

Short Stories 112-113: The Arimaspiian Legacy and Slow Children at Play

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Marc Aramini — 05 Jan 2015, 20:36

THE ARIMASPIIAN LEGACY AND SLOW CHILDREN AT PLAY

“The Arimaspiian Legacy” and “Slow Children at Play” appeared as Cheap Street Chapbooks in 1987 and 1989, respectively, and are collected in

*Starwater

Strains* and *Innocents Aboard*.

“THE ARIMASPIIAN LEGACY” SUMMARY:

“The Arimaspiian Legacy” begins with a quote from Herodotus? *Histories*, indicating that tales of the one eyed men of the north (called Arimaspiians) and their enemies, the griffins which zealously guard golden treasure from them, originate with the Issedonians and have been passed on by the Scythians.

The narrator describes his late friend David, who is survived by a few family members, and their childhood meeting at a chess club. He relates how they gave each other names as children and had similarly bookish interests, even living close enough to visit each other via bicycles. He calls David by the surname Arimaspiian. Their meetings often involved boasting. ?[David] was exceedingly proud of whatever he possessed: his geese were every one a swan. The narrator also describes one of David’s possessions: the dubiously ebony handle of an eyeglass bearing the initials M.H., which David used to burn his own initials, D.A., into the grip of a Finnish knife.

David became an astronomer and antiquarian book collector, though the narrator is reluctant to call him a true collector because of the random nature of his acquisitions. He stuffed his inherited Victorian home with stacks of books. On the narrator’s last visit, David had to give him his own chair so his guest could sit in the book-crowded residence.

One night David arrives at the narrator’s house carrying a narrow carton “embellished with golden foil — surely the kind that distillers of the best class provide at Christmas”. David says that he has fulfilled his life ambition and found the book that “no one buys” — one that always disappears when you come back for it. He says the book was “eight hundred and sixty-five thousand miles across” (the diameter of the sun) but he has reduced it to a regular book size through translation, in a blue cover embellished with a golden griffin. David says that griffins are spirits rather than fabulous beasts and references Sumer, Akkad, and Ur, also indicating that he is now “potentially the master of the world.”

David goes on to say that these Griffins, “come midwinter[,] — fly from the sun with new strength for the Tree,” and that the covetous Aramaspiians (whose name means “one-eyed”) who attempt to steal their gold are half blinded by the sun. According to David, sunspots have

spelled out a solar code which he has been able to translate into Chaldean and then into English. He claims, "Someone left it there to get us started," and that it is the secret to many powers of controlling both the human body and the external world.

Stepping over the window ledge after indicating that a woman is waiting for him below, David descends on steps of air towards a woman in a red jaguar. When he is still three stories from the ground, the sun comes out and its rays destroy the power of his invisible staircase; he falls to his death. David leaves his library to the narrator, who is prone to go through the crates in storage "especially at this time of year." He states, "In my dreams, I see him falling, and griffins bent upon vengeance, bearing the treasures of the sun." The story ends with Milton's quote from *Paradise Lost*, which describes a "gryphon" as a Fiend pursuing the Arimasian who stole its gold over any terrain by any and all means necessary.

"SLOW CHILDREN AT PLAY" SUMMARY:

The narrator of "The Arimasian Legacy", revealed to be Gene, states that he is perhaps the only one who understands how two child-like beings have come to live in his building, an understanding which even these "children" lack. The pair, named Mark and Joe, remind Gene of the sign reading "Slow Children at Play" outside his building, though Mark can be quick on occasion. He says they live by begging and that even simple tasks can take them exorbitant amounts of time. Gene also infers that they originally came from the ruins to the south of his building and that they dwell on the eighth floor of his apartment building, accessible only through stairs, because it was probably the only door unlocked and because the old landlord did not like using the stairs (the elevator only ascends to the penultimate seventh floor).

Gene watches out for the "children" by insuring that they escape the attention of the caretaker of the property, first by insinuating that they are residents and then by telling a new poorly educated groundkeeper that the children's room is occupied and stealthily alters the apartment building's rental diagram to show that their rent is paid in advance. He classifies Joe as retarded and Mark as insane. He notes that Joe is only willing to meet Mark's eyes when he speaks and is slow of action. He also observes that "some celestial power meditates his death; so Mark believes."

On the winter solstice, when Gene inquires as to their origin, Mark replies, "I c-came from the sky — J-Joe out of the ground, G-Gene. Yes! F-from the sky! I f-fell, oh, f-fell so many, many. I h-had wings," at which point he extends both his arms and his legs, making him think of a four winged insect. Mark believes that now he is doomed to die rather than to fly. Joe asserts, "We have to die, too, Mark." Here, Mark notes a crimson sun and asks, "He'll k-kill you, too, G-gene" — Today's his day. He takes your sun away.

