

General Observation on Lupinologists (was Re: Urth before Earth)

The Urth list — 9 messages, 5 voices, 20 Jul 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4666>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jul 2006, 17:26

I'm not going to try to reply to B's latest right now -- depression has drained me of energy -- but I do have a general observation to make, which was inspired by said post.

On 7/19/06, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
... the Armstrong painting is one more by Fechin/Inire.

I've come to realize that Wolfe interpreters tend to develop certain ... for want of a better word (obsession seems a touch too strong) crochets. I recognize two of my own: a tendency to see Christian/Catholic themes everywhere, and a belief that Wolfe is too tricky for his own good. Others have harbored crochets about sentient trees, twin planets, and so on.

One of yours seems to be seeing Father Inire in every shadow...

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>
"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.
However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

JWillard — 20 Jul 2006, 17:44 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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If we hadn't developed these 'crochets' I doubt we'd be subscribers to this list. I'd much rather see these possibilities and readings pursued (supported in some way, of course) and argued

than limited or dismissed.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jul 2006, 17:53 · in reply to JWillard

On 7/20/06, JWillard <aldenweer at charter.net> wrote:

If we hadn't developed these 'crochets' I doubt we'd be subscribers to this list. I'd much rather see these possibilities and readings pursued (supported in some way, of course) and argued than limited or dismissed.

I wasn't suggesting that they should be "limited or dismissed."

Rather, that we should take account of them, both in ourselves and in other posters, as they emerge. Thus, I'm certainly not about to dismiss B's suggestion that Fechin is Father Inire, but neither am I simply accepting it; I would want to see it, as you say, supported, by clear textual evidence (rather than "it fits the overall pattern" -- unless the pattern is already overwhelmingly established).

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Transentient — 20 Jul 2006, 19:09 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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That's pretty funny. I just read Peace and two of the things I am really stuck on about it are the fallen tree at the beginning of the book, and the part where Alden and Margaret are in the barn looking for the egg and Margaret mentions that it has the face of Jesus on it, and is Alden worried about it being under a hen because he is afraid it might hatch. :)

b sharp — 21 Jul 2006, 12:45 · follows Transentient

Coming from a scientific background, I agree with both JWillard and Dan'I. People should pursue their own theories but temper them with an awareness of how personal bias can be misleading. After you've done your best to make an objective analysis, submit your ideas to peer review for further refinement or rejection. I've refined and rejected plenty of my own ideas based on the feedback I've received here and I hope to continue the process.

Regarding Father Inire, I've always wondered about him, but if you'd asked me a year ago I would have said I thought his only appearance is as the cowed servitor who guides Severian to the thiasus. As I started reading critical analyses of BotNS this year, Robert Borski and a couple others seemed to find a bunch of Inire appearances. Pursuing that line of thought myself has finally shed a light on what I've always thought of as the central mystery of this series- Severian's family tree.

Borski seems to view Inire as a Moses-like guide for the people of Urth, guiding them to the promised land of Ushas (hmpf, some salvation). I don't agree; there are plenty of clues that Father Inire and the Cumaeen do not have humanity's best interests at heart. Nor do I agree

that Ossipago and Palaemon and Ceryx are Inire or that the couple that are landed on Urth on Flood Day are Inire and the Cumaean etc. etc. A lot of disagreement. But if Borski had just kept his ideas to himself I would have lost a valuable inspiration.

Dan'I says:

I'm certainly not about to dismiss B's suggestion that Fechin is Father Inire, but neither am I simply accepting it; I would want to see it, as you say, supported, by clear textual evidence (rather than "it fits the overall pattern"--_unless_ the pattern is already _overwhelmingly_ >established).

Consider Inire, Fechin, Rudesind and the boatman. Fechin and Rudesind are connected by art. Rudesind and Inire are connected through the Curator guild. The boatman and Inire are connected by the Botanic Gardens. Rudesind and the boatman are connected by similar speech patterns and being widowers.

Fechin and the boatman (and Ouen's father) are always losing their material possessions. Fechin, the boatman and Inire all show an interest in pretty young girls. Fechin, Inire and Rudesind all resemble monkeys.

