

(no subject)

The Urth list — 14 messages, 8 voices, 14 Jan 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5897>

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Lee Berman — 14 Jan 2011, 03:23

David Stockhoff: I have long been trying to figure out specifically what, if anything, Wolfe was trying to get at with his depiction of a man who becomes a god called the Conciliator.

Some really great research David. I do think the aspect of Conciliator in this story has been somewhat ignored. My own view is that myth, religion and legend find a number of conciliators and

Severian partakes in many aspects of them (though many question Severian's status as a "half-breed").

I generally find Severian somewhere in the mix between Hercules and Jesus, but I think your analysis pins it down a bit more definitively from a Catholic perspective. Raising of the dead is another essential theme, which you address.

(The connection between "lame" and "castrated" is the theory that when a hero in literature is wounded in the "thigh," that really means he's been rendered, er, drastically impotent---or at least that the two are related by proximity. A king who cannot ride and fight may still be able to sire an heir, but he's still cursed. BTW, has anyone wondered why Severian and Valeria never had an heir?)

The mythic connection between lame and castrated is something I've never encountered before. Thank you David!!!

I have wondered more than once in these annals about the lack of pregnancy in Valeria. I guess we could think of it as a pre-castration condition for the New Sun (what if he failed and faced castration; he can't have already had a child).

I have another rather obtuse interpretation for Valeria's barrenness. Severian, following a generic Greek hero pattern, is like an anti-Oedipus. There is always at least some tiny clue that each woman Severian has sex with is related to him. He is anti-Oedipus because, though cursed by incest, the one female family member he doesn't have sex with is his mother.

The exception may be Valeria. Both Andre-Driussi and Borski find suggestion that Valeria may be related in some manner to Catherine. So, perhaps, if Severian and Valeria led a chaste marriage, it was a way of breaking the incest curse. Perhaps an unmentioned pre-requisite for Severian to qualify for New Sun staus.

I'll go further on a limb by suggesting that incest can be considered the true Original Sin. It is the curse of all polytheistic pantheons of gods and goddesses (and the pharaonic dynasties they are patterned after). Their only alternative to incest was bestiality with humans (commoners). Thus the mantle of moral superiority and the basis for sexual repression among monotheistic religions, esp. Christianity and Islam. "at least our God isn't dorking his sister!".

It applies to Adam and Eve also. I argue that the forbidden knowledge they gained from the fruit was carnal knowledge (hence the fig leaves). We know Adam and Eve's kids had to be incestuous. But Adam and Eve themselves were the closest of relatives- cloned, identical twins (if we science up the rib story).

Some say there were some other people around for Adam and Eve's kids to mate with, in Nod, east of Eden.. But, as Dr. Talos' play implies, that gets into the Nephilim and fallen angel matings and stuff like that, which led to a Flood. There ARE some necessary dark sides to Creation and incest is one of them.

David Stockhoff — 14 Jan 2011, 13:00 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 1/13/2011 10:23 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

(The connection between "lame" and "castrated" is the theory that when a hero in literature is wounded in the "thigh," that really means he's been rendered, er, drastically impotent---or at least that the two are related by proximity. A king who cannot ride and fight may still be able to sire an heir, but he's still cursed. BTW, has anyone wondered why Severian and Valeria never had an heir?)

The mythic connection between lame and castrated is something I've never encountered before. Thank you David!!!

Sure! That's straight from /The Golden Bough/, a book of sheer nonsense that is sure to set your brain on fire. Keep a small fire extinguisher handy. ;)

I have wondered more than once in these annals about the lack of pregnancy in Valeria. I guess we could think of it as a pre-castration condition for the New Sun (what if he failed and faced castration; he can't have already had a child).

Yes, that kinda makes sense, and yet kinda doesn't quite explain it. Was Severian simply informed that any heir he produced would be killed?

[snip]

Some say there were some other people around for Adam and Eve's kids to mate with, in Nod, east of Eden.. But, as Dr. Talos' play implies, that gets into the Nephilim and fallen angel matings and stuff like that, which led to a Flood. There ARE some necessary dark sides to Creation and incest is one of them.