When Gene confirms that it is indeed the solstice, Joe is overcome with terror at the prospect of the red light he sees through the window flying away. Gene is reading at his desk, Griffith's **Mercenaries of the Hellenistic World,** and covers the author's name at its reminder of the death of his friend David. He also reassures Joe that the crimson light they see is not the yellow light of the sun. Joe tries to launch himself through the window and Mark saves him, saying it is merely a red stop light.

Mark calms him by promising to cross the river to find "the sun" together and bring it back. Here Gene admits in his own thoughts that the window has been tugging at him as well, and that if Joe died, he would be even more likely to hurl himself through it. They go to seek out the light.

Passing through an industrial district, Gene thinks that they are like the Magi, "wise men who

were in fact members of a certain Media tribe, who followed a star to Bethlehem. We three comprised a half-wit, a madman and a fool.” As they approach the light, Gene sees a man who appears to stand in the fire. Joe realizes that the light is not the sun, but the man asserts that it is indeed. Joe pleads with him to bring it back. The man says, “It has never gone — but I will bring all of you again to it — because the time is not yet.” He looks disdainfully on Mark, but more kindly on Joe.

He then turns around and says that the hour is come, and at his back was “an entire new being: a live griffin, eagle-clawed and many-winged. Its eagle's head screamed,” and Gene staggers backwards to the car, believing this to be the start of his psychotic episode. The light seems to grow larger and more brilliant, and he notes that the figure before it “was horned like a Viking or a devil; and as I looked, it roared like a lion.”

Gene writes his psychologist of the event, and admits that Joe's visit the next day makes him doubt that he actually lost his reason. Gene told Joe that he was ill, and the boy admits that he has been ill from eating out of the dumpster, “because they spray for flies.” Gene later thinks of the nickname of the devil, “the Baal of Flies”. He tells Joe he is going to see a specialist, and Joe says, “we were just paying — you played, too. — Last night you played with us.” He says that they do not get hurt, because they “take care of each other.” He looks out the window at the sunlit river, smiling.

The ending of the text is a quote from **De Mundo** in which all sing together, moving in a dance around heaven and unite in harmony “whose cause is one, and whose end is one. It is this harmony which entitles the All to be called Order, and not disorder.”

DISCUSSION:

There are many religious, historical, and thematic implications of these two stories, but it is fruitful to view them in the vein of Wolfe's previous Solstice story, “At the Point of Capricorn”, in which a syncretic blend of pagan myth and Christian cosmology weave a dense tapestry. The first story ends without identifying the narrator as Gene. It maps the struggle between the griffins and the Aramaspians onto that of David's hunger for knowledge and power and his death through some spiritual or supernatural agency, which steps in to prevent him from using powers beyond those of mortals. In this case, the power seems to dwell with the sun, and the Christmas wine David brings coupled with the indication that our narrator seeks to look for the book during the Christmas season is of course related to the Winter Solstice. At the solstice, less sunlight will allow the narrator to search for David's volume without fearing the sun's full strength. While this is fairly simple, the second story complicates matters metafictionally by turning our narrator into Gene, something which Wolfe has done before in his “Procreation” series, and by bringing possibly angelic and demonic characters into direct interaction with our narrator, despite his claims of a “psychotic episode” to explain away what he has witnessed.

The obvious importance of the winter solstice to primitive cultures makes it significant to the modern world as well: the point at which the sun reaches its weakest point but then immediately begins to grow stronger, bringing warmth, sustenance, and continued fertility as the cyclic seasons turn; given its importance in many pagan rituals, it was an equally obvious time for placing the birth of Christ on the calendar. The necessity of sacrifice mapped by Frazier in his **Golden Bough**, which also touched on Christ's life story as another expression of this eternal cycle of death and rebirth tied to renewal, is also innately tied to this time of year. However, at times these stories seem to bring in an almost Gnostic world view in which the reality that we know through the senses is artificial, and our scheme of heaven and hell fails to adequately describe the harmony of the spheres, where high and low can work together for a higher purpose and human life and reality, the material plane, might be described as mere

child's play.

