United and keep you off of psychoactive drugs" (101).

There are breach of promise suits in our world (or used to be), and women do sometimes try to kill men who jilt them. Had Green not entered the float, he would have been unmolested.

(The dark humor: by rights, Green should have been sent to the hospital prison for his [ignorant] behavior, yet North, with his violent rap sheet and ties to secret societies, has still been assigned to the simple hospital. Shows the social weighting of their crimes, I suppose.)

In fact North had been on the Violent Ward until a few days before Green arrived (84); presumably he'd done a good job of play-acting.

And what precisely is North's crime? His rap sheet says he was "Arrested 8/8/68 ngri." (128), but I don't know what that means. Actually there's an apparent discrepancy in this regard. North tells Green when he first meets him, not knowing yet that he's a Visitor, "If you start and then you think my God, I'm going to _die_, and you back out, they say you're crazy. Same thing happened to me." (38) But North is a Visitor too, so he wouldn't have died. North could have backed out, like Green, for some other reason, but what?

Green
saying "I'm not gay" to the antique-collecting woman (233). (I could have sworn Green said it another time earlier on in Otherworld, but I can't find it now.)

You're right; to North, in fact. (39)

In addition to that, I find something very shady about North witnessing Al Bailey's "doing" by Gloria Brooks . . . that he would be so passive when his friend/recruit is being killed seems odd.

Well, North is planning his escape, and doesn't want to attract attention to himself and be possibly returned to the Violent Ward. And his speech on p. 91 suggests that he would regard a conspirator who let himself be seduced as weak and therefore expendable.

(More about Bailey: since the post-coitus/post-ejaculation death is more like dying by AIDS, then how come Bailey is an instant KIA?

Did Bailey die immediately? The only two references I found to him don't say anything about his dying.

Ejaculation as the death-trigger, I can see that easily enough. And yet, wow, what a <forgive me> Catholic Christian utopia nightmare! No fornication, no auto eroticism, sexual congress is performed one time for reproductive purposes.

Uh huh. (Fanny's excitement at the prospect of being able to "do it over and over," mentioned above, fits with this picture.)

Aside from the points I and Roy have already made, the mechanism you favor seems quite implausible, both biologically and evolutionarily. And I personally have a hard time imagining the human race persisting without sexual frustration, unrelieved by masturbation, as one motivating factor for men; though Wolfe might disagree.

But I don't really know. I doubt that there's enough evidence in the book to decide the question one way or another (though Wolfe might think there is); and I'm not sure it really makes much difference for the book as a whole.

Later mantis wrote:

That is to say, I think that TAD shows a world where reproduction involves pre-fathers following Love/Death and pre-mothers following Power, and the other men and women being pretty much the mass of non-reproductive society, getting on with their lives.

This raises the question: what percentage of men become fathers, and women mothers? You seem to be suggesting that it's only a minority; and if you do think that the average mother has twenty-five children, it had better be a minority, or there would be a population explosion. As I said, I haven't read the whole book in a long time; but as I recall, my impression when I read it had been that the majority of men became fathers. There are a couple of quotes which to me support this view, though neither is definitive. Fanny tells Green "Lots of men hold out for their entire lives, damn them." (152); if a majority of men held out, I would expect her to say "most men" rather than "lots of men." Watching Joe's fight with Sawyer, Lara says of the audience "They applaud him [Sawyer] now[.] But in a few years he will be dead, and so will they." (292) Of course, Lara could be speaking from an immortal goddess's perspective, and by "a few years" she might mean fifty or sixty. And I realize that under this view there are problems with population increase, even if the average number of children is somewhat less than twenty-five; I don't know what to do about that.

And speaking of population increase, where are all the children? The only occasion I've come across so far where children are seen in the book is the boys who are mentioned as following the parade.

Ah, well we are in agreement on that one: two against the world! But their argument, iirc, is that Otherworld males are as biologically different from Earth males as O-females are from E-females -- so O-males are chaste and pure (until a pre-mother does something which activates them) where E-males are not . . .

