

sphinx, lions, wolves, and Latro

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 10 May 2003

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James Jordan — 10 May 2003, 21:13

Reposted from Nutria, since Crush is still out of pocket:

Okay, I admit this is long, and for starters, let me say up front that I don't claim to understand everything Wolfe is intending in the Soldier novels. There is a (necessary) great deal of convoluted and confabulation here. Here's what I'm reasonably confident of:

* It would be difficult to overemphasize the shadow that Graves' "The Greek Myths" (TGM) and (to a lesser extent) "The White Goddess" (TWG) cast over these novels.

* Latro was one of Xerxes' "Immortals" -- **the** elite Persian fighting force. During the war with the Greeks, the Persians violated Demeter's grove and it was believed by both sides that from that time She operated against them.

* Demeter is the mother of Persephone/Core/The Maiden. When she curses him, he becomes a conduit between the divine and the mundane -- if he touches a god or spirit, they become as material to mortals -- if he touches a mortal, become accessible to a god or spirit (see Latro's conversation with the serpent woman for this).

* Marc, you are clearly aware of all this, but I wanted to spell out certain details for the sake of my argument. According to Graves, Demeter, Cybele, Rhea, Hera **and** the Theban Sphinx **and** (TGM 82:6) are the Great Mother who rules alternately in the sky, on earth and on the sea, and in the infernal regions of the dead under the earth and sea. Her emblem is the Moon which is full, waxing/waning, and new.

Her colors are white, pink, and black/violet respectively (Eurykles explains this to Latro in SotM). She is virginal, erotic/fruitful, and a crone respectively. (I have a planned essay showing that the life of Eurykles also definitely follows this lunar cycle).

The lion is her symbol, but so is the wolf which howls at the moon and nursed Romulus and Remus. The wolf hunts at night and the lion is one of the few cats known for hunting during the day. Persephone is called Demeter's daughter, but she is essentially the same person exemplifying her changing phases. It's an endless cycle in which the Maiden ushers in the Crone and the Crone the Maiden. I was not aware of the Sphinx's "Day/Night" riddle that you mentioned, but it certainly fits and further explains why Wolfe chose to include the Sphinx in the first novel rather than the third.

Amazons are known as worshippers (and children) of the Thracian Ares but Graves says they were priestesses of the Moon -- so it is reasonable to conclude that (ah ha!) Wolfe is saying that Ares is really that same goddess. I don't want to look like I'm self promoting, but for further evidence that Graves sees Ares this way, I refer you to my article on Trivigaunte at my site <http://www.urth.org/whorlmap>. For this reason alone, I find it unlikely that Latro is Ares or a son of Ares -- as I understand

the themes of the novels, it is difficult to shoe-horn in such a high degree of free-agency in a single god. Incidentally, Marc, since you have recently finished SotM, you might be interested in my essay "The Wolfe and the Laidly Worm".

Now for these statements:

Marc said:

"Why aren't Latro's symbols wolves instead of lions, since his name is Lucius?"

Response:

I think you are thinking of Lycaeus. Lucius means "Light Bringer". It is the name for the morning star and is synonymous with Lucifer. His name ****is**** a major support for your theory because Venus as the morning star is a symbol of warfare. But I think this spin is sufficiently covered in that Latro is an expert soldier.

Primarily, I think the significance of the name is that it comes from the same root as the word "lucid". Due to his curse, Latro is the opposite of lucid, yet his curse has also granted him uncanny lucidity.

Buuuut, Latro's surrounded by wolves as well as lions. I don't understand it, but IIRC he ****is**** accused of being a "Neurian" by the ghost of a man he and another Neurian kill. IIRC, the Neurian says that their changing in to wolves is a curse of "Cybele" and the Apollo refers to Latro's curse as a wolf's tooth.

Marc said:

* "The advice of Hercules to Latro is easily followed by him: Latro has all the tools, he just doesn't know it because he has been stripped of his memory."

Response:

Latro doesn't know what he knows but when he is put to it, he can access any technical knowledge he needs without help. He can speak any of the languages he has learned if he happens to be speaking to (or pretending to speak to) another speaker of that language. He can access his knowledge of tactics and war engineering while on a battle field.

He can discuss Zoroastrian theology when he is queried about "what a Magi would say". He even seems to know that he is not a Zoroastrian. Is there a reason Ares would study Zoroastrianism? I think it is reasonable to assume that any advice he needs from Hercules, is knowledge he didn't have before his curse.

Latro's only divine act is one that is not shared by any other god including Demeter whose curse seems to have blessed him with it -- to make the divine real. I can't imagine why that should be a special propensity of Ares'.

Instead of Latro working miracles that show him to be divine Ares, the gods work for Latro -- treating him alternately as a court favorite or a champion.

Marc said:

* "I maintain that there is a close relationship between Latro and Ares, and that Nike certainly follows him without appearing to him."

AND

"Hegistratus and Cimmon and company swear to protect Latro before he goes

off to the Spartan ceremony of manumission, for no apparent reason. It seems as if they are talking about how necessary Arete is for the survival of their cities, and their icon of arete has become Latro. Why? The name of Ares is in the word Arete."

Response:

Graves says that the Athenians weren't fond of Ares. He also says none of the other gods were fond of him either -- except for Eris and Hades. This is certainly not true of Ares.

I don't see how Nike standing behind him means he is Ares or anyone in particular. If it were Eris, that would be another thing. Nike (the personification of Victory) is at least as often invoked in athletics as warfare. Perhaps her favor is why the gods back Latro.

If Arete equals Ares then Latro is a ****soldier**** of Ares, not Ares himself.

Marc said:

"When Latro fights Pasistrates on the shore, lions are showing up all over the place."

Response:

The roaring lions during Latro's fight with Pasistrates I took to mean that Leonides (note the name) and his soldiers were supporting/rooting for Latro (remember they were at their shrine). Possibly because Latro (as Pasistrates' slave) refused to submit in battle just as they did before Xerxes.

Conclusion:

Marc, I think you have put your finger on the fact that Latro consistently has more in common with Heracles than with Ares -- Heracles ****who was draped in a lion's skin**** and was cursed with madness so that he did not recognize his children. He's clearly not Heracles himself, yet he's a Heracles-type (whose name supposedly means "the glory of Hera -- ironic, isn't it?). I like this idea the more I think about it. I bet one could map Heracles over Latro rather nicely. I like this idea much better than associating him with Achilles.

Wolfe offers two competing images of the gods in the Soldier novels. One of servants of a dealing with petitioners to a Great King (I think it is significant that Wolfe's image is that of a king and not a queen). The other is of an actor who puts on masks to become different characters.

I believe Wolfe is going beyond Graves, to say that the White Goddess and any other god as well are servants of the true god, and in another sense the god Himself. Note that he uses this imagery again in "The Long Sun" where the gods are all interfaces of the Mainframe (which causes me to speculate on the purpose of the Echidna coalition in preventing the colonists from disembarking).

-- Crush