One of the important thematic ideas that arises in "Slow Children at Play" involves the minor suicidal pull of Gene's window, the one David fell to his death from in showing off his control over reality. The mysterious light which seems to be retreating in this story resonates not only with the sun but with the idea of paradise itself, and the need to return to the divine and be free from mortal life perhaps cause both Gene and Joe's temptation to hurl themselves from the window. If Mark has fallen from Paradise, the pull is not as strong, but Joe seems to have risen up from a lower level, seeking to come ever closer to the symbol of paradise and salvation. Of course, Joe's compulsion seems much stronger than Gene's (perhaps he has been longer deprived of the communion with God or whatever celestial power is symbolized by the light than the other characters, especially given Mark's tale of losing his wings and falling to earth). The being who guards the sun also seems far kinder to Joe than to Mark. The similarity between the terms for Griffin and Cherub in some Mesopotamian languages will be discussed below in Mythical Allusions, but the being guarding the light whose back forms both a lion and a horned devil functions as a guardian Cherub, the same angel which was tasked with keeping fallen man from Eden and earthly paradise. This figure is described in almost oxymoronic language, bridging the gap between descriptions of unholiness and divinity in fascinating fashion: the horns of a devil or Viking juxtaposed with the symbol for Christ, the lion, and a syncretic story that ties together gold, nuclear power, the sun and the ancient myths of griffins with the descriptions of a Cherub from Biblical sources, primarily the book of Ezekiel. In addition, the winter solstice/Christmas story of the sun's waning power is directly tied into the life story of Christ by Gene's sentiment: he feels that they are the three Magi, following the star to salvation. The moment in history of which he speaks, when God becomes man, is one in which some tragedy and sacrifice becomes necessary for the greater good and for salvation, one which increases holiness rather than destroys it, for Christ is born to die. The waxing and waning of the light and Gene's perception of this Cherub as perhaps evil in nature constitutes an incomplete understanding of a world view in which good and bad, high and low, death and life, are all necessary and work in harmony.

The kindness the figure shows to Joe is very interesting, as it seems from his reaction to the fly repellant in the dumpster and Gene's rumination that the devil, the Baal or Lord of Flies (Beelzebub) might be involved. This would make Joe a demon who has risen up to the material plane. Whether he is simply a servant or a fly echoes the insectile description of Mark and the idea that he might have lost four wings — a description which jives with Ezekiel's accounts of cherubs, found below under Religious Allusions. A subservient devil and a fallen angel playing together, somehow innocent of the understanding of the choice between good and evil, are treated differently by this Cherub/Griffin. Perhaps the title refers to humanity in trying to understand the actions and the cosmology of the universe, simply slow children trying to play a game, but it must also comment on the comparative innocence of both the fallen angel and the risen demon.

MYTHICAL ALLUSIONS:

Herodotus, Pliny, and Strabo all speak of the one-eyed Arimaspoi who covet gold and war with their neighbors, the griffins who guard it. David mentions Sumer and Akkad, and the religion of both had parallels with many Babylonian and Hebrew stories. Sumerians and Akkadians envisioned the universe as a dome surrounded by water. The earth, the firmament, and the water itself all became associated with deities. One of the Sumerian and Akkadian myths involves Anz?, "a divine storm-bird and the personification of the southern wind and the thunder clouds." This demon, half man and half bird, stole the Tablets of Destiny from Enlil, hiding them in a mountain. Eventually, whether at the hands of Marduk or the arrows of Ninurta, Anz? was killed. ("Anz" (mythology)?)

Much as David's book was meant to give him vast power, the tablets of destiny conferred upon Enlil (or Enki, depending on the story) in Sumerian myth was the source of his authority over the universe. David is guilty of the same theft here as Anz?, though the bird imagery is confused and combined with the description of the conflict between the Griffins and the Arimaspians in Herodotus and other sources. It seems that David considers himself something like Prometheus or Anz?, but in reality he maps to the one eyed men, "half blinded by the sun," who cannot see clearly because of their avarice and longing for gold or authority, staring too long into an immense power. Clearly all of these stories also echo the myth of Prometheus, punished for bringing fire to man, tormented by an eagle in his bondage. (The Griffin, of course, usually has the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle).

The Akkadian word for Griffin, karubu (implying a winged creature), is linguistically related to Cherub (kuribu), fitting in with the theme of an angelic protector. Even the descriptions of Cherubim from Ezekiel match very well, with both lion and eagle features.

The woman at the red jaguar waits for David, but it is unclear if she is just a mortal or something more. The reverence for Jaguars exists in Mayan and Aztec religions rather than in those of Sumer and Akkadia, so the symbolic importance of her car might be a dead end in determining her identity. In any case, the revolving flame in "Slow Children at Play" seems to be guarded by the griffin/cherub, who says that it is indeed the "sun".

