

Questions about BNS

The Urth list — 16 messages, 8 voices, 14 Nov 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4924>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Eric Ortlund — 14 Nov 2007, 19:26

Dear Friends,

My name is Eric and I teach Hebrew and Old Testament at a seminary in Canada. I picked up *Strange Travellers* several years ago while living overseas and was entranced, especially with "To the Seventh." Then it was on to the *Wizard Knight*, which I have now read four times, each new time with increasing relish. I'm glad I did WK first, because I might have been overwhelmed otherwise! Anyway, all this is to say I'm relatively new to Wolfe (but he's quickly become my favorite author) and to this list - so if the questions I'm asked have already been discussed, just let me know!

Anyway, I'm on my third time through the *Book of the New Sun* and there are some questions that keep niggling at me. Anyone care to comment on these?

1) When Severian enters the shop of Agilus and Agia, Agilus is wearing a mask that makes him look like a corpse. No detail in Wolfe is inconsequential: so why is that there? Foreshadowing of Agilus' fate?

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it - and then the native tells a story about a fish who apparently is a woman. I'm totally at a loss here; what is the connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this contribute to the story?

3) What about the vision Dorcas and Severian see when they're leaving Nessus of the huge palace (pg 181)? What is it of? I vaguely remember that the conversation which Severian has with the woman who gives him tea at the fair in Saltus might hint that it is somehow identified with the tent of the Pelerines. Is that on the right track?

4) At the end of *Shadow of the Torturer*, there's a disturbance at the huge gate of Nessus; we only learn in Severian's dream in the next book about the five soldiers turning people aside. Severian seems so circumspect in describing this that I'm suspicious he knows something which he isn't telling us. Is this incident in the book significant? Or is it just that Severian doesn't know why the soldiers are there?

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the Gyoll near the beginning of *Shadow*, he sees a woman's face; later, during his dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia hint that they came to see him at the Gyoll - so that's who he sees. Two questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? Also, when his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius - and a boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really small, but, like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the

boatman say this? Is there anything here?

Thanks again - Eric

Invite the next generation of students to consider Briercrest College and Seminary. Visit www.briercrest.ca/refer.

This e-mail may contain confidential and privileged proprietary material for the sole use of the intended recipient. Any review, use, or distribution or disclosure by others is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, or authorized to receive the information from the recipient, please contact the sender by reply e-mail and delete all copies of this message.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 14 Nov 2007, 21:49 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

Eric,

Welcome. I can't answer all your quesitons, and for those I can, my answers may be "debateable." But here goes.

1) When Severian enters the shop of Agilus and Agia, Agilus is wearing a

mask that makes him look like a corpse. No detail in Wolfe is
inconsequential: so why is that there? Foreshadowing of Agilus' fate?

Perhaps, but more generally there's a theme about things that pretend to be something they aren't pretending to be what they really are: i.e., the Hierodules, beautiful humanoids who wear masks of hideous things, and wear beautiful human masks over that; or Jonas, who seems to be a robot masquarading as a human, but turns out to have a human soul. Etc.

Mind, I might be reading this through my "Kurt Vonnegut" eyes.

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it - and then the native tells a story about a fish who apparently is a woman. I'm totally at a loss here; what is the connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this contribute to the story?

I can't answer this one. But I'll use it to suggest that pagination rarely helps; there are quite a number of one-, two- and four-volume editions of tBotNS out, so your pagination will almost certainly differ from that of those trying to answer the questions. better to give chapter numbers and information that will help locate the text in the chapter -- which, other than the chapter number, you did fairly well here.

3) What about the vision Dorcas and Severian see when they're leaving Nessus of the huge palace (pg 181)? What is it of? I vaguely remember that the conversation which Severian has with the woman who gives him tea at the fair in Saltus might hint that it is somehow identified with the tent of the Pelerines. Is that on the right track?

It *is* the tent of the Pelerines. They lit a fire to burn it down and it went up like a hot-air balloon.

4) At the end of Shadow of the Torturer, there's a disturbance at the huge gate of Nessus; we only learn in Severian's dream in the next book about the

five soldiers turning people aside. Severian seems so circumspect in describing this that I'm suspicious he knows something which he isn't telling us. Is this incident in the book significant? Or is it just that Severian doesn't know why the soldiers are there?

This incident has been discussed a great deal, to no real conclusion. One answer that has been suggested is that they are there to capture one of several members of the party - particularly Sev himself (in which case the attack would be under the influence of Abaia or one of those guys) or maybe Baldanders. Another is that this is simply soldiers taking advantage of the fact that it's forbidden to use the roads, and the gate is on a road, so...

