

Saint Catherine and the Nature of the Flood

The Urth list — 11 messages, 7 voices, 14 Mar 2012

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6181>

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Jordon Flato — 14 Mar 2012, 20:37

So, I haven't chimed in for a while (and haven't really had anything urth-shattering to add in any event), but a few things from recent discussions have caught my eye and brought up questions for me.

1) Christianity in the world of Urth

The question has been around a long time, no? Was there Christianity in the past of Urth, or is this a universe without Christ? Is this a universe which prefigures ours, with echos of the Christian story in it, but without the physical incarnation of Christ which would enact the salvic effect of that incarnation? My question, which I can't recall seeing discussion of, but doubtless has in fact been picked apart and answered in a number of ways already, is this:

If the guild of torturers practices a rite central to their mythology and close to the very nature of their order, a rite which involves a character named Catherine who's story we can easily and readily track to the real and actual Saint Catherine of our world, doesn't that strongly indicate the presence, in the distant past of Urth, of a real Christianity? The very existence of saints, and of this one in with details so similar to the details of the story we know of Saint Catherine, seems to beg the question for me. How could you have her story without having first had Christ?

What sorts of 'close but not identical' circumstances could have existed to give rise to this exceptionally similar story to our own?

Is this simply a function and artifact of the translation gimmick? Gene Wolfe the discoverer of the manuscript attempting to translate untranslatable elements by placing in terms and whole myths with which we are familiar?

What has past thinking on this board done with this question?

So, now, and

2) The Flood: Is it a spiritual act of renewal/genocide, or pretty much just a physical by-product of the gravitational effect of the white fountain giving the sun the ol' hot beef injection? It was recently pointed out that in the future of Master Ash, most humans had escaped and dispersed to the four corners of the universe. This was, no doubt, a much better outcome for the individuals of Urth, many if not most of whom could have gone on to live lives of some meaning and worth. Better than being drowned, for sure. But the Heiro's have a plan. They want to turn Man into themselves, they want to uplift us, if we prove worthy. Severian passes that test, and man is found worthy, but not *as he is*. Gather the wheat and burn the chaff. If man has been shown to have the potential for evolving into the next stage, there must be the correct setting for such (the renewal of the Urth's resources as Ushas) and the removal and washing clean of all of the habits, traits and declining traditions which brought Humanity into the negative judgement in the first place, said judgement having resulted in the black hole sun.

In this sense, I think Severian, and the qualities which have been honed in him by his

magnificent journey, takes on perhaps his most 'christian' role off stage in the series. I wish I had the book in front of me, but the few things he says to the new Humanity on Ushas sound very Christlike to me.

Looked at as a god, his every word will serve as, at least in part, the basis for a new moral direction for man. Urth and Severian have both been put through the fire, and what is left is metal ready to be tempered to a finer degree than what was possible before. So there is a physical and yet quite spiritual dimension to the flooding of Urth.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 14 Mar 2012, 21:37 · in reply to Jordon Flato

Hi, Jordon. Good to "see" you.

Jordon Flato wrote:

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Is this simply a function and artifact of the translation gimmick?

I'm inclined to think so -- indeed, the translator seems to substitute saints' names for whatever past/future terminology people of the Commonwealth use to name themselves. (And it won't do to say that those names are direct; look how much the names of well-known saints have changed in common usage after just two thousand years: e.g., Cephas --> Petrus --> Peter.)

The concept of saints isn't intrinsically Christian, either; Buddhism has something that we translate as "Buddhist saints."

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Jeff Wilson — 14 Mar 2012, 22:27 · in reply to Jordon Flato

On 3/14/2012 3:37 PM, Jordon Flato wrote:

But the Heiro's have a plan. They want to turn Man into themselves, they want to uplift us, if we prove worthy.

Argh!!! Tzadkiel spells it out: A humanlike race became the godlike Hieros and ascended from Briah. Their forsaken servant creatures became the angelike Yesodis and called themselves Hierogrammates and Hierarchs and Hierodules, but by the time they ascended from Briah to Yesod, the Hieros were gone. The Yesodis now seek to guide and manipulate humanity into becoming like the Hieros so the Yesodis can ascend with them.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com

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Jordon Flato — 14 Mar 2012, 23:05 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Jeff, yes, that was what I was trying to say. Thanks. I didn't take the time to lay it out correctly. My main point is that this uplifting of humanity is the purpose of the flood, not just as a consequence of the White Fountain.

Dan'l,

Clearly a lot of the Saints names were added by the translator, we know this. But, it's the RITUAL that I'm concerned with. Did the translator add that in? Because the wheel, the roses, the striking off of the head, all of that is REALLY from Catherines story, regardless of her name. That is the story of Saint Catherine. So, did the translator completely add in all of that for some reason? Or did all of that stuff really occur to Severian. And if it happened, it is following the story of a Christian Saint, who wouldn't have existed to generate the story if there hadn't been a Christianity.

And, if we ARE saying that he added in or manipulated that element of the story, then every single detail of Sev's journey becomes so suspect as to become nearly meaningless (which of course is very Wolfean anyway).

So how about that?

On Wed, Mar 14, 2012 at 3:27 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com> wrote:
On 3/14/2012 3:37 PM, Jordon Flato wrote:

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Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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António Pedro Marques — 15 Mar 2012, 01:47 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

No dia 14/03/2012, às 22:27, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at clueland.com> escreveu:

On 3/14/2012 3:37 PM, Jordon Flato wrote:

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Why don't we call them yerus, or better yet yarus.

David Stockhoff — 15 Mar 2012, 02:00 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 3/14/2012 9:47 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

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Yahoos?

António Pedro Marques — 15 Mar 2012, 02:08 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Perfect! 'Yahoos' it is. Jeff?

No dia 15/03/2012, às 02:00, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> escreveu:

On 3/14/2012 9:47 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

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Yahoos?

Jeff Wilson — 15 Mar 2012, 04:55 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

On 3/14/2012 9:08 PM, António Pedro Marques wrote:

Perfect! 'Yahoos' it is. Jeff?

It may prevent their confusion with the Hieros, but replacing that with the confusion about why they're called yahoos doesn't strike me as a particularly gainful exchange.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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Jerry Friedman — 15 Mar 2012, 04:57 · in reply to Jordon Flato

From: Jordon Flato <jordonflatourth at gmail.com>

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Dan'l,

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who wouldn't have existed to generate the story if there hadn't been a Christianity.

I don't think that follows. Universes are similar to each other, and might affect each (through "morphic resonance"?). So maybe there could have been a very Catherine-like story, and even a very Christianity-like religion, without an incarnation.

Jerry Friedman

Lee Berman — 15 Mar 2012, 11:46 · follows Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson: But, it's the RITUAL that I'm concerned with. Did the translator add that in? Because the wheel, the roses, the striking off of the head, all of that is REALLY from Catherines story, regardless of her name.

Jerry Friedman: Universes are similar to each other, and might affect each (through "morphic resonance"?).

Yes. Or you could argue that earth culture such as Catherine's story, Frankenstein and the Rubiyat have echoed down the corridors of time back to Urth, as Dr. Talos describes.

You could argue that Urth cannot be earth because it would mean God is breaking his Covenant with a second Flood. Or you could argue that humanity has changed sufficiently to the point that the Covenant was rendered null and void.

Like many other points of contention in Wolfe's work, the evidence is a Necker cube or Old Lady/Young Lady, and can be seen differently from different perspectives. Both are correct. The incorrect position is asserting that there is only one way to see it properly.

Jeff Wilson — 15 Mar 2012, 17:39 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 3/15/2012 6:46 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

Jeff Wilson: But, it's the RITUAL that I'm concerned with. Did the translator add that in? Because the wheel, the roses, the striking off of the head, all of that is REALLY from Catherines story, regardless of her name.

thricetimes Argh!! I did not say this.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at clueland.com
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