THE TREE:

In "At the Point of Capricorn", the solstice ceremony also involves the mention of a tree that is used to call back the sun, and here background mythology involves gold being used as an energy source for some mythic tree, fed by the effort of the flying Griffins. We are all aware that the tradition of the Christmas tree has pagan origins; trees were used in an attempt to appease the sun gods who diminished in power until the solstice. This can be seen in the use of the evergreen in Egyptian practices worshipping Ra, with the Romans and their Saturnalia, and of course with the Druids and Vikings as well (the Cherubim in "Slow Children at Play" also has horns like a Viking's helm). It might very well be that the Yggdrasil or world tree is meant, with celestial energy fueling it, but just as likely the warmth for the tree David speaks of is symbolic in nature and related to these pagan and Christian solstice rituals.

GOLD, THE MAGNIFYING GLASS, AND M.H.:

David's proclivity for golden and gold-accented things is derivative of the Arimaspiian myth. His magnifying glass with its golden initials seems to represent a way not only to harness and focus the power of the sun, but also focuses two eyes into one lens. This may turn David into a symbolic Arimaspiian as well, when he looks through it. Speculation on the actual meaning of M.H. on the magnifying glass could lead just about anywhere, with no real way of determining if we are correct save perhaps David's proclivity for gold: he collects gold gilt volumes and there is gold foil on his wine of choice. The initials are also in gold. This might even be a brand designation. His obsession with the ultimate gold, the message of the sun via sunspots transmuted into a book, might invoke the alchemical text by John Dee, the **Monas Hieroglyphica**, which deals extensively with cosmogony and decryption. David harnesses the power of the sun with the magnifying glass to inscribe his own initials in a metaphorical process similar to harnessing the sun to create his ideal book. However, given the symbolic import of a magnifying glass, the text leaves assigning a definite explanation for M.H. fairly open. Even something as obscure as Mycroft Holmes could be implied (whose specialism is impractical and indolent omniscience, after all, compared to his brother Sherlock's practical deductive skills), or

even a scientist who works with gold whose initials happen to be M.H.

Whether intentional or not, there are some striking echoes between the themes of Dee's manuscript and these short stories. The *Monas Hieroglyphica* operates under the cabalistic idea that manipulation of the letters and symbols of the Hebrew language can be used to influence the world and the cosmos due to some kind of astral relationship between language and the signs of the zodiac. This is similar to the decoding David performs in which the sun spot patterns become the text he has sought all his life. According to Michael Walton, Dee's treats "the Monad's interpretation as an art of writing which revealed all astronomical knowledge, both the greater astronomy of the heavens and the lesser astronomy of alchemy." (118) Dee also believed this was the key to "all things visible and invisible". If indeed the M.H. initials invoke Dee's work at all, then mathematics and the Hebrew language have been replaced with nuclear science and Chaldean, respectively. This association with Chaldea resonates with the historical Chaldean Oracles, which are Greek commentaries on a poem of Chaldean origin. In this poem, the first intellect emanates fiery rays which are interpreted by the second intellect, the Demiurge, to understand and influence the cosmos. Even the symbol of Dee's Monad can resemble a magnifying glass in some of its components, which are broken down below:

<http://www.jwmt.org/v2n13/partial.html> (Turner).

The spirits of Sumer and Ur also resonate with the tale of Prometheus, stealing fire for man. The provenance of flame in Zoroastrian thought is well known, and the cosmic significance of the solstice to the story is equally apropos.

THE HARMONY OF THE SPHERES AND GNOSTICISM

The poem that concludes "Slow Children at Play", *De Mundo*, is included in a footnote to Hans Jonas' treatise on *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity*, in which the harmony of astral bodies and the cosmos is discussed. It could very well be that this is the source Wolfe used in finding the poem. The book states:

The Pythagoreans had found in the astral order the proportions of the concordant musical scale, and accordingly had called this system of the spheres in operation a harmonia, that is, the fitting together of a many into a unified whole. Thereby they created the most enchanting symbol of Greek cosmic piety: "harmony," issuing in the inaudible "music of the spheres," is the idealizing expression for the same fact of irrefragable order that astrology stresses less optimistically in its own context. Stoic philosophy strove to integrate the idea of destiny as propounded by contemporary astrology with the Greek concept of harmony: ? its action as it affects terrestrial conditions and the short lived beings here. And since the stellar movements are actuated by the cosmic logos and this logos functions in the world process as providence (pronoia), it follows that in this wholly monistic system heimarmene itself is pronoia, that is, fate and divine providence are the same. The understanding of and willing consent to this fate thus interpreted as the reason of the whole distinguishes the wise man, who bears adversity in his individual destiny as the price paid by the part for the harmony of the whole. (259)

The text goes on to present a Gnostic revaluation of the idea of this harmonic piety and presents this cosmic order as anti-divine, yet it seems that in this case the Wolfe story sticks with the pre-Gnostic valuation of the solar bodies and even integrates Judeo Christian "good" and ?evil? angels as mere children at play.

