

TWK: Mag?

The Urth list — 7 messages, 7 voices, 25 Feb 2005

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Roy C. Lackey — 25 Feb 2005, 00:29

""Oh, son . . ."

"It was a peasant woman. I had seen many fairer, though she was fair.

"You are my son."

"I knew that she was wrong, and it came to me that if I were to lie upon the ground, and she to bend over me, I would see her in the way I had just recalled her. Then I understood that she was the fairest of women." (W, 263)

This exchange took place in the Room of Lost Love, when Art first encountered Mag, and just before his rendering of her note. For me, that last paragraph is the most enigmatic in TWK.

In context, the pronouns "she" and "her" can only refer to the woman who calls herself Mag. In the space of an inch of text she seems to go from merely a "fair" woman to "the fairest of women". How can that be?

A memory was triggered in the short time it took her to say those few words, a specific memory. If Wolfe is playing fair with us, that recollection should be somewhere in the text. There is an instance where Lynnet is sitting by a campfire when the persona of Mag takes over, and Art lies on the ground with his head in her lap while she speaks to him of her girlhood in America, but that doesn't happen for another 70 pages, so that can't be it. I even went back and read KNIGHT again, looking for the original incident.

I found two possibilities, both of which confuse me even further. The first is at the beginning of the book when Art is lying on the hill looking up at the "pictures" in the clouds, one of which is "a beautiful lady who smiled down at me". (K, 20) The other comes when he is camped for the night with Berthold beside the Griffin and is "Flat on my back after our meal". (33) Then, "A lovely, pointed face lit by great lustrous eyes like harvest moons peered down into mine, then vanished." (34) That face was green and was, of course, Disiri's. (58) During his account of his tryst with Disiri in the cave he wrote, "She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen in my life (she still is) and I had to shut my eyes, which made her laugh again." (57)

I'm tempted to say that the "beautiful lady" was The Lady of Skai, since all of the other "pictures" he saw in the sky were otherworldly, but I can't see what she would have to do with his mother. And I refuse to believe that Disiri in any way, shape or form was his mother. Besides, he hadn't forgotten Disiri, so he knew he wouldn't find her in the Room, as he takes pains to say. _But_, after telling Mag about his being "taken by the Aelf" and being playmate to Disiri, he realized that it was only then that his memories of Aelfrice had returned. And with his memories he also found his "lost" love of the Aelf. (W, 265) He had told Parka on their first meeting that "I don't like them." (K, 22)

So where does that leave us? Is it merely that, upon seeing and hearing Mag, Art had a flash of

a nondescript, early-childhood memory of his "lost" mother bending over him, and had idealized that memory of vanished Mother into "the fairest of women", which ideal can be distinguished from the more carnal "most beautiful woman I had ever seen"? If that's all it is, then Art wasn't paying attention in English class.

Anyone have any other ideas?

-Roy

StoneOx17 at aol.com — 28 Feb 2005, 11:51 · follows Roy C. Lackey

"Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> quotes (with regard to Mag)

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the ground, and she to bend over me, I would see her in the way I had just recalled her. Then I understood that she was the fairest of women."

and then writes

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I'm really confused here, as well. I do remember that somewhere Wolfe implies that the Valfather is a stand-in for everybody's father. If that's true, maybe the Lady of Skai is in some sense everybody's mother, in which case having Mag remind Able of her would be fair.

I'm also confused about whether Mythgarthr really exists, or is just an internal construction of Able's (while he's really being whisked off in an ambulance). If everything is internal, then the identification of the Lady with his mother makes more sense. Do any defenders/opponents of this interpretation want to weigh in? In fact, is Mythgarthr necessarily either internal or external, or could it somehow be both at once?

Stone Ox (Peter)

Andy Robertson — 28 Feb 2005, 12:28 · in reply to StoneOx17 at aol.com

In fact, is Mythgarthr necessarily

either internal or external, or could it somehow be both at once?

Mythgarthyr = the clearing where tales are told

Midgard = Middle World = America

Not the same

maru — 28 Feb 2005, 12:47 · in reply to StoneOx17 at aol.com

StoneOx17 at aol.com wrote:

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I'll take the 'Unbeliever' route out: Mythgarthr is both. As for the Valfather and co. (Are they Overcyns? The Knight implies so, but I don't know what The Wizard sez.) since they are the gods of that plane, we should expect them to be mythic or archetypal, since those interpretations would have more adherents; parents are of course archetypal, and the Lady's association with the Moon even more so.

~Maru

I could, of course, be wrong; but since when has that stopped any of us?

James Wynn — 28 Feb 2005, 13:13 · in reply to StoneOx17 at aol.com

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I suppose it could be both at once but I think it is absolutely significant that Valfather bows to Michael and in Germany the shrines to Odin were replaced with chapels to St. Michael.

In another sense, Arnthor, Weiland, Ravd, Toug and all the other heroes are Arthur as well. And Idnn and the Lady and the Witch and Parka and Mag are all Able's mother. Berthold and Thor are both Ben (Thor had a stone lodged in his head from an ax wound that never got properly removed and so did Berthold).

A knight does not conquer Ogres. He primarily tests, learns from, and conquers himself.

Does Wolfe expect anyone to probe that far? I suppose so since he had Able see the ambulance.

~ Crush

David Duffy — 28 Feb 2005, 15:46 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mon, 28 Feb 2005, James Wynn wrote:

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In that case, you would see it as _Peace_, but with a happy ending ;)

A few bits and pieces which I have had trouble sending at the time:

someone wrote:

... Maybe the spelling of Setr is just meant as acknowledgment of this. If it's more than that and a hint towards "Set" I have no suggestions.

Surely Set is correct: Osiris-Isis-Set
Arnthor-Morcaine-Setr
Able-Disiri-Berthold

A. and D. were brought up together as if brother and sister.

Berthold was also ruler of the waste land and is appropriately wounded. Leader of the group of giants that ransacked Griffinsford - Schildstarr.

Beginning of Knight: "If I slept here tonight," I suggested, "I could wake you if you had a bad dream." "Schildstarr," the bearded man muttered.

End of Wizard: "There we saw [...] Bold Berthold slay Schildstarr"

"I knew then that the name of our town had not been Griffinsford. Perhaps it is Griffin -- or Griffinsburg or something like that."

Gifford IL ? The gazetteers give a few Griffins in various states.

And has someone previously pointed out?

MACLURA

DESCRIPTION: Maclura is the botanical name for a medium sized, spiny tree called the Osage Orange. This tree can grow up to 60 feet in height and was originally found growing from Arkansas to Texas. This tree is mainly grown for interest as it isn't a particularly beautiful tree. It grows well in other parts of the country besides its native range. It is valued as a hedge plant and as a tree for windbreaks and poor soil. The leaves are simple and alternately arranged on the twigs. They are ovate with pointed tips and smooth edges. They grow from 3 to 5 inches long and 2 or 3 inches wide. They are shiny dark green on top and paler and smooth beneath. Male and female flowers grow on separate trees, but neither have any decorative value. The interesting fruits resemble oranges, thus the common name, Osage Orange. They are fairly large with wrinkled skin and are colored green at first, turning an orange hue later. The "oranges" consist of a number of closely packed drupes, which when punctured, secrete a bitter, milky juice that turns black upon exposure. The wood of this tree is hardy, strong and durable and has a bright orange color. The Indians used it for making bows and it has been considered to be one of the best bow woods. Because of this, it has been given other common names such as "Bow-wood" and "Bois d'arc". It is also used for fence posts, insulator pins, pulley docks and a number of other things. The wood also produces a bright yellow dye.

However, the relationship of Americans-Native Americans and Humans-Aelf doesn't really hold up.

Michael Straight — 07 Aug 2005, 22:37 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Hi, all. I just finished Wizard and am reading through some of the discussion.

On 2/25/05, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> asked about this passage:

"Oh, son . . .'

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Here's what I think is going on here:

Mag calls Art her son. Art's initial response is to believe she is wrong, mistaking him in the same way Berthold mistakes Art for Able.

But as he looks at her, Art has a memory from when he was a child looking up at his own mother and realizes that Mag's face is the same one he remembers, except now he's grown and sees her face-to-face. Mag *is* his mother, his lost love, and for that reason the fairest of women (to him).

As to how Art's mother comes to be in Mythgarthr, on the Isle of Glass, I have no idea.

-- Rostrum