

TWK: 7 world cosmology

The Urth list — 19 messages, 10 voices, 10 Dec 2005

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4526>

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Roy C. Lackey — 10 Dec 2005, 09:57

In my previous post I forgot to mention that the "servants" of God in Kleos had his ear, but those who went down to Skai to kill Ymir no longer had it. This forced the latter to petition the former to intercede for them (W, 47), thus establishing the pattern of praying, sacrificing and otherwise worshipping the inhabitants of the next higher level for all the remaining lower levels.

Humans are native to the fourth level, Mythgarthr, having been "raised" up from animals by God. Scattered references in the story make it clear that Art came from modern America, in our world. Our world can exist only in one of the several worlds said to be on the fourth level. Proper religious practice is defined in the story as the devotions due the collective inhabitants of the next higher level by the inhabitants of the level immediately below it. Stated bluntly: humans are supposed to worship the inhabitants of Skai.

We all know there is a wide and deep religious underpinning to Wolfe's work. I don't recall any overt, specific Judeo-Christian references in TWK, but it's in the background; certainly it's in Art's background. The first time I read TWK and realized the way people were prescribed to worship, I fully expected the hammer to fall, sooner or later; that people would be set straight before the story was done. It never happened, and I don't understand why it didn't.

Why did Wolfe write a story in which people are expected to pray to and worship Norse gods, in direct violation of the First Commandment, beings to whom God had specifically turned a deaf ear? In which a man, hero or not, becomes an object of worship for humans?

To say that it is "just a story" isn't good enough, not for Wolfe. He could have left the High God out of this cosmology and avoided the issue, maybe. Then it would have been "just a story". There were "gods" in the Sun cycle, too, but God was always around the corner, never out of touch. I recall no instances of prayer, not even an oath, directed to God in TWK. The concept doesn't even seem to exist, and there are two levels of beings between man and God. Am I missing something?

-Roy

Stanisław Bocian — 10 Dec 2005, 13:50 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Saturday, December 10, 2005, 10:57:39 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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RCL> -Roy

Why do you expect all Wolfe's books to be Christian? When pagan gods do fit into Christianity? This is the best orthodox neoplatonism. According to it, any contact between two levels needs mediators.

That belief influenced also Christianity, especially Pseudo-Dionysius hierarchy of angels. (See eg Annunciation. In pseudodionysian scheme archangels are the second lowest of 9 hierarchies of angels.) Those influences are stronger in Catholicism and Orthodoxy than in protestant Churches.

Of course, in Christianity direct contact between man and God does happen - but very seldom. Only regular contact that happens through Christ - and this is greatest miracle in the whole Christian theology.

Men can pray to God, but to whom does God answer Himself?

Stanisław Bocian

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thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 10 Dec 2005, 14:21 · follows Stanisław Bocian

On Sat, 10 Dec 2005 01:57:39 -0800 "Roy C. Lackey"

<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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This vaguely Zoroastrian or Gnostic or whatever hierarchy of powers permeates Wolfe's fantasy works. I can't see it as anything but deeply, deeply unorthodox. These beings are not just members of a hierarchy of angels; they are, in fact, gods - imperfect, perhaps wayward, but nevertheless beings who stand above humans.

If they have strayed, they are to be "respected but not worshipped", as SilkHorn says of the Mother. If they haven't, they are to be in fact worshipped - Michael, Art himself after his return from Skai (except that he is travelling "incognito").

Similarly unorthodox, his God-heroes: Severian is, in fact, an enormously powerful God. Latro is at least an avatar of Mars & I wouldn't be surprised to find in the concluding works that he is something even higher than that. We have a large number of hints that Art is at least an avatar of Thor, in some sense the son of the Valfather, and (especially with the conclusion) perhaps also something higher.

I find it impossible not to read them as Jesus-types within a fundamentally Arian (and Adoptionist) setting. They are creatures, they come after the Highest God, they may in fact be chosen from the ranks of mortals, but they develop into a godhood with a trajectory of development which will in the end bring them to the Empyrean, as very high gods.

I don't read Wolfe this way because it's the way I happen to believe - fundamentally, as metaphysics, I actually think it's kind of silly. But I think it must be Wolfe's belief, because if not, why write these stories in this way?

One "heresy" which Wolfe is not "guilty" of: Manicheanism. There is no independent God of Evil. Evil is just a mistake, a separation from God, not a positive thing in its own right. The Most Low God in TWK is the closest to a real Lord of Darkness, and his claim that God is Janus-faced is the closest thing to Manicheanism I can recall in Wolfe. But I think it's reasonably clear that this being is just the dross cast off by God - a mere creature. (And he flees Art, and Art "harrows" his realm - once again, a Wolfean Arian/Adoptionist Jesus-type.)

