

Seawrack's name

The Urth list — 20 messages, 8 voices, 29 Aug 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5730>

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Lee Berman — 29 Aug 2010, 03:27

Antonio Marques: I don't know whether this has been pointed out before, but it is a fact that 'Seawrack' and 'Scylla' are almost equal as names go. Or, at least, the name misheard as 'Seawrack' could easily be a derivate of the name misconstrued(?) as 'Scylla'...Yes, I know I've been implying that the greek pronunciation of a name such as Scylla would be something like ['skulla] 'SKOOL luh'.

I hope I am not being insulting in noting that the English pronunciation of Scylla usually involves a silent "c" like scissors or scintillating. This would bring Scylla's pronunciation even closer to Seawrack.

But Horn is very familiar with the female name "Scylla" from his religious studies and I can't see how he could hear that name and feel the need to convert it to "seawrack"

Apologies for redundant posts, but for me the even closer similarity of "shipwreck" to "seawrack" gnaws at me as an intended association.

We know that the purpose of the mythological sirens was to cause shipwrecks. Moreover these quotes suggest to me that was Seawrack's original purpose also:

Horn: The real riddle concerning Seawrack is this: If the Mother took care of Seawrack in order that Seawrack might lure others....did the Mother send her back among her own kind so that she might lure more or lure them better?

Seawrack: "You were dead...I saw you down there. Dead things are food... You were dead... Dead people are to eat."

Horn: "The sea goddess, Do you know her name?"

Seawrack: "No, if I ever did I've forgotten it. I don't want to remember her anymore...I'm going to try to forget the song...and forget the water and the underwater woman and the boats underwater with people in them. That was why I wouldn't eat your fish. I don't want to eat fish or drowned meat, never any more."

Horn: "Somewhere she is singing for me at this moment....Seawrack has beyond any question found her way back to the waves and the spume, the secret currents, and her black, wave-washed rocks. There will come a stormy midnight when I throw off the blankets...I will put out then in whatever boat I can find and you will not see me more. Do not mourn me Nettle. Every man must die and I know what death I long for"

antonio at gmail.com — 29 Aug 2010, 15:16 · in reply to Lee Berman

No dia 2010/08/29, ?s 04:27, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> escreveu:

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(not uh but the vowel in 'car')

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Yes, that's what I meant. I brought up the Greek just to explain why I think it doesn't matter here.

But Horn is very familiar with the female name "Scylla" from his religious studies and I can't see how he could hear that name and feel the need to convert it to "seawrack"

Because he wouldn't be hearing 'Scylla' but rather the original that got misheard/construed as 'Scylla', or a derivate of that.

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I got that, but I don't find it logical (of course the name itself makes sense, but not to me the way

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António Pedro Marques — 29 Aug 2010, 23:27 · in reply to antonio at gmail.com

No dia 2010/08/29, às 16:16, antonio at gmail.com escreveu:

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...the way one gets to it). Everything is fine, except why the shipwreck maiden would be called 'shipwreck' or why 'shipwreck' would become 'seawrack'. I mean, of course one can find a connection, I just don't think it's a polished one.

António Pedro Marques — 29 Aug 2010, 23:39 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

António Pedro Marques wrote:

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(The narrator even mentions that he had not thought of Seawrack as a siren before Krait(?) called her so, but of course we all know that can be argued to mean the opposite.)

Lee Berman — 30 Aug 2010, 01:58 · follows António Pedro Marques

Antonio P. Marques- I don't find it logical (of course the name itself makes sense, but not to me the way the way one gets to it). Everything is fine, except why the shipwreck maiden would be called 'shipwreck' or why 'shipwreck' would become 'seawrack'.

I think the issue boils down to a difference in sense of interpretation. As a contrast, to my theory I'll mention Borski's theory, which included exhaustive botanical research to come to the conclusion that Seawrack's real name must be a version of the sea-wrack seaweed called *Laminaria hyperborea* with a bunch of folk names one of which happens to be the Irish word "screadhuidhe". So that is Seawrack's real name. Great.