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the Gyll near

the beginning of Shadow, he sees a woman's face; later, during his dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia hint that they came to see him at the Gyll - so that's who he sees. Two questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? Also, when his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius - and a boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really small, but, like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the boatman say this? Is there anything here?

I don't know who the woman crying out is. But my claim is that the boatman is Dorcas's husband, whom Severian next encounters in the Garden when he nearly drowns.

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

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

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

I am miserable, he is miserable,

We are miserable.

Can't we have a party? Would he rather have a party?

Adam Thornton — 14 Nov 2007, 23:09 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On Nov 14, 2007, at 1:26 PM, Eric Ortlund wrote:

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it

This would be Severian and the Urth of the New Sun, is my reading.

In addition to being a Christ figure he's a Mosaic figure--he brings his world to salvation but does not himself get to enter the New World.

- and then the native tells a story about a fish who apparently is a woman. I'm totally at a loss here; what is the connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this contribute to the story?

Undines? Dunno.

3) What about the vision Dorcas and Severian see when they're leaving Nessus of the huge palace (pg 181)? What is it of? I vaguely remember that the conversation which Severian has with the woman who gives him tea at the fair in Saltus might hint that it is somehow identified with the tent of the Pelerines. Is that on the right track?

As I recall, the tent of the Pelerines rising like a hot air balloon as it burns. But I might be misremembering, because that doesn't sound plausible.

4) At the end of Shadow of the Torturer, there's a disturbance at the huge gate of Nessus; we only learn in Severian's dream in the next book about the five soldiers turning people aside. Severian seems so circumspect in describing this that I'm suspicious he knows something which he isn't telling us. Is this incident in the book significant? Or is it just that Severian doesn't know why the soldiers are there?

This has been discussed before, but I don't think anyone knows definitively what's going on. I myself love the idea that Severian thinks he can impress chicks with impromptu excruciations.

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the Gyll near the beginning of Shadow, he sees a woman's face; later, during his dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia hint that they came to see him at the Gyll - so that's who he sees. Two questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? Also, when his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius - and a boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really small, but, like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the boatman say this? Is there anything here?

The boatman may have seen an undine. Or maybe not. There's something there all right. What, though...

Adam

Gwern Branwen — 15 Nov 2007, 02:28 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On 2007.11.14 13:26:21 -0600, Eric Ortlund <eortlund at briercrest.ca> scribbled 0 lines:

Dear Friends,

My name is Eric and I teach Hebrew and Old Testament at a seminary in Canada. I picked up Strange Travellers several years ago while living overseas and was entranced, especially with "To the Seventh." Then it was on to the Wizard Knight, which I have now read four times, each new time with increasing relish. I'm glad I did WK first, because I might have been overwhelmed otherwise! Anyway, all this is to say I'm relatively new to Wolfe (but he's quickly become my favorite author) and to this list - so if the questions I'm asked have already been discussed, just let me know!

Anyway, I'm on my third time through the Book of the New Sun and there are some questions that keep niggling at me. Anyone care to comment on these?

1) When Severian enters the shop of Agilus and Agia, Agilus is wearing a mask that makes him look like a corpse. No detail in Wolfe is inconsequential: so why is that there? Foreshadowing of Agilus' fate?

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it - and then the native tells a story about a fish who apparently is a woman. I'm

totally at a loss here; what is the connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this contribute to the story?

...

Thanks again - Eric

I've thought that they didn't really travel. The naked native is named Isangoma, which seems to be an African title for some sort of shaman or diviner, and he refers to Agia and Severian constantly as spirits.

Actually, turns out I'm not the first to think this:

<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0016/0040.shtml>,

<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0024/0061.shtml>,

<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0304/3184.txt.shtml>.

Yeah, so my theory is that they are there as specula themselves, which is how they can 'travel' such distances of time and space, and why the Preceptress Marie and Robert cannot see them (well). But Isangoma and his kind are gifted with being able to; that is why when his nephew hooked that fish, he could see through to what it really was: "Then he saw the fish moving beneath the woman's face, and knew that he saw a reflection."

So it's further commentary on Inire's Fish, but I don't think that's it. Understanding what's going on would be a lot easier if we knew who Marie and Robert are. Why is she a Preceptress? Who is Robert and why did he abandon his art studies in Paris? What the heck are they doing in such a stereotypical Africa? And if it's the deep past from Severian and Agia's point of view, why is the mail plane a 'thopter and not a fixed-wing?

gwern

EODN Commecen AUTODIN security AFSPC Global Pine 1071 NORAD Faber

Jeff Wilson — 15 Nov 2007, 02:40 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Nov 14, 2007, at 1:26 PM, Eric Ortlund wrote:

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it

This would be Severian and the Urth of the New Sun, is my reading. In addition to being a Christ figure he's a Mosaic figure--he brings his world to salvation but does not himself get to enter the New World.