I think one of the clearest statement of what I really believe to be Wolfe's cosmology is in the first Latro book, where he discusses the subject with Cleomenes. There is a hierarchy of powers; we can aspire to commune with the lowest rung; the God of Light does not require a God of Darkness.

but I think it's clear that even he is just the dross cast off by God

Why do I say unorthodox? Because

James Wynn — 10 Dec 2005, 16:31 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

To say that it is "just a story" isn't good enough, not for Wolfe. He could have left the High God out of this cosmology and avoided the issue, maybe. Then it would have been "just a story". There were "gods" in the Sun cycle, too, but God was always around the corner, never out of touch. I recall no instances of prayer, not even an oath, directed to God in TWK. The concept doesn't even seem to exist, and there are two levels of beings between man and God. Am I missing something?

Acts 17:29-30

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent."

What's my point? That even if Wolfe would *not* write a story set in a world where the worship of created beings was not only accepted but required (and I doubt he would not), Mythgarthr and above might exist during such a "time of ignorance" in which God "winks" at such things.

On the other hand, before humans in Mythgarthr were "raised" from animals, they presumably did not worship anything at all. So now they worship the Overcyns. When they are further "raised" to Skai, they will worship Parka and Michael, and when they are further "raised" they will worship The Most High God. Disiri was also "raised" from gathered detritus.

+++++

Probably, the reason I don't find the theology of TWK troubling as you do, is that I don't believe that the Seven Worlds exist in the same categorical sense that ours does (or in the sense that Urth is presumed to).

For example ONE: There might have been an Arthur who led a temporary and failed alliance in the area around Hadrian's Wall in the 5th or 6th century, but the King Arthur we know of from Le Mort d'Arthur et al is not that Arthur. HE is an 11th century king, and the stories surrounding him are of mythological and cosmological origin and predate him. He has been "raised" to another level beyond mundane history.

For example TWO: I still believe that Art Ormsby is in that ambulance Able saw. The Seven Worlds exist in a world of metaphor in which, Wolfe *might* be illustrating, we ALL partake; so possibly, it "pre-existed" Art's abduction (if pre-existed is the right word for a place outside of Time and "Reality") . It is not just *in* Art, but it is *in* Art for the purposes of this story.

It is not Narnia. It is not Oz. It more like Alice's rabbit hole, and it is at least more like Tolkien's Middle Earth, which is described as existing in human Earth's pre-history, but an utterly implausible history.

In conclusion, the physics of the connection between the Seven Worlds and ours are those of "Story and Poetry."

(all of which doesn't explain Mag and Mother and such, but I think it might help avoid wandering down some blind alleys)

J

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Dec 2005, 20:56 · follows James Wynn

Crush wrote:

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I took the bit about humans being "raised" up from animals as just a nod to Darwin.

As for this upward evolution of humans and Aelf ever nearer to the High God that you propose,

it's just not in the book, and I see no indication that it's even theoretically possible according to the internal logic of the cosmology. There are only two instances in the story where an individual is raised up to the next level, Disiri and Able. Disiri's lot is unique among the Aelf, as I said before. Able's lot may not be unique among humans, but it is certainly exceptional. He was one of the "chosen slain", picked for his fighting abilities to sit at the Valfather's table and wait for Ragnarok. The average human in Mythgarthr is **never** going to get to Skai, dead or alive.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 10 Dec 2005, 21:20 · in reply to Stanisław Bocian

Stanisław Bocian wrote:

Why do you expect all Wolfe's books to be Christian? When pagan gods do fit into Christianity?

As I've said before, Wolfe's major project since at least *_tBotNS_* seems to be creating situations in which a non-Christian cosmology is embedded into a larger, ortho-Christian context. The most blatant example of this is *_tBotLS_*: the *_Whorl_* is a perfect Gnostic kosmos, embedded into a larger Universe in which there is only one true God of Christianity (whom Silk knows as 'the Outsider'). We know this because in Silk's "enlightenment" vision at the beginning of *_Nightside_* he is shown the Gospel, though he can only understand the theanthropos as "a man who has been both enlightened and possessed by the Outsider."

This is the best

orthodox neoplatonism. According to it, any contact between two levels needs mediators.

Actually, it isn't so much Neoplatonic as Pagan (in my etc.). It is a deliberate representation of the world-Ash of Norse myths, with its higher worlds and its lower worlds, in the form of the later Edda (which was influenced by both Christianity and Neoplatonism, and had a High God above all). Similarly, the world of Latro is an embedding of the Greek myth-world into a larger Christian context.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

James Wynn — 11 Dec 2005, 02:17 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I took the bit about humans being "raised" up from animals as just a nod to Darwin.

I don't think it is "just" a nod to Darwin. He **chose** to use the word "raised" afterall.

As for this upward evolution of humans and Aelf ever nearer to the High God that you propose, it's just not in the book, and I see no indication that it's even theoretically possible according to the internal logic of the cosmology.

