

TWK: Tower of Glas

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 05 Sep 2006

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Matthew Keeley — 05 Sep 2006, 21:11

Hi,

I'm new here, and likely won't be participating in that many discussions as yet, as there are still many of Wolfe's books that I haven't read and which I should like to complete before taking a more active part in this list. Nonetheless, I wanted to join this list and I did. I've looked at the "back issues" of this group, but couldn't find anything dealing specifically with what I'm about to bring up...

(I should perhaps warn that there are major spoilers for TWK here.)

In *The Wizard Knight*, Wolfe seems to want us to identify the Tower of Glas with the Tower of Babel, but it seems to me that the tower in question also resembles Dante's Purgatory in many ways. I found this rather perplexing, as while the Tower of Babel is clearly a symbol of evil (rebellion against God, hubris, etc.), Purgatory is something manifestly good and holy. I figure I should be a bit more specific, so I've composed a lists comparing the ToG with Babel and with Purgatory.

BABEL / ToG

-The Tower of Glas is built by Aelf who wish to reach Mythgarthr, while Babel is built by men who wish to reach heaven. I think it may be noteworthy that though Babel is never completed, the Tower of Glas does in fact reach into Mythgarthr.

PURGATORY / ToG

-To ascend Purgatory, one must walk a path which circles the mountain itself; to ascend the ToG, one must take circling stairs.

-The climb of Purgatory leads one to be purified of sins; Uri and Baki are ostensibly cleared of their allegiance to Setr at the top of the ToG.

-At the top of Purgatory is the Earthly Paradise / Eden; the top of the ToG is the beautiful Isle of Glas.

-The voyager in Purgatory sees representations of Satan in the form of a serpent; Able sees Setr as a serpent / dragon in the Eden-like jungle on the Isle of Glas.

-Able's mother lives (at one point) on the Isle of Glas; I'm reminded of Eve, the "first mother," who lived in Eden / the Earthly Paradise.

-Angels are present in Purgatory; Able meets Michael for the first time on the Isle of Glas.

Any thoughts on what Wolfe is trying to do here? It seems rather odd to so mix Purgatory and Babel; the Tower of Glas seems a rather ambiguous symbol (Though, looking at my list, there seem to be more parallels to Purgatory than to Babel). I wonder if Able undergoes any purification in climbing the ToG? That would seem to fit the interpretation of the ToG as a sort of Purgatory...

Thanks for any thoughts or comments. I think I'm going to enjoy this list...

-Matt Keeley

David Duffy — 06 Sep 2006, 01:56 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On Tue, 5 Sep 2006, Matthew Keeley wrote:

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Hi, welcome to the list! (though I should add I am more a regular reader than participant). I like the comparison you make (list snipped).

I would have thought "as above, so below", but with the proviso that the deeper you go, the less perfect the resemblance, and the more likely things are to go wrong -- the Island of Glas is less than paradisaical, even though it may be glamorous. Movement upwards in the worlds must be lawful I think -- that is arranged by a higherup for one who is worthy or made worthy by the love of those above. In that sense the Tower is hubristic. Wolfe is big on the conflation of Faery with the land of the dead, so a connection forcing its way up like that doesn't sound propitious to me.

The Tower of Glas also appears in Castlevuew, by the way.

David Duffy.