Perhaps this is exactly the name Gene Wolfe had in mind as SeaWrack's real name. But for me

it is a quite ridiculous solution to an openly posed puzzle. "Screadhuidhe"? Is that really what Gene Wolfe wanted us to discover here?

This seems to me a misguided, unrealistic attempt to make Gene Wolfe's literary worlds be as rich and diverse, with one to one correspondence, to everything in our own real world. When I read Wolfe I find him an author who is constantly aware that he is writing a book, not really creating a world.

The author-reader connection is something he is highly focused on. I think he often puts things in his stories which go right over the heads of his characters and are meant to go straight from author to reader. An example might include a painting of a moon landing that only we can recognize contains an American flag. It is an "in" reference. (especially to Wolfe's fellow patriotic Americans ;-))

Likewise I find the association of the words "wreck" and "wrack" to be an "in" reference for English speakers. These are odd words- very few others in English are like them. (they are joined by wreck). But long before I ever read Short Sun I always thought of "wreck" when I heard the word "wrack". So when I was first reading Blue's Waters and learned that Seawrack was a Siren I immediately went scurrying back to the section where Horn names her to make the connection.

Perhaps I am alone among English speakers in always associating "wreck" and "wrack". Maybe others consider such an idea nonsense. But for me the pieces fall in line nicely. Shipwreck is just a more pleasant "eureka" sort of solution for me than screadhuidhe.

Lee Berman — 30 Aug 2010, 11:37 · follows Lee Berman

Antonio- Everything is fine, except why the shipwreck maiden would be called 'shipwreck' or why 'shipwreck' would become 'seawrack'. I mean, of course one can find a connection, I just don't think it's a polished one.

Well, if the "shipwreck" idea doesn't float (heh) perhaps it is something else. None of the names I've found for the mythological sirens fit in.

Another guess on Seawrack's real name (spoken by both Seawrack and the Mother) is "Sirenia". This is the scientific order name for manatees and dugongs. It doesn't sound/look as similar as shipwreck. But it could then tie the Mother and sirens to Abaia and the undines, who are often confused for manatees. Nice that it connects sirens and mermaids and Blue and Urth all together.

Perhaps "syrinx" is another outside possibility. It is the name for a bird's singing organ but also the mythological nymph who, in trying to escape rape by Pan (Pas?) drowned and was turned into hollow reeds (hence the creation of the pan pipe).

Could Wolfe have had all three words in mind with Seawrack? Well, sigh, I dunno. As long as it isn't screadhuidhe I am happy ;-).

James Wynn — 30 Aug 2010, 12:43 · in reply to Lee Berman

Whatever name Horn heard, I'll find it hard to believe it didn't start with an "s" in the first syllable and end with a K or "chi" sound.

u+16b9

Lee Berman — 30 Aug 2010, 13:50 · follows James Wynn

James Wynn: Whatever name Horn heard, I'll find it hard to believe it didn't start with an "s" in the first syllable and end with a K or "chi" sound.

Hm...sounds cryptic. As though you had an answer in mind. Spill the beans or I'll be forced to assume your theory is that Seawrack and Mother are living backward in time and the name Horn heard was Kypris. ;-).

James Wynn — 30 Aug 2010, 14:36 · in reply to Lee Berman

James Wynn: Whatever name Horn heard, I'll find it hard to believe it didn't start with an "s" in the first syllable and end with a K or "chi" sound.

Lee - Hm...sounds cryptic. As though you had an answer in mind. Spill the beans or I'll be forced to assume your theory is that Seawrack and Mother are living backward in time and the name Horn heard was Kypris. ;-).

Hmm...like the sound of that idea. I wish it were true.

No. I really don't have an answer. But I know what I'm looking for: When people hear "something that sounds like", they hear the first and last sounds. The word we're looking for either starts with an S or starts with a vowel and the first consonant is an S. It ends with voiceless velar plosive (such as k) or a voiceless uvular fricative (such as chi). I'd also prefer that it use a schwa sound in the last syllable or something close to that.

