

"Wolfer" and "The Eleventh City"

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 07 Feb 2008

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JBarach at aol.com — 07 Feb 2008, 23:43

Urthlings --

I'm in the midst of Innocents Aboard. I read "Wolfer" last night and "The Eleventh City" this morning, and I have a few questions about each of them. I didn't find either of them mentioned when I searched the Urth archives, so if I've missed a discussion of them, please point me to it!

WOLFER

(1) "Wolfer" starts with a discussion of the meaning of names, a subject that evidently interests Wolfe very much, given his name and the similarity that it has with the name of the protagonist, Janet Woolf. That suggests to me that all the names (or at least the last names) in the story are likely significant.

On the other hand, when I try to figure out the significance, I don't get very far.

"Granstrom is my name," says the big man who gives Janet the wolves, and that way of putting it seems to me to tie what he says to the way the story begins. So what does his name mean? Well, a quick look at one webpage (<http://www.ancestry.com/facts/Granstrom-name-meaning.ashx> (<http://www.ancestry.com/facts/Granstrom-name-meaning.ashx>)) indicates that it's a Swedish "ornamental name" from gran ("spruce") and strom ("river").

The person to whom Janet is supposed to give the wolves is named Larry Ventris. Ventris is Latin and means "belly" or "womb" (as in the line from the "Ave Maria": benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus: "blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus").

The ranger toward the end of the story is named Jerry Baumgarten. According to this site (<http://www.ancestry.com/facts/Baumgarten-name-meaning.ashx> (<http://www.ancestry.com/facts/Baumgarten-name-meaning.ashx>)), Baumgarten is Germanic and means "orchard" from baum ("tree") + garte ("enclosure," hence "garden"). The name would have been given to someone who owned, lived by, or worked in an orchard. It was also the name of several villages, so someone from one of those villages could have had that name. It also appears as a Jewish (Ashkenazic) ornamental name.

On top of that, I'll add the names of the two Scotties: Kyoto and Wasabe, who both have Japanese names. The former is a place name; the latter an alternate spelling of wasabi, a kind of Japanese horseradish. Oh, and (perhaps in keeping with the discussion of Barnes and Noble?) the gun is frequently identified as a Smith & Wesson, but I don't know that there's any significance to that (a smith is, of course, a blacksmith; "Wesson" is an alternate form of "Weston," which indicates someone from the western town or settlement, so there's no imaginary link as the lecturer proposes there is between B&N).

Those are all the last names. But are they significant? The opening of the story certainly sets us up to expect significant names. Margaret Bishop is treated as if she has a significant name ("Let us pray," she says once, and doing work for her leads Janet to what she takes to be a vision of Christ [?]). But what about the rest of them? Or am I barking up the wrong tree here?

(2) In some ways, the story seems straightforward (which in Wolfe is probably a tip-off that it isn't really)

At a lecture about the meaning of names, a woman named Janet Woolf (who has been thinking a lot about the meaning of her name) flips out a bit and ends up meeting Margaret Bishop, who gets her involved in a plot to bring wolves into a park in Michigan. The woman picks up the wolves, tries to deliver them but can't, and so takes them to the park herself, where she's confronted by a ranger who doesn't seem to mind. She drives off, has a vision which she takes to be divine blessing on her work, and plans to do more of this sort of thing in Texas.

And yet ... there are a few elements of the story that aren't so simple:

- * What's the significance of the opening discussion of the meaning of names?

- * What's the significance of Janet's own last name "Woolf," and why is she so adamant that the lecturer isn't right about her name but that instead she's a servant and friend of wolves? That makes sense in the rest of the story, but why is Janet convinced of that already at the beginning?

- * What's the significance of Janet's divorce and return to her maiden name? Are there any hints of what her married name might have been? (I don't think so.) Is the divorce and all the stuff related to it -- e.g., having to borrow the SUV from her ex-husband -- more or less irrelevant? If so, why are they there at all? They make the story longer, but do they add anything to it? Why couldn't Janet herself have been single or married or (at any rate) an SUV owner herself? Why does she have to borrow it from her husband? What's the significance of her being divorced?

- * What's the howling that Janet hears? Wolves, obviously, but what's it all about?

- * Are we to take the various things that Kyoto and Wasabe and the wolves say as Janet's own projections? Or are we to believe that they really do communicate to her?

- * Is there any significance to "Suicide Road"?

- * Why does Jerry Baumgarten simply let her go?

- * What's the vision all about at the end?

THE ELEVENTH CITY

Again, this story appeared quite straightforward. It didn't entirely work for me. I would have preferred, I think, to have it end with Cooper in some danger or somehow actually involved with the events described. Instead, we get the story, as it were, at arm's length. I wonder why? Am I missing something? Are we supposed to feel a sense of foreboding as we come to the end? Or is it just Sam Cooper passing on an odd incident, as it appears on

the surface to be?

A couple more questions:

* What's the significance of the title? It clearly refers to the passage from the Gospel of Mark which Cooper quotes in his letter. The man who had the legion of demons (which were cast into the swine) then proclaimed what Jesus had done in "Ten Cities" (which is the region of Decapolis, across the Sea of Galilee from the region of Galilee).