Well, either way, O-males have to be biologically different from E-males, since Green can have sex with Lara without dying, whereas an O-male could not. But I don't think O-males are chaste and pure, though they don't have involuntary emissions (and their sex drives must presumably be somewhat weaker).

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 30 Jan 2003, 21:59 · follows Adam Stephanides

BTW I took a look at the Captain Billy's Whiz Bang ref, Adam. Pretty neat stuff.

Adam Stephanides wrote:

Actually, I hadn't been thinking of the bill's title at all. But now that you mention it, I think that the reading you attribute to me fits better than the one you prefer. Of course, bills here frequently have anodyne titles which don't reflect their contents, let alone the motives behind them (USA Patriot Act, anyone?); presumably it's the same in Otherworld.

Yes. In my defense I would say that we are now arguing over what the bill claims to be about versus what it is really about. We can agree that it claims to be about "preserving families," but I still hold out the notion that the real reason is something else ("extending the franchise" was the example I gave). And I'm not talking about "unanticipated consequences." For an example from our world we might look at Prohibition and say that, as madcap as it was, still it was a high ideal and/or an atonement for the wild booze years before it, yet at root (how to explain?) it seems like an expression of the Puritan roots that preceded the founding of the nation. (The "unanticipated consequence," of course, was the unprecedented rise of organized crime. How this could have been unanticipated remains a mystery, except for the strange blinders that always adorn rose-colored glasses.)

Adam quoted me and wrote:

But I see no evidence of a welfare system at all in TAD.

While it may not be mentioned explicitly, I think it's safe to say that one exists. Firstly, in matters not gender- or reproduction-related, Otherworld

society seems similar to America in the late 1940s or early 1950s. We had a welfare system then, though much less extensive than the Great Society, so it's reasonable to suppose that Otherworld does. Secondly, Green thinks at one point that a society dominated by women would care more about children than ours does. Though realistically there's no reason why Green should be in a position to know (he seems to observe very little that's not related to his quest for Lara), I get the feeling we're supposed to regard his ruminations on Otherworld as reliable. So if postwar America and Otherworld differ in this regard, I'd expect the difference to be in Otherworld's favor. Third, and most importantly, the practical aspect: a woman living on her own, raising twenty-five children, could not possibly support herself unaided (unless she were rich).

First point, right, but add they still have slavery, =mostly= in the South. That should shake up the picture pretty nicely!

I am willing to concede on some points: I, too, saw Lara's "3 to 36" number of babies, and have readjusted my sense (50 babies is thus far above normal); likewise the shortage of young men -- there are too few young men to fight in wars, iirc a comment Gene Wolfe made about the Otherworld in one or more interviews. We see this in the lack of a War Between the States. (It also fits in with the idea that the ancient matriarchal utopias were all predicated on slavery.)

So in Otherworld most men die between the age of 14 and 21, let's say. Any man who survives beyond these years is either asexual or possesses an iron will or is simply too frightened. And the breeding population isn't a minority, it is just that the men are winnowed out so early that adult men are a numerical minority.

OTOH, I guess I should outline my other unsupported notions about family structure and political structure in Otherworld. I figured that power collected in families, whether they be blue bloods in New England or Faulknerian dynasties in the South. When every mother is a widow, there are no "single moms" is how I would put it -- new mothers would naturally have a place already waiting for them at their own mothers's house. Mothers would have power, but grandmothers would have more, and great grandmothers -- whew!

As for Congress, I vaguely thought that the Senate would be something more like a House of Mothers (or Grandmothers?) and the House of Representatives would be the more plebian (maybe even have male politicians). So the passage of the bill through both would represent a surge from lower to upper.

We do not see any of this in the text: we see no grandmothers, we see no congressional politicians (I don't think), we don't see any dynastic houses. What we see are the "little people" at the bottom struggling to get up, just like the characters in FREE LIVE FREE. So granted, in these circumstances we might expect to see "single moms," mothers who are not an appendage of a larger household, but I do not think that we do.