I think gnosticism and alchemical principles such as holy incest are closer to the core of the---what to call it, religious system?---in BOTNS. But gnosticism had no obsession with torture or death or force; those features are purely medieval Christian. Taken together, it's almost as

though the Incarnation was dimly perceived but was responded to incorrectly---was terribly misunderstood.

How this dim perception might have occurred is another question.

Adam Thornton — 14 Jan 2011, 14:03 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 01/14/2011 07:00 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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How this dim perception might have occurred is another question.

Through a glass is how things are usually seen darkly.

Perhaps a mirror.

Now I'm having an image of The Last Supper, except that the apostles are poker-playing dogs, except that actually they're alzapos.

Adam

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 14 Jan 2011, 15:03 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Perhaps Witz can work something up for you with the Conciliator in the central seat. Maybe 2 feet by 4 feet?

--- On Fri, 1/14/11, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

Now I'm having an image of The Last Supper, except that the apostles are poker-playing dogs, except that actually they're alzapos.

Adam

António Pedro Marques — 14 Jan 2011, 15:07 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote (14-01-2011 13:00):

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Rather Sev produce heir -> Sev no gets called to Yosed (methinks).

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 14 Jan 2011, 15:46 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

--- On Fri, 1/14/11, Ant?nio Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com> wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (14-01-2011
Someone else wrote

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He must really want it, then, or has little interest in an heir. I suppose this is what the whole process of building his character toward respect for the highest authority points to: he chooses the authority vested in the Increate vs investing authority in an heir.

Of course, that's assuming he could get an heir through the "coronation" process to begin with, AND assuming he didn't know any children might be drowned before adulthood. All these are disincentives.

Plus, Severian already had a son and he killed him (ahem).

Jeff Wilson — 14 Jan 2011, 16:24 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 1/14/2011 9:07 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:
David Stockhoff wrote (14-01-2011 13:00):

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Yes, that kinda makes sense, and yet kinda doesn't quite explain it. Was Severian simply informed that any heir he produced would be killed?

Rather Sev produce heir -> Sev no gets called to Yosed (methinks).

It makes sense to not bother asking people to destroy the world if their kids are on it, esp when you have the freedom to move in time to the ones who don't have kids. In this vein, Inire or whomever also seems to seek out candidates who have as few other family ties as possible (Ymar, "Appian") and are practiced at hardening themselves to human suffering (Ymar was a jailer, "Appian" served under the honey steward and so was probably complicit in the Antechamber detention to the point of delivering the pastries and coffee himself).

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jerry Friedman — 14 Jan 2011, 16:58 · in reply to Adam Thornton

From: Adam Thornton <adam at io.com>

On 01/14/2011 07:00 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Taken together, it's almost as though the Incarnation was dimly perceived but was responded to incorrectly---was terribly misunderstood.

How this dim perception might have occurred is another question.

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Perhaps a mirror.

Now I'm having an image of The Last Supper, except that the apostles are poker-playing dogs, except that actually they're alzabos.

Do alzabos eat poker champions to improve their skills?

Jerry Friedman

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 14 Jan 2011, 17:00 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

--- On Fri, 1/14/11, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
On 1/14/2011 9:07 AM, Ant?nio Pedro Marques wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote (14-01-2011 13:00):

I have wondered more than once in these annals about the lack of pregnancy in Valeria. I guess we could think of it as a pre-castration condition for the New Sun (what if he failed and faced castration; he can't have already had a child).

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True. But (1) there is Valeria (2) we have no evidence Severian knew what would happen if he succeeded---though one can certainly find grounds to suspect he did, not least the fact that he never denies it directly in his own autobiography. OTOH, I would almost expect lies from the Heirodues, but Inire might have warned him.