The pattern may not be overwhelming but I can't ignore that these four guys might be related. Would all these connections appear accidentally in Gene Wolfe's work? If the relationship illuminates obscured portions of Severian's family tree, I really can't ignore it. Others, especially those not so interested in the family tree, probabaly can ignore it and that's okay. But to me, the family tree seems so important and I haven't seen any good, complete models for it. Anyone familiar with a Severian family tree I'm not aware of?

I have my own model for most of Severian's full family tree (still a couple vague spots, I'm afraid), and I think it (along with Eschatology and Genesis) explains why the destruction of Urth and creation of Ushas was necessary. I was considering submitting another essay to Ultan's Library on this, though my first test attempt at that was such a failure and wasted two months. But one way or another I'll get these ideas out eventually.

-bsharp

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 21 Jul 2006, 18:19 · in reply to b sharp

B writes...

... after some stuff I generally agree with on method ...

Regarding Father Inire, I've always wondered about him, but if you'd asked me a year ago I would have said I thought his only appearance is as the cowled servitor who guides Severian to the thiasus.

Now, you see, I'm not even convinced of _that_ (though, as always, I'm willing to be convinced). I think Father Inire is a deliberate (on Wolfe's part) _absence_ in the BotNs. Play with presence/absence seems to me to be part of the Book's overall thematic. Thecla is the absence who is always present with Severian (even before the alzado feast); I suspect that Inire is the presence who is always absent, someone who always has influence on every event but is never present at any event.

Robert Borski's theorizing is always fascinating, but there are times when I think he is deliberately seeing how far he can push things rather than following any strict textual method.

.... a light on what I've always thought of as the central mystery of this series- Severian's family tree.

Well, certainly _a_ central mystery. We have reasonable certainty of the identity of his mother and maternal grandparents, but his paternal line seems pretty obscure. Candidates seem to include Father (thus the name, hint hint) Inire, the Autarch, one of the Masters of the Guild, and -- in the "send in the clones" scenario -- Typhon, or perhaps more accurately Typhon's father, and probably all sorts of people I haven't named. Vodalus? Why not?

I'd love to see some serious _textual_ evidence for _someone_ as Sev's father! I'd be particularly interested if (as you say) it helps explain why the eschatus and regenesis were necessary.

Note: I don't put much trust in thematic evidence without a clear textual basis for it. If I can see a nearly-complete pattern in the text that supports a theme, and X, though there's no direct evidence for it, is the only element that fits the pattern, well, that's a special case.

As, of course, are _my_ thematic theories. 8*)

So anyway, the pattern you establish later in your note -- about Inire, Fechin, Rudesind and the boatman -- is fine as far as it goes, but it's all based on a pattern that seems to me to be perceived before the fact, and the characters assigned to the pattern. I'd need to see that the pattern was present in the text waiting to be discovered, and I just don't see that.

I mean -- are they "connected" by these various things? Of course; but being connected by some thematic link doesn't mean they're the same person.

Borski seems to view Inire as a Moses-like guide for the people of Urth, guiding them to the promised land of Ushas (hmpf, some salvation).

Keep in mind that the entire generation of Israelites Moses led out of Egypt died in the desert without so much as a glimpse of the Promised Land. The cost of Ushas is very like that paid by the Israelites.

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"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

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Roy C. Lackey — 22 Jul 2006, 02:16 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l quoted and wrote:

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Well, certainly _a_ central mystery. We have reasonable certainty of the identity of his mother and maternal grandparents, but his paternal line seems pretty obscure. Candidates seem to include Father (thus the name, hint hint) Inire, the Autarch, one of the Masters of the Guild, and -- in the "send in the clones" scenario -- Typhon, or perhaps more accurately Typhon's father, and probably all sorts of people I haven't named. Vodalus? Why not?

I'd love to see some serious _textual_ evidence for _someone_ as Sev's father!

Are you having some "senior moments" a tad early? <g> Or you just don't accept Ouen as Sev's father? Dorcas wasn't Sev's grandmother?