Doesn't he? If the people who worship The Sleeper aren't on Briah, where are they?

3) What about the vision Dorcas and Severian see when they're leaving Nessus of the huge palace (pg 181)? What is it of? I vaguely remember that the conversation which Severian has with the woman who gives him tea at the fair in Saltus might hint that it is somehow identified with the tent of the Pelerines. Is that on the right track?

As I recall, the tent of the Pelerines rising like a hot air balloon as it burns. But I might be misremembering, because that doesn't sound plausible.

Their "tent" is more like a circus big-top made from advanced fabric that resists combustion and may be somewhat metallic in appearance as it resembles other buildings in the citadel which include rocket ships in their number. If nothing else, the straw covering the ground inside it

would be a ready source of hot air when burned. It probably wouldn't be stable and could roll over and deflate at any moment, giving the appearance that it disappeared in a shower of sparks.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< http://www.io.com/~jwilson >

Adam Thornton — 15 Nov 2007, 02:54 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Nov 14, 2007, at 8:40 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Nov 14, 2007, at 1:26 PM, Eric Ortlund wrote:

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it

This would be Severian and the Urth of the New Sun, is my reading. In addition to being a Christ figure he's a Mosaic figure--he brings his world to salvation but does not himself get to enter the New World.

Doesn't he? If the people who worship The Sleeper aren't on Briah, where are they?

I thought they were on Urth's distant past, that he had swung himself backwards into time to when the New Sun was not yet, and hence was stuck.

I may well have misread that. (Which is a general-purpose caveat in any of my readings of Wolfe.)

Adam

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 15 Nov 2007, 03:21 · follows Adam Thornton

On Thu, 15 Nov 2007 06:26:21 +1100 Eric Ortlund
<eortlund at briercrest.ca> wrote:

1) When Severian enters the shop of Agilus and Agia, Agilus is wearing a mask that makes him look like a corpse. No detail in Wolfe is inconsequential: so why is that there? Foreshadowing of Agilus' fate?

Also, Agilus has some kind of permanent mask attachment points on his neck. Sev can still see them when Agilus removes the mask. What's with that?

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native

is
talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from
Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but
not
being able to enter it - and then the native tells a story about a
fish
who apparently is a woman. I'm totally at a loss here; what is
the
connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this
contribute to the story?

On the fish part: Just after the jungle hut scene (I think) Sev tells Agia the story of Inire and Thecla's little friend, the one in which the mirror-fish appears. I'm pretty sure this is the same fish, and the woman is the "reflection" of Thecla's friend.

3) What about the vision Dorcas and Severian see when they're
leaving
Nessus of the huge palace (pg 181)? What is it of? I vaguely
remember
that the conversation which Severian has with the woman who gives
him
tea at the fair in Saltus might hint that it is somehow identified
with
the tent of the Pelerines. Is that on the right track?

I thought it was pretty clear that this was indeed the Pelerine's temple rising up like a hot air balloon.

4) At the end of Shadow of the Torturer, there's a disturbance at
the
huge gate of Nessus; we only learn in Severian's dream in the next
book
about the five soldiers turning people aside. Severian seems so
circumspect in describing this that I'm suspicious he knows
something
which he isn't telling us. Is this incident in the book
significant?
Or is it just that Severian doesn't know why the soldiers are
there?

Over the years, this has puzzled many. I haven't yet heard an entirely satisfactory solution & don't have one myself.

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the
Gyoll
near the beginning of Shadow, he sees a woman's face; later,
during his
dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia
hint
that they came to see him at the Gyoll - so that's who he sees.
Two
questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? Also,
when
his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius -
and a
boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really
small, but,
like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the boatman say

this?

Is there anything here?

My guess is that the crying woman was his mother (near-death has dredged up a very early memory, or something like that). The boatman knows that water-women come up the river, and he wonders if "Malrubius" was one of these. (Actually, I can't remember exactly where we get told that water-women coming up the river is relatively common - but I believe at the end of CoA there's enough to make this clear, and SilkHorn says somethign like this in RTTW.)

David Duffy — 15 Nov 2007, 04:13 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On Wed, 14 Nov 2007, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On 2007.11.14 13:26:21 -0600, Eric Ortlund <eortlund at briercrest.ca> scribbled 0 lines:

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it - and then the native tells a story about a fish who apparently is a woman. I'm totally at a loss here; what is the connection? What is the naked man talking about? How does this contribute to the story?

