

Junie Moon (Again)

The Urth list — 9 messages, 5 voices, 11 Oct 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5177>

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JBarach at aol.com — 11 Oct 2008, 20:26

Urthers --

Last night, I read "Has Anybody Seen Junie Moon?" for the first time. It's in Starwater Strains and, to my surprise, is being reprinted in the new Best Of, which implies that someone at least thinks it's one of Wolfe's best -- and that implies that someone thinks he understands the story. Or perhaps whoever chose those stories (and I suspect Wolfe wasn't really involved, or "From the Cradle" would be in there) thinks that it's a story that demonstrates Wolfe's trickiness and repays study.

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The narrator is often called Hercules, and he thinks Junie Moon's real name is probably "June." I suspect he's wrong and that whoever pointed this out on the list earlier is correct: Her real name is Juno. Those names put us in the sphere of Greek mythology, with Juno sending Hercules out on some missions.

But I suspect that approach is also misleading. Hercules is only the narrator's stage name. His real name is Sam. Short for what? SAMSON, the strong man in the Bible.

He is actually "Sam Jr." he says, which makes him the son of Samson. He isn't Samson himself, but he's the son of Samson. And, in fact, I suspect that "Sam Jr." is something of a joke on Wolfe's part, a joke which hints at what I'm saying: The narrator is Sam Jr, which means he is the son of Sam or "Sam's son." Get it?

Incidentally, the name "Samson" is derived from the Hebrew word "shemesh," sun, which is something an internet search easily turns up (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson> (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson>)). Given that Junie is a Moon, perhaps that's significant.

There may be other allusions to Samson, too, including the tearing open of the gate (Samson uproots the gates of Gaza) and the line at the end: "If all of us get mad at once maybe we will bring the whole thing crashing down." And if those allusions are really allusions, then there may be some parallel between "the feds" and the Philistines.

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James Wynn — 11 Oct 2008, 21:28 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

John,

I haven't read "Junie Moon" but "White Cow Moon" is almost certainly a reference to Io (who was the moon).

She was one of Zeus's rape victims. In order to hide her from persuing Hera (Juno), he changed her into a heifer ("virgin horned one"). Hera, being suspicious, had Argus watch over her in case Zeus tried to change her back. Zeus sent his son Hermes to kill Argus (which he did by severing his neck with a curved blade). Then Hera cursed Io to wander the Earth forever.

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Jeff Wilson — 11 Oct 2008, 22:38 · in reply to James Wynn

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There's something that doesn't compute here. I suppose a maiden could be a priestess of Juno, who is a goddess of fidelity as well as marriage, but after being raped or seduced by Jove (accounts differ), she would hardly be a maiden thereafter, unless the cloudy guise of Jove allows the same dodge around defloweration that the ray of light shining through Mary's goblet without/breaking it does in Christian iconography.

Also, Greco-Roman myth (Juno and Hercules are the Roman names) had Juno as the enemy of Hercules, not his employer. Hercules being the issue of yet another of Jove's infidelities, she sent serpents to kill him at birth and others at various later times. Meanwhile, Herc's usual "employer" was Augeas (the 12 labors).

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

James Wynn — 12 Oct 2008, 07:31 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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Well, as with so many things about the myths it is not entirely clear that Hercules was originally understood as Hera's enemy. His Greek name, HERACLES, means "Glory of Hera". Still, his *ultimate* employer is usually seen as King Eurystheus. His employment to Eurystheus was assigned to him by the Oracle at Delphi (which originally belonged to Hera) because Hera drove Heracles mad and had him murder his family.

So it is perfectly reasonable --in a Lupine sense-- that Hercules would be employed by Juno, although one should be suspicious of her motives in employing him.

[Aside] The concept of a *seemingly* hostile divine patron is not unheard of even in Christianity. This messianic text is assigned by Christians to Jesus:

"Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased JHVH to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the JHVH shall prosper in his hand."