Those were "ten cities," but the title refers to an "eleventh." Which is it? The city where Cooper is? If so, what's the significance? I suppose Cooper is "publishing" (the word for proclamation used in the version Cooper quotes) the news of another exorcism wrought by Jesus, by means of the blessed sacrament, in this letter to an eleventh city, Lincoln, Nebraska, and he's asking whether he ought to publish this account in his book.

Of course, technically, it was the man who had the demons who then published abroad what Jesus had done. Here, it's Sam Cooper asking whether he ought to publish this account.

Anything more? I ask because the title pushes us to wonder about "the eleventh city."

* Why did Jacinta throw stones at Sam Cooper? I notice that later he says "I was stoned by her," which calls to mind the stonings practiced in various stories in the Bible. (In fact, it makes me wonder, because Dell makes a point of saying that Jacinta was a loose woman, but, even now, she isn't the one who is stoned; rather she does the stoning ... of Sam Cooper.) What's going on here?

* What does the postscript really add to the story? I suspect it does add something, but I'm just missing it.

Now it's your turn. Thanks in advance!

John

*****Biggest Grammy Award surprises of all time on AOL Music.
(<http://music.aol.com/grammys/pictures/never-won-a-grammy?NCID=aolcmp00300000002548>)

Roy C. Lackey — 10 Feb 2008, 06:25 · follows JBarach at aol.com

John,

I can't answer many of your questions, but I dislike seeing honest, thoughtful queries such as yours about two stories that have not been discussed here before be ignored. These two stories are obviously religious in theme and I hate to get into religious matters because little good ever comes of it, but it can't be helped.

John Barach wrote:

WOLFER

[. . .]

* What's the significance of Janet's divorce and return to her maiden name?

Are there any hints of what her married name might have been? (I don't think so.) Is the divorce and all the stuff related to it -- e.g., having to

borrow the SUV from her ex-husband -- more or less irrelevant? If so, why

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they there at all? They make the story longer, but do they add anything
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it? Why couldn't Janet herself have been single or married or (at any
rate) an
SUV owner herself? Why does she have to borrow it from her husband?

What's

the significance of her being divorced?

I think the scene with her ex-husband is there to show her timorousness at the beginning of the story, which contrasts with her overaggressive and assertive nature by the end of it. She goes from little lap-dog to bitch-wolf.

* What's the howling that Janet hears? Wolves, obviously, but what's it
all
about?

The Call of the Wild?

* Are we to take the various things that Kyoto and Wasabe and the wolves
say
as Janet's own projections? Or are we to believe that they really do
communicate to her?

I *think* they were her own projections. The animal talk is never in quotes until the last page of the story, after her vision. Why the dogs' speech should become more "real" then, I don't know, unless they too have somehow been transformed by the vision and new-found dedication to walk on the wild side.

* Is there any significance to "Suicide Road"?

* Why does Jerry Baumgarten simply let her go?

He sympathizes with her cause.

* What's the vision all about at the end?

The man in white is surely Jesus, as you suspected. I don't understand Kipling's poem ("The Only Son", the opening and concluding lines of which bracket the story) any better than I do the story. If I did, I might be able to say more about the story. But I think it's safe to say that the poem and story are related, however loosely.

THE ELEVENTH CITY

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of Galilee from the region of Galilee).

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it? The city where Cooper is? If so, what's the significance?

I don't know the significance, but I think the eleventh city is indeed the town he was writing from, San Marcos del Lago, pointing back to the Gospel of Mark and the Sea of Galilee.

I suppose
Cooper is "publishing" (the word for proclamation used in the version
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quotes) the news of another exorcism wrought by Jesus, by means of the

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sacrament, in this letter to an eleventh city, Lincoln, Nebraska, and he's asking whether he ought to publish this account in his book.

I'm not so sure Jesus should be credited with sending the demons from the ghost-pig into a human woman, no matter how loose her virtue. The "blessed sacrament" was obtained fraudulently and used by a witch to undo what Jesus had done. That can't be a good thing. <g>

-Roy

Helen Algin — 11 Feb 2008, 19:53 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

Hi. This is my first post. I am an avid reader of Wolfe short stories because I operate under the delusion that they are easier to figure out than the novels. Other than the stories, the Solider series is my all-time favorite Wolfe work.

I can't comment on Wolfer yet, but I will re-read it. I'm afraid I can't shed too much light on The Eleventh City, either. I haven't responded earlier because I am just as befuddled as you.

I take this story as more thought-provoking than puzzling. What an interesting concept that the demon Legion keeps asking to be moved from one body to the next in interests of survival. What an interesting idea that the demon pig traveled throughout the western world and then to S. America with the Spanish.

Sam Cooper is a recurring character in, I think, four stories. He's a folklore-ist. So maybe we can take it at face value that he is not involved directly with the story he's telling.

* What's the significance of the title?

I may be way off here. But my first instinct is to think it is supposed to indicate that the town is like an extension of the Ten Cities. Like a metaphor for the fact that the known world was once small, in biblical times, but now it encompasses the whole world. Or something.

* Why did Jacinta throw stones at Sam Cooper?

Because she's crazy? Sorry, no answer for this one.

* What does the postscript really add to the story?

I personally think the P.S. is the most intriguing part! "...no sane person could have done it and remained sane. I have photographed it." So does it drive Cooper crazy or is he jaded enough not to be phased by it?

JBarach at aol.com wrote

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