I've thought that they didn't really travel. The naked native is named Isangoma, which seems to be an African title for some sort of shaman or diviner, and he refers to Agia and Severian constantly as spirits.

Actually, turns out I'm not the first to think this...

Yeah, so my theory is that they are there as specula themselves, which is how they can 'travel' such distances of time and space, and why the Preceptress Marie and Robert cannot see them (well). But Isangoma and

...

Understanding what's going on would be a lot easier if we knew who Marie and Robert are. Why is she a Preceptress? Who is Robert and why And if it's the deep past from Severian and Agia's point of view, why is the mail plane a 'thopter and not a fixed-wing?

--

gwern

As Agila says, I think they are reenactors. They are not in our Africa: Isangoma uses an Australian aboriginal word for fishing spear, as well as Zulu terms, and mentions several our-now-extinct birds and animals. Rereading the mail plane description, it is a fixed wing propeller driven aircraft. I don't know who Robert and Marie are, but it seems like we *should* know them. I think they are Preceptor and -tress just because they are both missionaries.

Cheers, David Duffy

PS About 1/3 through Pirate Freedom!

Jeff Wilson — 15 Nov 2007, 04:41 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson wrote:

Adam Thornton wrote:

On Nov 14, 2007, at 1:26 PM, Eric Ortlund wrote:

2) When Severian and Agia are in the Jungle Garden, the apparently travel in time and space (the story about Father Inire's mirrors apparently prepares the reader for this) to a missionary couple in the jungle. Can someone please explain to me what on earth the native is talking about on pg. 131? The woman in the couple reads from Deuteronomy 34 - about Moses looking into the promised land but not being able to enter it

This would be Severian and the Urth of the New Sun, is my reading. In addition to being a Christ figure he's a Mosaic figure--he brings his world to salvation but does not himself get to enter the New World.

Doesn't he? If the people who worship The Sleeper aren't on Briah, where are they?

sorry, I meant "on Ushas".

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 15 Nov 2007, 06:14 · follows Jeff Wilson

Welcome, Eric!

Search the archives for "Piteous Gate" for past discussions of the incident.

As several others have said, the fiery apparition witnessed by Severian and Dorcas in Book I is indeed the "miracle" of the rising, burning tent cathedral of the Pelerines mentioned by the lady vendor in Saltus in Book II.

Eric Ortlund wrote:

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the Gyll near the beginning of Shadow, he sees a woman's face; later, during his dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia hint that they came to see him at the Gyll - so that's who he sees.<<

More specifically, the huge face he sees is that of Juturna. See Book V, Chapter XLIII.

Two

questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? <<

As Andrew has also suggested, I believe the woman was his mother.

Also, when

his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius - and a boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really small, but, like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the boatman say this? Is there anything here? <<

I believe that Robert Borski was the first to suggest that the boatman is/was Dorcas' husband. I know of no better explanation.

-Roy

Eric Ortlund — 15 Nov 2007, 15:13 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Comments in blue below.

Eric Ortlund — 15 Nov 2007, 15:19 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Eric Ortlund — 15 Nov 2007, 15:48 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

T

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Roy C. Lackey
Sent: Thursday, November 15, 2007 12:15 AM
To: The Urth Mailing List
Subject: Re: (urth) Questions about BNS [mx][spf]

Welcome, Eric!

Search the archives for "Piteous Gate" for past discussions of the incident.

As several others have said, the fiery apparition witnessed by Severian and Dorcas in Book I is indeed the "miracle" of the rising, burning tent cathedral of the Pelerines mentioned by the lady vendor in Saltus in Book II.

Eric Ortlund wrote:

5) One more and I'll stop - when Severian nearly drowns in the Gyll near the beginning of Shadow, he sees a woman's face; later, during his dream while he's sleeping next to Baldanders, the brides of Abia hint that they came to see him at the Gyll - so that's who he sees.<<

More specifically, the huge face he sees is that of Juturna. See Book V, Chapter XLIII.

Two

questions: who is the woman crying that he hears - Thecla? <<

As Andrew has also suggested, I believe the woman was his mother.

That makes sense to me.

Also, when

his friends pull him out, he says that he saw the dead Malrubius - and a boatman asks if Malrubius is a woman. I know this is really small, but, like I said, no detail is insignificant; why would the boatman say this? Is there anything here? <<

I believe that Robert Borski was the first to suggest that the boatman is/was Dorcas' husband. I know of no better explanation.

-Roy

Yup, that sounds right to me.