Well, you admit that Disiri was raised to human status and at the end of the book, she is on her way to Kleos.

It doesn't have to be universally **done** for that to be the overall plan. In evolution, hominids aren't one day **made** human. It is a gradual process that occurs in generations rather than to a particular creature. The vast majority of genes threads do not survive, and only a remnant continue. Disiri has done it. Others will as well.

In a sense Garsecg and his sister (I forget the name) become Aelf and then human as well in the form of Arnthor and Morcaine. Albeit, they do it in a backward manner that is presumably unacceptable to the MHG.

The average human in Mythgarthr is **never** going to get to Skai, dead or alive.

Dying first seems to be the standard procedure for raising humans to Skai.

As for the "average human" getting to Skai:

Mat 7:13 Enter through the narrow passage: for wide is the passage, and broad is the road, that leads to destruction, and many there are that go that way.

J

Roy C. Lackey — 13 Dec 2005, 06:56 · follows James Wynn

I wrote:

Michael didn't meet Able in Kleos, so clearly he had come down from his high place. Presumably he was able to return, unlike his brother servants/angels who went down to Skai. What's the difference?

hartshorn wrote:

I suspect the thing that bound the descended angels to Skai was probably the slaying of Ymir and the shedding of Ymir's blood.

That's the answer I was looking for and the direction I wanted to take this thread. People seem to accept the idea that the inhabitants of Kleos are in fact angels of one stripe or another; at least none have argued against it. The exact wording in the text regarding those descended angels is "they could never go back." The question then becomes, **why** couldn't they go back?

Was there something related to the shedding of blood that physically (if such a word applies to angels) prohibited them from getting back to Kleos, or was it that they were not **permitted** to return, presumably by the Highest God? I suspect the latter.

Why would God punish them for doing what they did? Remember, they were trying to cast out the inevitable imperfection of the world God had created for them, to make that world as near as possible to God's perfection. And they did succeed in casting out much of the imperfection, personified as Ymir in Skai.

Able was a hero, a man who sacrificed his life in the course of killing a monster, Grengarm. He was rewarded by being elevated to Skai and becoming a god to men. Some angels voluntarily gave up their places in Kleos to go down and kill a monster, Ymir. They were punished by being demoted permanently to Skai and forced to accept their brethren who stayed at home as gods. What's the difference? Why was the one rewarded and the other punished for doing the same basic thing?

-Roy

Andy Robertson — 13 Dec 2005, 08:40 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey writes:
What's

the difference? Why was the one rewarded and the other punished for doing the same basic thing?

-Roy

Because the Angeloi had started higher, and had descended of their own will, to kill Ymir?

Because their actions in so doing shaped and created a yet lower realm to which they were then bound as gods? Bound by the results of their action, which changed their being?

Remember, this is a gnostic cosmos. God just Is, in a primum-mobile way, and pays very little attention to anything but his own glory. It's not a case of rewarding or punishing, but of things necessarily resulting.

- hartshorn

James Wynn — 13 Dec 2005, 12:21 · in reply to Andy Robertson

Roy C. Lackey writes:

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Able was in the same situation after he "fell" from Skai (I think there is a deliberate parallel to Lucifer there) and used his Skai-powers in Mythgarthr. He was either prohibited or unable to return to Skai. It is not impossible that both are true: That he was unable because what he had done was prohibited and it was prohibited because it would prevent a being from returning to from where he powers came.

J

Maru Dubshinki — 13 Dec 2005, 15:28 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 12/13/05, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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-Roy

Correct me if I am wrong, but didn't they descend from perfection? If they go from perfection to imperfection, then it is not hard to believe that it would be impossible to ever get back.... without the aid of the MHG. Reminds me of the doctrine of the Fall, that perfection once lost is impossible to regain with merely mortal/imperfect/sinful efforts, and that only the intercession of Jesus and his blood can we be lifted up to perfection.

~Maru

stilskin — 13 Dec 2005, 16:48 · in reply to Maru Dubshinki

--- Maru Dubshinki <marudubshinki at gmail.com> wrote:
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But it's unlike the Fall in that these angels voluntarily sacrificed their claim to perfection in order to deal with the problem of Ymir, knowing that they couldn't return.

I also wonder if Able is not a kind of dividing line, like Christ, a new dispensation or the way toward a new dispensation. He is at first bound by all the strictures that bind other denizens of the various levels, but only until he breaks through them --

again, just as Christ had to die before he could demonstrate the defeat of death through resurrection. It seems to me that Wolfe sees Able as a Christlike figure in this cosmos -- not strictly analogous to Christ but pointing the way to the MHG.

<http://www.sff.net/people/stilskin>

Chris — 13 Dec 2005, 18:42 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Are we sure that the banishment is permanent, or could there be some process of redemption unique to that realm?