Thus, while /syrinx/ works on a lot of levels (including Seawrack's singing), I'm unhappy with "inx" ending because it actually ends with an S sound and its vowel is the "ing" sound. Still, I think it is the most solid possibility suggested so far. And if Wolfe had other reasons for the term /seawrack/ it would be close enough for him.

u+15b9

adam at io.com — 30 Aug 2010, 17:04 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Mon, 30 Aug 2010 09:50:17 -0400, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

James Wynn: Whatever name Horn heard, I'll find it hard to believe it didn't start with an "s" in the first syllable and end with a K or "chi" sound.

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Shrek.

Because Wolfe is trolling us.

Adam

Adam Thornton IO — 30 Aug 2010, 17:16 · in reply to Lee Berman

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James Wynn: Whatever name Horn heard, I'll find it hard to believe it didn't start with an "s" in the first syllable and end with a K or "chi" sound.

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Remember the nearly-offensive Asian accent in _AEG_ ?

Yeah, the one that mispronounced "L" as "R" ?

So...how **did** Silk get himself, or a splinter of himself, into a siren?

Adam

Dave Tallman — 30 Aug 2010, 18:21 · follows Adam Thornton IO

This article on wikipedia got me thinking:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrenka>

The warrior mermaid depicted on the Coat of Arms of Warsaw is called a "syrenka" (little mermaid in Polish). I notice also that it has one arm behind a shield, effectively cutting it off. (It's the left arm and not the right, but it's still a "missing" arm). The name is also similar enough that I could see Horn converting it.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Aug 2010, 18:26 · in reply to Dave Tallman

Good lord, man. Are you suggesting that Seawrack's name is a Polish joke?

On Mon, Aug 30, 2010 at 11:21 AM, Dave Tallman <davetallman at msn.com> wrote:
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James Wynn — 30 Aug 2010, 18:46 · in reply to Dave Tallman

I like this reference on a lot of levels. Check the article on Melusina
(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melusine>) that linked to in the syrenka article.

Incidentally, while we're on the subject of heraldry. I'm pretty sure the lion-head fellow in "The Sorcerer's House", the one with a sword and a book, is the Lion of St. Mark.
http://europeforvisitors.com/venice/articles/winged_lion_of_st_mark.htm

Now ask me why it's in a faerieland story. I don't know.

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On 8/30/2010 1:21 PM, Dave Tallman wrote:
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David Stockhoff — 30 Aug 2010, 20:27 · in reply to James Wynn

I'm pretty sure Wolfe is as deeply familiar with heraldry as he is with mythology and the Tarot. It is, after all, a system of Christian symbolism.

And that coat of arms is not purely Polish---the Queen's Royal Hussars (UK) wear it, among others. It's "around."

I wouldn't take "syrenka" as a joke at all, except maybe for the missing arm. Otherwise, except for lacking a sword and shield, the Syrenka is especially fitting because she used to be a female water-dragon, and before that a male one (from the Wiki). She's a monster.

If Seawrack is a part of Scylla, then she is certainly "little" even if she's a siren and not a mermaid.

The sound match is even better than "syrinx."

On 8/30/2010 2:46 PM, James Wynn wrote:
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Lee Berman — 31 Aug 2010, 01:47 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff- If Seawrack is a part of Scylla, then she is certainly "little" even if she's a siren and not a mermaid.

At the risk of mucking up David's perfectly good Andersenian reference I'd want to note that sirens and mermaids are not really distinct creatures. The sirens are often depicted as mermaids and mermaids were often supposed to have a seductive, deadly allure. I think the legends are all intertwined.

Manatees are supposed to be the real world inspiration for mermaids. As mentioned, their order classification is Sirenia. We know undines are confused with manatees in BotNS. I don't remember Juturna singing but she certainly had a seductive nature, luring Severian toward an underwater future.

Wolfe is certainly giving those European water nymphs/demons their due. Joining the undines and nixies and kelpies that are mentioned in BotNS, now we might have a melusine/syrenka inspiration to the siren of the Short Sun.

I like the idea of a pinched off piece of a larger entity as the origin for undines and Seawrack. But I notice in these European legends of the creatures there is often a Changeling aspect. And some of the Mother and Seawrack's talk does suggest Seawrack could have been a child stolen from her real mother. I suspect another one of those double possibility solutions Wolfe throws at us.