-Roy

b sharp — 22 Jul 2006, 05:30 · follows Roy C. Lackey

I find this exchange between Dan'l and Roy very interesting:

Dan'l:

I'd love to see some serious _textual_ evidence for _someone_as Sev's father!

Roy:

Are you having some "senior moments" a tad early? <g> Or you just don't accept Ouen as Sev's >father? Dorcas wasn't Sev's grandmother?

First I think the Lupinology world has a enough accepted dogma for most of us to conclude Dan'l really was having a "senior moment" and he meant he'd like evidence for someone as Sev's maternal grandfather. The acceptance of Ouen as father, Dorcas as paternal grandmother and boatman or "Charon" as paternal grandfather are almost articles of faith.

Or could Dan'l really be out-skepticizing Roy here by denying Ouen's paternity? Dan'l?

We often hear demands for clear textual evidence to support a claim, but we don't have that for Ouen and Dorcas. All we have is a fat guy who sees a physical resemblance between a dark haired guy, a young blonde woman and an old waiter who all chanced to meet at a restaurant. And let's not forget the woman's portrait in a locket...found by Ouen in a pawn shop for crying out loud. Can we be sure that picture is really his mother and not a surrogate purchased to console him in his loss? (well, yes we can be pretty sure, but why?)

In the absence of clear, distinct text evidence, why does EVERYBODY (even my brother who only read BotNS once) understand who Ouen and Dorcas are? I think the answer is that BotNS is like a big jigsaw puzzle without a cover box. You start by assembling piece by piece. But you don't really make progress until a pattern appears and you can start filling in empty spaces intuitively without the text telling you exactly where the next pieces fit. Some patterns are easier to see than others and some patterns are seen by some and not others.

And it is a near universally understood pattern that when family members are missing and physical resemblances are presented for no apparent reason we are expected (by the author) to jump to certain conclusions without direct evidence. A physical resemblance and the name Catherine leads many to assume an actress that plays Katherine is Severian's mother. This is an even bigger intuitive leap than the Ouen/Dorcas assumption but I haven't seen a lot of argument about that since back when J. Clute suggested the old Autarch, Appian in that role.

In the future, sometime I'll be arguing that Catherine and Cyriaca are sisters, that Severian's paternal grandfather and Catherine's father are the same person and that Thecla's four books and Agia's four weapons help place each of them in Severian's family tree. And I won't be able point to text which says exactly those things but I will show a certain pattern these help fill and, the intuitive leaps I had to make to fill them. This pattern which ties to what I think is the overarching theme of BotNS (noted below). It won't be of much use to many Lupinologists but maybe to some who also perceive that same theme.

I would like to propose that knowledge of BotNS has progressed to the point where it can be judged sort of scientifically. By that I mean that (like in science) nothing can ever be "proven" (unless Gene Wolfe decides to speak candidly before he passes on) so all we have are working

theories. Competing theories. The one (or ones) which explain best to the most people is accepted.

Naturally there will be divided camps and competing theories but I still think constructive criticism of a theory should always explain why a competing theory seems better. It may be that Peter Wright will always view the BotNS pattern in terms of Socialist Political Theory. For Robert Borski and others it might be a Moses tale. For Dan'I and others, Catholic themes prevail. But each framework might speak to many other people and there might be enough overlap that theories in one perceived pattern could assist those in another.

In recent months my own framework reference has come to agreement with Nick Gevers who observes that,

"Wolfe has a fascination with paganism and the rise of Christianity that eclipsed it, and has worked >this into a series of related epics: The Book of the New Sun".

I'm hoping to discuss how important portions of BotNS relate to this theme (including the family tree), if I can find a way to break it into the bite-sized chunks this format requires. Wish me luck!

-bsharp

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 22 Jul 2006, 06:48 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Are you having some "senior moments" a tad early? <g>
Or you just don't accept Ouen as Sev's father? Dorcas
wasn't Sev's grandmother?

Aaaargh. You're right, I just spaced on that.

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