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The logical inconsistency of being a "virgin" and having had intercourse is an issue that was taken up by the Jewish polemics regarding Jesus's claimed virgin birth. However, a few Talmudic scholars acknowledged the physical possibility. It is possible, though rare, for a woman to

become pregnant without completely breaking equipment. But it doesn't really matter in these examples since Mary's pregnancy was a miracle (not a physical event): "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1: 35). One presumes Zeus did not have a human form unless he wanted to, and could have had intercourse with Io without one (whatever would be meant by Zeus's divine lust).

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Jeff Wilson — 12 Oct 2008, 07:46 · in reply to James Wynn

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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That's a good point. I was trying to remember how I associated Hera with Gaea. It turns out it was our old pal Robert Graves in "The Greek Myths" (a book Wolfe has recommended), where he says flatly "Hera was Mother Earth or...Delphyne in her prophetic aspect" (TGM 21:3). He said it was Hera who sent the Python against Leto.

Anyway, it is certainly true that Hera and the Python were close cahoots. The Python was the nurse maid to her lil' baby Typhon. (Homeric Hymn To Pythian Apollo 300-370)

(<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?layout=;doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0138;query=card%3D%2317;loc=3.305>)

Fernando Q. Gouvêa — 13 Oct 2008, 02:02 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

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There are those who claim that magic is like the tide; that it swells and fades over the surface of the earth, collecting in concentrated pools here and there, almost disappearing from other spots, leaving them parched for wonder. There are also those who believe that if you stick your fingers up your nose and blow, it will increase your intelligence.
-- The Teachings of Ebenezum, Volume VII

Craig Brewer — 14 Oct 2008, 03:38 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvêa

I just reread "Has Anyone Seen Junie Moon?" after reading

John's question last week. I haven't processed much yet, but here are my initial reactions. And I'll apologize in advance for the somewhat shotgun nature of these responses. You're reading the ideas "as they happen?"

I have a feeling the key to this story has more to do with the Samson story than Juno/Hera's, although that certainly must be addressed. Recall that Samson ultimately wants revenge on the Philistines for being blinded, as well as being deceived by Delilah. The title is of course "Has Anyone SEEN Junie Moon," and one of the problems throughout the story is that Sam Jr. keeps not seeing things, or seeing things only partially: he can't remember exactly what he saw in Merlin's cave or what the moon rock looked like the one time it came to the circus.

And remember that Samson's father is Manoah. Junie makes she and Sam take on the last name Manoe after the feds find them.

There's also the nice bit in the Bible about Samson telling a riddle that only he would be able to solve since it's about an experience only he had. (Killing the lion and the honey that appears inside it.) Perhaps there's a kind of in joke here between Wolfe and Lafferty that we're not supposed to get and, thus, part of the story's charm is its impenetrability. But only perhaps, because that seems a bit too obscure a reason for writing a story, even for Wolfe.

Instead, it seems fairly obvious here that the Feds are to be thought of as the Philistines. And what both the Feds and Philistines do in both stories is keep people from knowing the truth. In the story, truth is a matter, again, of correct sight, but also finding the right vantage point on events (and how often in the story does that have to do with being at the right height, whether it be throwing Junie up 15 feet, or telling the truth on the plane, or figuring out what the White Cow Moon is made of so that you can easily create escape-velocity vehicles which seems to be the reason the Feds get interested in Junie). And, of course, it ends with Sam Jr. saying that people could join together and tumble the Feds, where "maybe we will bring the whole thing crashing down," which seems about as direct a reference to Samson destroying the temple as we're going to get. (And Junie will be found in the pieces that are left over suggesting that she is in fact already lost and not just far away.)