I sense that you still cannot see the rather desperate pre-mothers: Gloria Brooks (maybe), the ice queen (definitely), and even Fanny.

I don't recall Gloria, but my impression is that the ice queen is too young to be really desperate. I'd attribute her sudden violence to a combination of her great triumph of attracting a man to her float being suddenly snatched away, combined with Green's unfavorably comparing her to the goddess (as she must think as she undoubtedly thinks, not realizing that for Green Lara is a flesh-and-blood woman). And Fanny is happy to give up the putative advantages of motherhood in favor of being able to "do it over and

over" with Green (309). Which is not to say that women in Otherworld don't strongly desire to be mothers, as I said.

I dunno. The thing about Fanny is, she is so ambitious to climb up the socioeconomic ladder. As a police officer, Green could lead her to a promotion, or even a double-promotion, iirc her spoken fantasy on the subject. The motherhood element does not seem to be for Fanny an "either/or" thing, that is, it does not seem to be a choice of career or motherhood . . . it seems like an "and" thing: that motherhood will lead to promotion, either directly or as another element.

The thing about Gloria is that, if allegations are true, she has rape/murdered a patient in a mental ward. Far more predatory and serious than the gay proposition in the Earth mental ward.

The ice queen, ah. My view of her is changing . . . today I see her, and all the doll-attackers as following a model of the goddess which just happens to be wrong, according to the goddess herself. That is to say: the ice queen is enacting the behavior of Cybele, and the stained glass that Roy was bugged by (sorry Roy, the short answer was "Love-goddess-with-spear is far more ancient than Greek myths -- it is more like Ishtar and those other fierce Middle Eastern goddesses of Love & War") is an example of the wrong model being enshrined. Because Cybele loved Attis and became insanely jealous when he fell in love with a mortal princess, so she caused his insanity, which made him cut himself: but in TAD Lara says this was all a mistake and misunderstood, which I take to mean that Lara is more like Aphrodite, and the Otherworld church is focused on Cybele.

With this in mind, obviously a rival (the doll or the "other goddess" who stands behind her) makes the Cybele-devotee go into a berserker rage: the devotee re-enacts the whole thing.

Still, a main point about the ice queen: she represents a socially sanctioned non-marriage approach to the reproductive situation. But talk about random selection!

And what precisely is North's crime? His rap sheet says he was "Arrested 8/8/68 ngri." (128), but I don't know what that means.

Our mutual friend Google tells me that it means "Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity."

As for North's secret societies, "Iron Boot" reminds me of Jack London's THE IRON HEEL, a rather prophetic vision of fascism.

Green
saying "I'm not gay" to the antique-collecting woman (233). (I could have sworn Green said it another time earlier on in Otherworld, but I can't find it now.)

You're right; to North, in fact. (39)

Thanks, Adam! Yikes, for a guy who hasn't reread the book, you've got an unbelievable grip on it -- did you index it during your first read? <g>

Did Bailey die immediately? The only two references I found to him don't say anything about his dying.

Right, I'll grant you that. Then again, I don't see anybody making any moves to say goodbye to Al, shake his hand -- their sense of him seems to be very past tense.

Uh huh. (Fanny's excitement at the prospect of being able to "do it over and over," mentioned above, fits with this picture.)

I dunno. Fanny's excitement is very odd to me . . . it marks her, somehow, but as what? A visitor, maybe. Or an Aphrodite devotee in a world of Cybele worshipers. (Oops, these two options aren't that different.)

It is one of those weird little shifts, like when Green says that E-women at singles bars and company picnics were just like O-women -- after babies, not after Love.

In a sense she is playing it perfectly: she will be his Aphrodite. (Aphrodite likes to do it over and over; Aphrodite doesn't much like having babies, which is what those earth mothers like Cybele do.) Unfortunately, Green does not love Fanny, so for him it just signals another loveless coupling, the type he has been rejecting all through the book.

=mantis=