I can think of few rulers who have shown any real concern for human suffering. Autarchs, by their natures, might actually be expected to be more empathetic than, say, Roman emperors, so maybe this "hardening" is a red herring and the only operating principle is "we obey." Still, Severian has no family and perhaps more enemies than friends outside the Guild.

As for the lameness, it need not be taken literally that Severian and his rule will be sterile; it could be symbolic, just as his sacrifice is symbolic, since he returns from the other side (sort of). Lee: Briefly, "The sacrificial/sacral/divine king has an obligation to sacrifice himself for the good of his people and the land. The maimed/Fisher king is a danger to his people as he might cause the kingdom to become a wasteland."

Gerry Quinn — 14 Jan 2011, 21:18 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

David Stockhoff:

(The connection between "lame" and "castrated" is the theory that when a hero in literature is wounded in the "thigh," that really means he's been rendered, er, drastically impotent---or at least that the two are related by proximity. A king who cannot ride and fight may still be able to sire an heir, but he's still cursed. BTW, has anyone wondered why Severian and Valeria never had an heir?)

The mythic connection between lame and castrated is something I've never encountered before. Thank you David!!!

Severian may exaggerate his sexual prowess, but he does not indicate that he is unable to perform sexually, as one would expect of a castrated man. It seems unlikely that he would particularly desire a child from any of his sexual encounters in BotNS. If contraceptive technology has not been lost in Severian's time, it may not have been much of a concern..

I have wondered more than once in these annals about the lack of pregnancy in Valeria. I guess we could think of it as a pre-castration condition for the New Sun (what if he failed and faced castration; he can't have already had a child).

I have another rather obtuse interpretation for Valeria's barrenness. Severian, following a generic Greek hero pattern, is like an anti-Oedipus. There is always at least some tiny clue that each woman Severian has sex with is related to him. He is anti-Oedipus because, though cursed by incest, the one female family member he doesn't have sex with is his mother.

Just as there is some tiny clue that everyone is a character from Dr. Who, if you are looking for such clues.

If all Severian's lovers in BotNS are close relatives, his family would seem to be extraordinarily diverse and geographically dispersed. His lovers are spread (so to speak) from the slums of Nessus to the Autarch's Palace to villages in the interior and the minor aristocracy of provincial towns. They include pureborn exultants and those who are apparently lowborn, and some who are in between. If we include UotNS, we may add a woman from thousands of years in the past, and a female creature not born on Urth, nor even in Urth's universe. But even leaving these two aside, the thesis seems improbable to say the least.

Furthermore, apart from Dorcas there is just one woman mentioned in the story whom most agree is plausibly a close relative of Severian's. That is Merryn - and there is no indication that Severian has sexual relations with her. If Wolfe intended to indicate that Severian's lovers were hidden relatives, leaving Merryn out appears rather bizarre!

- Gerry Quinn

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 14 Jan 2011, 21:42 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

--- On Fri, 1/14/11, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:
Severian may exaggerate his sexual prowess, but he does not indicate that he is unable to perform sexually, as one would expect of a castrated man. It seems unlikely that he would particularly desire a child from any of his sexual encounters in BotNS. If contraceptive technology has

not been lost in Severian's time, it may not have been much of a concern..

Indeed, he does not indicate that he is unable to perform sexually, ... just as one would expect of a man writing his autobiography.

His lovers are spread (so to speak)?....

Nicely done!

Jane Delawney — 14 Jan 2011, 23:33 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 14/01/11 03:23, Lee Berman wrote:

The mythic connection between lame and castrated is something I've never encountered before.
Thank
you David!!!

I've mentioned this on list once before but this seems pertinent again - Robert Graves invokes both interpretations of the 'wounded in the thigh' trope for the Messiah, in his novel 'King Jesus'. Here, Jesus is, and knows he is, the rightful King of the Jews. As such, he undergoes a trial by combat on the eve of his coronation/wedding day; during this trial, one of his hips is knocked out of joint, producing a permanent lameness which is regarded as a prerequisite for his destined role (there are references also to Jacob's combat with the angel, during which the Patriarch was 'wounded in the thigh' - Jesus is apparently supposed to recapitulate the role of his ancient ancestor in his ritual combat).

Graves was an early 20th century advocate of the persistence of mythic tropes (post James Frazer, but largely pre Gustav Jung); he wrote 'The White Goddess' amongst other volumes as tribute to the ultimate Muse, (according to him) the (female) source of all (male-authored) poetry.

(Goodness me, was R.G. uncomfortable with the fact of the existence of Sappho, one of the world's greatest ever poets, who just happens to have been female ... !)

He presents a Jesus who has been born to be the dying-and-rising Corn King, husband of the White Goddess, but who rejects his role, and even after his ritual combat and consequent lameness refuses to fulfill that role by consummating his predestined marriage to the Goddess's incarnation on earth, Mary Magdalene.

By refusing to do his 'duty', Jesus in Graves's work subverts his role from that of sacrificial King of the Harvest, into Saviour of the World. No, I'm not entirely sure even now just exactly how that is supposed to work either :) However there may be a link here with the Sun Cycle since in BoTNS although Sev makes love to many women, he has no physical heir; and it's not entirely clear that his marriage to Valeria was ever consummated at all (I well remember on reading UoTNS for the first time that I thought I knew exactly why Sev keeps referring to 'poor Valeria', namely that I assumed he had always been impotent with her as he never had been with other women; and then I remember my dismay on re-reading the work from the beginning to find that there was absolutely no support for this assumption in the text! Still not sure where that came from.).

The lameness theme is stressed too much to be merely accidental, however. Silk is lame as well - and although he marries, and obviously loves his wife so much that he overlooks her shortcomings (she's a prostitute, she's violent - I think it's Horn, after his melding with the dying Silk, who refers to her as 'beautiful, savage Hyacinth' or something like); and he still feels soiled after making love to her, even though they are married. And of course, they never have

children either, even though years have passed after the end of Long Sun before Horn is returned to the Whorl in Silk's body.

I've no idea what (if anything) all of this means in terms of GW's thinking, but at the least it does appear to be relevant in terms of the Sun Cycle's multitudinous lamed messiah / Fisher King references.

jd

David Stockhoff — 15 Jan 2011, 03:02 · in reply to Jane Delawney

On 1/14/2011 6:33 PM, Jane Delawney wrote:

He presents a Jesus who has been born to be the dying-and-rising Corn King, husband of the White Goddess, but who rejects his role, and even after his ritual combat and consequent lameness refuses to fulfill that role by consummating his predestined marriage to the Goddess's incarnation on earth, Mary Magdalene.

"Corn" meaning "grain" but perfectly extendable to "maize" that grain with yellow silk.

... (I well remember on reading UoTNS for the first time that I thought I knew exactly why Sev keeps referring to 'poor Valeria', namely that I assumed he had always been impotent with her as he never had been with other women; and then I remember my dismay on re-reading the work from the beginning to find that there was absolutely no support for this assumption in the text! Still not sure where that came from.).

I had the very same thought my very first time. We both must have read it somewhere else---is it a classic Victorian indirection?

The lameness theme is stressed too much to be merely accidental, however.

I've no idea what (if anything) all of this means in terms of GW's thinking, but at the least it does appear to be relevant in terms of the Sun Cycle's multitudinous lamed messiah / Fisher King references.

I guess if you have a wasteland of any kind, there must be a lame king. And Urth is such, else why Conciliate? The Whorl too is broken/has broken with its people.

Jeff Wilson — 16 Jan 2011, 18:37 · in reply to Jane Delawney

On 1/14/2011 5:33 PM, Jane Delawney wrote:

By refusing to do his 'duty', Jesus in Graves's work subverts his role from that of sacrificial King of the Harvest, into Saviour of the World.

No, I'm not entirely sure even now just exactly how that is supposed to work either :)

By ending the cycle, he raise the stakes from yearly prosperity to sempiternal posterity: all or nothing brinksmanship? Ormuzd makes Ahriman the same sort of proposition.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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