I cannot help but think that there is an element of "gathering the sparks" here. Once you've gathered enough "goodness" on a lower level, when its concentration reaches a high enough level you can uplift it to the next, more pure, level. And the inhabitants there are presumably trying to gather enough to uplift them to an even higher level of purity.

One possible wrinkle to this, though, is that there is a certain atemporal nature to this whole process. That is, in a sense, the slaying of Ymir is **always still happening**. The descent and uplift are contemporaneous, and so from a strictly temporal perspective the inhabitants of Kleos will appear to be static.

I wrote:

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Roy C. Lackey — 15 Dec 2005, 09:03 · follows Chris

I have to quibble with the Gnostic view of the cosmology of TWK that hartshorn and others have championed. I don't see it that way because I don't think it satisfies the most important criterion.

I agree that the Sun Cycle can (perhaps should) be viewed as Gnostic. The Increate, aka the Outsider, is known of and referred to by the authors of the several manuscripts concerned. That is not the case, however, with Art's manuscript. In the Seven World cosmology, the deity at the top of the heap, in Elysion, is labeled variously as the High God, the Highest God and the Most High God, but they all refer to the same entity. There is no mention, direct or otherwise that I am aware of in TWK, of any overarching "one true God" outside of or otherwise apart from the Seven Worlds.

In the absence of any contravening internal evidence, I see no reason to believe that "Highest God" and "Most High God" mean anything other than what normal superlative usage would imply. MHG cannot mean second fiddle, cannot refer to the Demiurge.

Able isn't very smart; I don't think he has the guile, even if he had a motive, to deceive his brother by writing him a letter in which he deliberately concealed his knowledge of the true creation and operation of the universe, if he thought or had reason to believe that it was something other than what he reported it to be, the Seven World cosmology. I don't think Able qualifies as another of Wolfe's unreliable narrators, at least not in the sense that he had something to hide. His narrative omissions are due primarily to a lack of discernment. And no other character in the story gives the reader any cause to believe that there is any deity outside the Seven Worlds.

On a more practical level, I just can't see Michael as working for the Demiurge. And the entire notion of upward spiritual migration loses its appeal if it brings people closer to the Demiurge. If the "one true God" isn't running the Seven World cosmology, what hope have the people of Mythgarthr for salvation of any sort, spiritual betterment, transcendent love (Able for Disiri), or any of the other finer, higher sentiments and aspirations commonly associated with 'true believers'?

-Roy

Chris — 15 Dec 2005, 18:46 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

I agree with Roy's take on the purported Gnosticism in TWK. If this is being based off of the scene with the Most Low God where he claims that if you saw his back you would see the Most High God, I think that it is clear that he is lying in that scene.

The cosmology seems to be much more of a synthesis of Norse mythology with a sort of

qabbalism.

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-Roy

James Wynn — 16 Dec 2005, 22:11 · follows Chris

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Right. Because we *see* his back and it is only maggots and such.

However, there is a progression demonstrated toward the both gods (Most Low and Most High) that is at first glance indistinguishable. What is the difference between Disiri's elevation to humanity and Able's elevation to Skai versus Garsecg's elevation to Setr (and the implied elevation to Arnthor)?

It is said that Garsecg devoured Setr, but that's not *entirely* the case. Setr, didn't cease to be. Instead he became Garsecg at least as much as the other way around. Morcaine *became* a dragon of Muspel (or was in the process of becoming one) and the same was true of Arnthor. They started out as half-Aelf and were in the process of ever-*sinking* toward the Most Low God.

J

Andy Robertson — 03 Feb 2006, 19:54 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

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From "The Norsemen" by H.A. Guerber

The Giants' Ship

A North Frisian tradition relates that the giants possessed a colossal ship, called Mannigfual, which constantly cruised about in the Atlantic Ocean. Such was the size of this vessel that the captain was said to patrol the deck on horseback, while the rigging was so extensive and the masts so high that the sailors who went up as youths came down as gray-haired men, having rested and refreshed themselves in rooms fashioned and provisioned for that purpose in the hugh blocks and pulleys.

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A little bit of lore that may possibly have contributed to UOTNS?????

James Wynn — 04 Feb 2006, 00:49 · in reply to Andy Robertson

hmmm...

Yes. There is definitely a deliberate connection. Of that I have no doubt.

J

From: "Andy Robertson says:

From "The Norsemen" by H.A. Guerber

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A little bit of lore that may possibly have contributed to UOTNS?????

Transient — 04 Feb 2006, 03:40 · in reply to Andy Robertson

On Feb 3, 2006, at 2:54 PM, Andy Robertson wrote:

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From "The Norsemen" by H.A. Guerber

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A little bit of lore that may possibly have contributed to UOTNS????

Maybe Free Live Free, too.