As for the bits about King Arthur that appear, Junie says that Laffer(ty) was definitely Merlin. But the knights are all portrayed as just good old heroes that happened to be remembered. But it's followed by a short meditation on the value of stories of lost greatness: "It was dead and gone like my dad. King Arthur was dead and his knights were too, and the bad guys were the head of everything and had been for a long, long time. We were the paint, even Junie was paint, and now the paint was getting dull the way paint does, with cracks all over it and falling off. And I thought this is not just where that king was born, this is where he died too. And I knew that was true the way I meant it." (131) In other words, fantastic stories (tall tales) have a tendency to lose their efficacy over time, which seems to be a danger that's recognized multiple times. Junie's whole purpose, after all, is trying to figure out the truth of the White Cow Moon before it's lost to her. (There's also the interesting point that Sam Jr. is compared to "the jolly old green giant," yet another Wolfean "green man," but who, in an Arthurian context, could be the Green Knight who actually tests Gawain to see if he's truly virtuous is Sam Jr. a test for modern readers?)

Thematically, I think Fernando's idea that the story is

about loss ties up many of the questions John originally had about the story. I'm not sure it's going to fit together in a puzzle-like way, but thematically, it does for me. I don't think that looking for exact mythical correlations will work in this case, which is where much of the discussion seems to have gone. (After all, we have Greco-Roman, Hebrew, and Indian mythical material floating around this story, all in the context of talking about a storyteller who acts like, as the narrator says of Indians: "they have all these stories that they tell you and then they laugh inside." (125) I get the feeling that this is less of a puzzle we're supposed to figure out. Instead, it's a puzzle that wants you to think about the nature of why it's puzzling, not it's solution. Dealing with loss and hope at once may be a kind of puzzle that has no definite solution.

Anyway, the story works for me as a reflection on loss in the form of a kind of hopeful elegy. In the story, Sam Jr.'s search for Junie Moon reads like a loving portrayal of a lost (dead?) lover. The hope comes from the idea that "Junie believes in dead people coming back and all that." (124) But, metaphorically, that hope starts to look like an unwillingness to let go even if it requires telling yourself some fabulously tall tales in order to keep hope alive.

On a meta level, the story's also a kind of elegy of Wolfe's for Lafferty. The story itself is a "tall tale" like Lafferty would write, but done in a Wolfe-like vein. Roy T. Laffer is already missing when the story starts, but his legacy of tales of course live on. More specifically, however, what lives on is the promise of those lying stories to perhaps hold a kernel of truth that outlasts the man, the story, and the lies. I particularly like this bit: "Do you know what it says on the tea boxes" The ones with the man with the cap on them? It says honest tea is the best policy. I know what that means, and I think that cranky old Roy T. Laffer knew it too. (125) As I read it, the pithy statement is at once a parable of the truth Laffer wanted to tell (as Sam says, Laffer "knew lots of stuff?[but] they would never believe him even if it was true" 125), but also a playful pun that actually doesn't say what it says — it says something true about honesty without being honest about how it says it, if that makes any sense. You have to be tricky to get the truth, and maybe have to know it already. So it points to a kind of shared idea of "truth" for both Wolfe and Lafferty which might be many things: Catholicism? A love of stories that don't tell you what they mean? The idea that truth is most truthful when pulled from a lie, or at least a tall tale? (And further bits fit this: Lafferty was from Oklahoma like Laffer, Wolfe, a big guy, spent plenty of time in Texas like Sam.)

Again, pardon my very disjointed ramblings here. I'm typing as I think, which is never a good way to communicate. But I'd like to thank John for getting me to reread this story which, this time around, is much more memorable than the first.

Craig

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

From: Fernando Q. Gouveia <fqgouveia at colby.edu>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Sunday, October 12, 2008 9:02:24 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) Junie Moon (Again)

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JBarach at aol.com — 14 Oct 2008, 04:54 · follows Craig Brewer

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And remember that Samson's father is Manoah. Junie makes she and Sam take on the last name Manoe after the feds find them.

Yes! Thank you, Craig. I think this clinches the Samson explanation I was groping at. I should have gone back, as you did, and read the story again with Samson in mind. I caught the "crashing down" bit at the end and, of course, the "Sam" stuff, but I forgot all about Manoe.

John

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