Thanks, everyone, for the responses; it makes Wolfe a lot more exciting to read as I realize how much depth there is to the New Sun series. This is the "biggest" book I've ever read - it simply has the vastest perspective of any work of fiction I've ever come across.

I find it impossible to describe the sense of uplift I felt after reading the last sentence of Urth of the New Sun about the sleeping god; after so much destruction and pain, it is a tantalizingly hopeful ending.

Part of the reason I find Wolfe so entrancing is that he's so erudite when it comes to ancient mythology. Part of my studies has been on ancient Semitic myths and their relation to the Hebrew Bible. As in BNS

- and as in WK, for that matter - the sea and the monsters in it are often seen as these cosmic

monsters which would destroy all of creation, which Marduk (Babylonian)/Baal/Yahweh/whoever needs to defeat - and in so doing, renews all creation. Much the same theme seems to be going on here. I find it very interesting that these chaotic forces try to enlist the hero in both BNS and WK.

The more I read about the Tokoloshe scene in the Jungle Garden, the more mysteries it seems to hold. Why do only Isangoma and Robert see Sev and Agia (who, by the way, are apparently "traveling" in the same way - as specula - which Horn/Silk does in the Short Sun series)? And Robert refers to the two of them as Death and His Lady (doesn't Dr. Talos say the same thing about them?), who have "come to remonstrate with him for giving up art for this" (1/21), "this" apparently meaning missions work.

I think it is significant that Robert says that "They are the spirits of the future, and we make them ourselves" - something which, from the larger perspective of the novel as a whole, is true. Isangoma also says, "Tokoloshe remain until the end of the world."

The odd thing is that the Christian missionaries don't seem to be able to handle the spectral appearance of Sev and Agia - but Isangoma understands it, is not frightened by it, and offers to dispel the spirits with his song. (There's a note of triumph in Isangoma's voice as Agia leaves the hut and Sev follows her.) Robert seems quite shaken in his faith in the whole encounter - as if Sev is torturing him just by his appearance. Perhaps a strike against Christianity and in favor of paganism! Odd.

Thoughts?

Thanks again for the helpful comments.

Gwern Branwen — 16 Nov 2007, 02:03 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

On 2007.11.15 09:48:09 -0600, Eric Ortlund <eortlund at briercrest.ca> scribbled 0 lines: ...

I think it is significant that Robert says that "They are the spirits of the future, and we make them ourselves" - something which, from the larger perspective of the novel as a whole, is true. Isangoma also says, "Tokoloshe remain until the end of the world."

The odd thing is that the Christian missionaries don't seem to be able to handle the spectral appearance of Sev and Agia - but Isangoma understands it, is not frightened by it, and offers to dispel the spirits with his song. (There's a note of triumph in Isangoma's voice as Agia leaves the hut and Sev follows her.) Robert seems quite shaken in his faith in the whole encounter - as if Sev is torturing him just by his appearance. Perhaps a strike against Christianity and in favor of paganism! Odd.

Thoughts?

I didn't think Isangoma was not frightened by it. Doesn't Robert specifically say to Marie that Isangoma is afraid? And doesn't Robert pale when he actually looks at them?

gwern

Gwern Branwen — 16 Nov 2007, 02:17 · in reply to David Duffy

On 2007.11.15 14:13:09 +1000, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> scribbled 0 lines:

On Wed, 14 Nov 2007, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On 2007.11.14 13:26:21 -0600, Eric Ortlund <eortlund at briercrest.ca> scribbled 0 lines:

As Agila says, I think they are reenactors. They are not in our Africa: Isangoma uses an Australian aboriginal word for fishing spear, as well as Zulu terms, and mentions several our-now-extinct birds and animals. Rereading the mail plane description, it is a fixed wing propeller driven aircraft. I don't know who Robert and Marie are, but it seems like we **should** know them. I think they are Preceptor and -tress just because they are both missionaries.

Yes, but couldn't the terminology as easily be due to the translation of tBotNS into English? If they really are from the Commonwealth time, then 'our-now-extinct' birds and animals would be even more extinct and mythical. And as someone else pointed out, where would these re-enactors be getting Paris and all the rest from? Records from that period don't seem to be available in Severian's time; the present-day is just too long ago.

Cheers, David Duffy

PS About 1/3 through Pirate Freedom!

gwern

Jeff Wilson — 16 Nov 2007, 14:56 · in reply to Eric Ortlund

Eric Ortlund wrote:

Comments in blue below.

Please do not use colors and other non-standard fancy formatting in e-mail intended for members of the general public; it makes the baby Theanthropos cry and opens several cans of worms as detailed here:

<http://www.expita.com/nomime.html>

<http://www.greenend.org.uk/rjk/2000/06/14/quoting.html>

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >