

Etymology/meaning/onomatopoeic aspects of the word "Urth"

The Urth list — 23 messages, 15 voices, 24 Apr 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5002>

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Pavel Bakič — 24 Apr 2008, 17:20

A question for the first-language speakers out there: We have a discussion going on concerning a proper rendering of the word "Urth" into Czech, and would appreciate any comments concerning the connotations the word has for a native speaker, apart from the obvious "Earth". An existing translation of *The Shadow of the Torturer* has "Urzem?", which translates literally as "Ur-Earth" (without the repetition of the "r" phoneme or the "vowel-consonant[s]" syllable structure, of course).

I *did* search for previous threads concerning the topic, but the fact of the archive-site being itself called Urth made it somewhat difficult.

Gwern Branwen — 24 Apr 2008, 17:43 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

On 2008.04.24 19:20:22 +0200, Pavel Bakič <pavelbak at gmail.com> scribbled 2.4K characters:

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I did search for previous threads concerning the topic, but the fact of the archive-site being itself called Urth made it somewhat difficult.

The OED records no special features for 'Urth'; it's just an obscure variation on 'Earth', although it's worth noting that I've seen the name of the Norse norn Urd transliterated as Urth.

So, it depends on how you take it. If it's just Wolfe trying to distance you from the present day, go hunting for obscure and literary term for 'Earth' which sound similar to whatever is the usual Czech word; but if the Norse reference is intentional, I doubt you could do much better than Urth, 'Urth' just being a transliteration in this interpretation.

gwern

BLACKER WISDUM secure the OTAR argus TRW MITM NAVELEXSYSSECENGCEEN Keyhole

Ron Crown — 24 Apr 2008, 17:57 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

Pavel,

If Ur means in Czech what it does in German, viz., "a long time ago," "originally," then the connotation of "Urzeme" is directly the opposite of what Wolfe was trying to achieve with "Urth" by distancing from our customary term "Earth" to underscore the distance in time from us. Translation is always tricky and I've long wondered how the unusual words that Wolfe used in

the Book of the New Sun would be translated. I've got both German and French editions of the Book but haven't managed to work all the way through them yet. The German edition does use "Urth," however, while the French uses "Teur" which does something similar to "Terre" that "Urth" does to "Earth."

A lot of Wolfe's nuances would, I think, be virtually impossible to convey in another language, for example, how do you convey the Christ/Apollo connotations of the New Sun/Son? German at least has a degree of assonance (Sonne/Sohn) but French (fils, soleil)? Ron Crown

Pavel Baki? wrote:

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Mo Holkar / UKG — 24 Apr 2008, 17:59 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

At 18:20 24/04/2008, you wrote:

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I did search for previous threads concerning the topic, but the fact of the archive-site being itself called Urth made it somewhat difficult.

The main extra connotation is that Urth is the name of one of the Norns -- Verthandi and Skuld being the others:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norns>

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki

<http://www.holkar.net/pmwiki/>

Lane Haygood — 24 Apr 2008, 18:18 · in reply to Mo Holkar / UKG

On Apr 24, 2008, at 12:59 PM, Mo Holkar / UKG wrote:

At 18:20 24/04/2008, you wrote:

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Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki

<http://www.holkar.net/pmwiki/>

So is it pronounced "Urdh," with the voiced [th] sound? (Sorry, I don't know how to reproduce IPA in plain text). The Norse is pronounced that way, but I've always pronounced "Urth" just like "Earth."

Also, the prefix ur- has an English meaning as well, meaning "older" or "elder," similar to the German. That is, however, at odds with the Norn-interpretation (Urdh is the Norn of Fate) and the idea that Severian's world is the future of our own. Though, perhaps to Severian at least, time need not necessarily flow in one direction.

Best,
Lane

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 24 Apr 2008, 18:25 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

Pavel,

There's a fair amount packed into the name. Urth or Urd or Urd is the name of the eldest of the three Norns, the Norse equivalent of the Fates. The names of the other two, Skuld and Verthandi, are given to Mars and Venus in the New Sun epoch.

But there's more: another variant on the name of Urd is Wurd, or Wyrđ, which means, simply, fate or destiny. Urth is in some sense the destined world.

And, as long as we're poking at names, let's not forget Lune, whose name is of course a variation of Luna, Moon, but which also suggests to an English speaker a Loon, or Lunatic, a madman (or woman).

The Moon itself, because of its phases, has traditionally been taken to hold in itself all three phases of the Triple Goddess, of whom the Fates/Norns are one variation/version, not to be confused with the Furies and the Graces, who are also incarnations of the Triple Goddess (indeed, the nine Muses may be also, depending on whom you ask).

The Three are Maiden, Mother, and Crone, and one of the significances of "Urth" is that Mother Earth is no longer a Mother, she is now a Crone; she is barren. Her function is to cut the thread that Skuld spins and Verthandi dyes.

When Urth becomes Ushas, she becomes the Maiden once again.

2008/4/24 Pavel Baki? <pavelbak at gmail.com>:

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Michael Straight — 24 Apr 2008, 20:05 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I don't know if it has anything to do with Wolfe's intent, but I can't look at the word "Urth" without thinking of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur.

Also, there just aren't many English words that start with "ur". It's a weird-looking word, which is part of what makes it attractive and exotic.

-- Rostrum

2008/4/24 Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com>:

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Jeff Wilson — 24 Apr 2008, 20:46 · in reply to Michael Straight

Michael Straight wrote:

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Urania of Uranus urgently yet urbanely urinated uranium hexafluoride on the urban landscape, abating the urticaria of Urkel, an Uruguayan ursine.

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

Andy Robertson — 24 Apr 2008, 21:32 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

[ISO-8859-2] Pavel Baki? writes:

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To add to what's been already stated: there's another pun in the Urth/Skuld/Verdandi triad of names. We learn from Vodalus in the wood that Verdandi (Mars) was called "The Gift" by the dawn-men who first went there. But gift=present and Verdandi is the norn of the present, as Skuld of the future and Urd of the past. So the pun is on the double meaning of "present" in English. I wonder if this can be carried over to other languages?

<http://www.thenightland.co.uk>

01273-488272 / 0777-214-9545

Dave Lebling — 25 Apr 2008, 00:09 · in reply to Pavel Bakič

Pavel,

Wolfe's substitution of a "U" for "EA" in English works well because English spelling and English pronunciation are so dissimilar. I don't know if the opportunity exists in Czech; my limited knowledge of it indicates words are mostly pronounced just as they are spelled. The best opportunity would seem to be a pun of some sort on "zem?"; just adding "ur" to it seems too unsubtle.

Is there a Czech word similar to "zem?" that has interesting resonances, the way "Urth" suggests the Norns, Norse mythology in general, language evolution (a future English-speaker might spell "Earth" as "Urth" -- so this is a joke about pulp SF's take on future language evolution), etc? How would one expect Czech to evolve in a million years?

Is there a set of old Slavic gods or goddesses associated with the Earth-Mars-Venus triad? Is there an allusive pun to be made like the "present"="gift" pun Wolfe makes? (I know people once made much of the fact that in German "gift"="poison", for example.)

I think the addition of "Ur" (if Czech speakers would "get it") isn't bad at all, as it goes along with Wolfe's caginess about whether we are the ancestors or the descendants of the people of Urth.

-- Dave Lebling

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Joe Riley — 25 Apr 2008, 07:12 · in reply to Dave Lebling

All of the above (and good luck).

Dave Lebling <dlebling at hyraxes.com> wrote: Pavel,

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Urth Mailing List To post, write urth at urth.net
Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

Michael Straight — 25 Apr 2008, 20:36 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Thu, Apr 24, 2008 at 2:46 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
Michael Straight wrote:

> Also, there just aren't many English words that start with "ur".

Urania of Uranus urgently yet urbanely urinated uranium hexafluoride on
the urban landscape, abating the urticaria of Urkel, an Uruguayan ursine.

To make it clear to our Czech friends, only seven of those words are commonly used in English. (Eight if you count the borderline "ursine").

And that's really about it. Urchin, urethra, and a few more words derived from either urine or urban. Glancing through the dictionary, I don't see any other "ur-" words that I've even seen before.

-- Rostrum

David Duffy — 25 Apr 2008, 22:54 · in reply to Michael Straight

On Fri, 25 Apr 2008, Michael Straight wrote:

On Thu, Apr 24, 2008 at 2:46 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

Michael Straight wrote:

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-- Rostrum

ur-text ;)

| David Duffy (MBBS PhD) ,_-_\|
| email: davidD at qimr.edu.au ph: INT+61+7+3362-0217 fax: -0101 / *
| Epidemiology Unit, Queensland Institute of Medical Research _-_-/_
| 300 Herston Rd, Brisbane, Queensland 4029, Australia GPG 4D0B994A v

Nigel Price — 28 Apr 2008, 15:12 · follows David Duffy

In addition to the other shades of meaning already mentioned, "Ur" carries the sense of "source". Thus "Ur-Hamlet", for example, is a supposed lost source play for Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Remember that although Urth itself in the time of Severian is a bit of a galactic backwater, humanity had in previous ages gone out to the stars to found and lose stellar empires. Humanity, in many forms, must be living or have lived on many worlds by Severian's time, but Urth is still humanity's home planet, the "source" of the race and its point of origin.

Perhaps, humanity will always refer to the soil it stands on as "earth", but there remains only one Earth, and overtime this Earth has become thought of as the "Ur-Earth", "Urth".

Or something like that...

Nigel

b sharp — 01 May 2008, 20:03 · follows Nigel Price

as it goes along with Wolfe's caginess about whether we are the ancestors or the descendants of the people of Urth.<

I think Dave Lebling is closest to being on track. There are Wolfe interviews and textual clues that make it clear that Urth is a twin to Earth, existing in the alternate universe of Briah (I think Earth might be in Yesod). Our conception of normal time runs in each universe, starting with Big Bang and ending with Big Gnab. But Big Gnab leads to another Big Bang so there is a more cosmic sense of time than what we can measure with watches. Briah is

the predecessor

to Yesod and thus Urth is older and more spiritually primitive than Earth. While Earth got its spiritual cleansing with the

Biblical Flood and coming of Jesus, Urth had to wait millions of years longer for the Christ-figure Severian to arrive. The name Urth conveys this primitive, pre-Christian condition, even though in Severian's time, Urth science is far advanced to our own.

-bsharp

Lane Haygood — 01 May 2008, 20:19 · in reply to b sharp

I think it likely that Briah represents a more primal (spiritual) stage of existence, as you say. Both names (Briah and Yesod) are taken from Kabbalah/Gnosticism. Briah is the second of the four cabalistic worlds, philosophically the one that relates to the instantiated Platonic forms, the world of creation and immanence. Yesod, however, is the penultimate stage of cabalistic spiritual development, only one step away from the godhead. It is also the means by which the manifestation of justice and mercy (Tiferet) seek to unite with the Kingdom of God. If I remember correctly, when I asked a classics scholar friend of mine what "madrigot" meant he told me it was "level" in Hebrew. So Severian traveling along the Madrigot represents him traveling through levels of spiritual development in existence as well as through his own subjective experience of time. He's the flowing back of spiritual completeness from beyond Yesod that bridges Briah with Malkhut.

Or as best I can recall from my cheap-and-easy study of Gnosticism while studying Neoplatonism.

Best,
Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 3:03 PM, b sharp wrote:

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-bsharp

Spell a grand slam in this game where word skill meets World Series.
Get in the game. _____

brunians at brunians.org — 01 May 2008, 20:32 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I think it likely that Briah represents a more primal (spiritual) stage of existence, as you say. Both names (Briah and Yesod) are taken from Kabbalah/Gnosticism. Briah is the second of the four cabalistic worlds,

Second from the top.

Atziluth, Briah, Yesod, Assiah.

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This is not my understanding.

It is also the means

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You are conflating the sephiroth and the Four Worlds. Although the Worlds map onto the sephiroth, they are different systems.

But there are different schools of thought.

.

Lane Haygood — 01 May 2008, 20:46 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Ah, that makes more sense. I'm actually going to go find my old class notes and update them. :)

Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 3:32 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
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Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2008, 21:53 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

While Earth got its spiritual cleansing with the Biblical Flood and coming of Jesus, Urth had to wait millions of years longer for the Christ-figure Severian to arrive.

There is a problem in that Urth's history seems to include a Christian era as well.

The millions of years figure is more figurative than literally believable; how likely are recognizable buildings to remain in the Stone Town without maintenance for a million years, or the stars in the Southern Cross to remain vaguely close together

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

brunians at brunians.org — 01 May 2008, 23:02 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Sorry folks, I made a huge mistake here. I must have been half asleep or something.

I think it likely that Briah represents a more primal (spiritual) stage of existence, as you say. Both names (Briah and Yesod) are taken from Kabbalah/Gnosticism. Briah is the second of the four cabalistic worlds,

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Actually the third world is Yetzirah. Yesod is the ninth sephirah.

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This is not my understanding.

Yesod is in fact the ninth sephirah, associated with the Moon, which is just 'above' Malkuth, the tenth sephirah, associated with the world we live in.

It is also the means
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bridges BriaH with Malkhut.

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I am not sure if you, Lane, were, but I definitely was.

But there are different schools of thought.

And of non-thought.

.

brunians at brunians.org — 01 May 2008, 23:04 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I hope it makes sense still after I corrected it!

.

Ah, that makes more sense. I'm actually going to go find my old class
notes and update them. :)

Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 3:32 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

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But there are different schools of thought.

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Lane Haygood — 01 May 2008, 23:22 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

I didn't catch the Yesod/Yetzirah typo. I say "Y" and read right past it.

It was my understanding that Malkhut was not the world in which we live because it represents the state of spiritual fulfilment that the material world lacks. But that may be true for only the schools of thought we were studying (Manicheanism, Mandaeanism, Neo-Platonism) and not with others. Or I could just be totally confused. That's been known to happen.

Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 6:04 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:
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philosophically the one that relates to the instantiated Platonic forms, the world of creation and immanence. Yesod, however, is the penultimate stage of cabalistic spiritual development, only one step away from the godhead.

This is not my understanding.

It is also the means

by which the manifestation of justice and mercy (Tiferet) seek to unite with the Kingdom of God. If I remember correctly, when I asked a

classics scholar friend of mine what "madrigot" meant he told me it was "level" in Hebrew. So Severian traveling along the Madrigot represents him traveling through levels of spiritual development in existence as well as through his own subjective experience of time.

He's the flowing back of spiritual completeness from beyond Yesod that bridges Briah with Malkhut.

You are conflating the sephiroth and the Four Worlds. Although the Worlds map onto the sephiroth, they are different systems.

But there are different schools of thought.

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brunians at brunians.org — 02 May 2008, 00:25 · in reply to Lane Haygood

There are certainly some differences among the various schools. And confusion does occur, as I know.

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I didn't catch the Yesod/Yetzirah typo. I say "Y" and read right past it.

It was my understanding that Malkhut was not the world in which we live because it represents the state of spiritual fulfilment that the material world lacks. But that may be true for only the schools of thought we were studying (Manicheanism, Mandaeanism, Neo-Platonism) and not with others. Or I could just be totally confused. That's been known to happen.

Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 6:04 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I hope it makes sense still after I corrected it!

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Ah, that makes more sense. I'm actually going to go find my old class notes and update them. :)

Lane

On May 1, 2008, at 3:32 PM, brunians at brunians.org wrote:

I think it likely that Briah represents a more primal (spiritual) stage of existence, as you say. Both names (Briah and Yesod) are taken from Kabbalah/Gnosticism. Briah is the second of the four cabalistic worlds,

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