David Stockhoff — 31 Aug 2010, 11:43 · in reply to Lee Berman

Absolutely! And Wolfe mixes them up anyway.

If the Syrenka is involved at all, she is not known for being a siren. But Seawrack is.

It's not much of a stretch.

On 8/30/2010 9:47 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Mr Thalassocrat — 31 Aug 2010, 13:22 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Tue, Aug 31, 2010 at 9:13 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
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Seawrack is.

It's not much of a stretch.

Whatever the Mother calls her, I think it's pretty clear how Horn comes to call her "Seawrack".

While walking on the island he pulls up some of the ground cover and sees in his hand "a little, weak, torn thing", and "knew it for the green scum I had seen washed ashore after storms". In other words, what might be called "seawrack", <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seawrack>

Wouldn't be at all surprising if "Seawrack" is a recognised female Vironese name.

Shortly afterward that, he meets her and hears a name which suggests to him "Seawrack", because of a similarity in sounds, because of her hair "misted green by some microscopic sea-plant", and just because it seems to him to suit her - presumably in part because she appears to him then in some respects "a little, weak, torn thing".

Personally, I think that trying to reconstruct the name the Mother calls her by is one of those Wolfean invitations to drive oneself bat-shit - simply not enough information. My guess is that it's something Neighbor-ish. Anyway, Horn never seems to have trouble with the names of the human "foreigners" he encounters.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 31 Aug 2010, 14:00 · in reply to Mr Thalassocrat

Sure, seawrack is a plant name, which is necessary to apply it to a female person. And it fits her much better than Seaweed.

I wouldn't try to suggest that Horn speaks Polish, anyway ... that's an association _we_ might make.

--- On Tue, 8/31/10, Mr Thalassocrat <thalassocrat08 at gmail.com> wrote:

From: Mr Thalassocrat <thalassocrat08 at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Seawrack's name

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

Date: Tuesday, August 31, 2010, 9:22 AM

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-----Inline Attachment Follows-----

António Marques — 13 Sep 2010, 21:45 · in reply to Lee Berman

Lee Berman wrote:

I think the issue boils down to a difference in sense of interpretation. As a contrast, to my theory I'll mention Borski's theory, which included exhaustive botanical research to come to the conclusion that Seawrack's real name must be a version of the sea-wrack seaweed called *Laminaria hyperborea* with a bunch of folk names one of which happens to be the Irish word "screadhuidhe". So that is Seawrack's real name. Great.

Perhaps this is exactly the name Gene Wolfe had in mind as SeaWrack's real name. But for me it is a quite ridiculous solution to an openly posed puzzle. "Screadhuidhe"? Is that really what Gene Wolfe wanted us to discover here?

The word is - appears to be, since the only reference to it is quite obscure - 'screadhbhuidhe'. Now, 'screadhbhuidhe' is more or less transparently two words, 'screadh bhuidhe', of which the first is probably a noun and the second and adjective. So far so good.

But the phonetics is completely off. There are a couple of different pronunciations possible for such a word, but none comes nowhere near Seawrack. Screadhbhuidhe is something like shkrayvee, shkrayvooy, shkrahvee, shkravooy. I can't see how that would become Seawrack.

As to meaning... bhuidhe is the lenited form of scottish or pre-reform irish buidhe ('yellow' - and just barely possibly 'buoyant' if it's scottish), current irish buí. Either will do for a brown alga. But screadh is enigmatic (the sc- establishes it as irish rather than scottish), because the only root similar to it means 'scream'. There's the remote possibility that it is a variant of pre-reform cr?adh, current cr?, which means 'earth', 'clay'.

So, even if the seaweed name is good gaelic, it has nothing to do with Seawrack, and 'yellow scream', 'floating scream', 'yellow clay' or 'floating clay' aren't in the least enlightening.

Plus, vironese naming conventions are vironese, and rendered in english. Whoever gave Seawrack her name isn't vironese, nor is there any reason to suppose a vironese original, and Screadhbhuidhe isn't english.