The mixed symbolism of the fallen angel with almost insectile multi-part wings, the aversion Joe has to the fly repellent, the satanic and Christian imagery used to describe the griffin like figure taking the sun in the second story (described with horns like a devil but roaring like a lion,

which is symbolic of Christ): all of these conflicting symbols create a confusing cosmology where good and evil are blurred together. Marcion's heresies of the world as a fallen illusion might even fit in to this scheme.

BIOGRAPHICAL ALLUSIONS:

Much like "On the Train" and a few of Wolfe's other short shorts, these stories have some biographical details. According to the Wolfewiki,

A friend of Wolfe's, David Taylor, provided inspiration for the character David in The Arimaspiian Legacy. In a Q and A style interview posted on Fantastic Metropolis, Wolfe made the following comment. "Of course I have ten thousand memories connected with books. How about being introduced to Dickens by my friend David Taylor, who had been reading Pickwick and talked like Mr. Jingle when he described the book? David has been dead for more than 40 years, but you will find him as David Arimaspiian in my story "The Arimaspiian Legacy." (?The Arimaspiian Legacy")

"Slow Children at Play" was based in part on an actual light -- a mysterious light in this case -- which I saw once and have never seen again. It's also based on a traffic sign about a half a block north of this house. ("Slow Children at Play")

MORAL IMPLICATIONS:

In addition to retelling the story of Prometheus, in this case involving not merely altruism but also self-aggrandizement, the second story in the sequence paints an almost astonishing moral picture of the cosmos. The title "Slow Children at Play", while it comes from a sign which sometimes depicts two children on a teeter totter, is another example of semiotic slippage in Wolfe, where he applies the imperative "[Go] Slow(!)" to instead function as an adjective. The insinuation that Mark fell from heaven and is a celestial being while Joe came from below and is repelled by fly treatments as a possible minion of the Lord of the Flies shows the high and the low living together, innocent of good and evil, almost as if they are at play in the mortal plane. Perhaps this sign showed the two children on the teeter totter as some of those "Slow Children at Play" signs do — one descending from on high, the other on his way up from the bottom, such that Mark and Joe are headed in opposite directions, one falling and one rising, but balanced for a time in the middle on the material plane.

Both are ignorant of money and other earthly concerns. The overlaying of Gnostic thought, in which the cosmos is composed of an Empyrian, Etherial, and Elemental world matches the levels implied by the story as Mark and Joe meet in the middle. In "reality", they are simple children without the burden of excessive sin. The idea that high and low ultimately serve the divine purpose is repeated in Wolfe several times, but it is very cryptic in this story. Why is a fallen angel consorting with a minion of Beezebub in Gene's apartment building? Is this simply to show how spiritual forces move and work in the real world innocent of free will and culpability, as these children are innocent?

LIERARY ALLUSIONS:

Gene mentions that the author's name, G.T. Griffith, reminds him of David's death, which of course is because of its similarity to griffins. However, Wolfe was almost certainly familiar with this tome, *Mercenaries of the Ancient World*, from doing research for his Latro novels.

BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

The description of Cherubim as having four wings and dispensing fire comes from the book of Ezekiel. This description definitely shows the manner in which Wolfe conflated the Griffin and Cherubim. The four faces of the cherubim are that of an eagle, a lion, a man, and an ox (or a cherub in a later description). It is quite clear that Wolfe has taken the leonine, aquiline, and linguistic similarities to heart in his construction of the supernatural beings in his story. The Book of Ezekiel describes Cherubim at length, and even shows them playing with fire:

1 In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.

2 On the fifth of the month--it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin-- 3 the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. There the hand of the LORD was upon him.

4 I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north--an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal,

5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man,

6 but each of them had four faces and four wings.

7 Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze.

8 Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings,

9 and their wings touched one another. Each one went straight ahead; they did not turn as they moved.

10 Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle.

11 Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another creature on either side, and two wings covering its body.

12 Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.

13 The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright, and lightning flashed out of it. 14 The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.

Ezekiel 1: 1-13

22 Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome.

23 Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body.

24 When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings, like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings.

Ezekiel 1:22-24

3 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court.

4 Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD.

5 The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when he speaks.

6 When the LORD commanded the man in linen, "Take fire from among the wheels, from among the cherubim," the man went in and stood beside a wheel.

7 Then one of the cherubim reached out his hand to the fire that was among them. He took up some of it and put it into the hands of the man in linen, who took it and went out.

8 (Under the wings of the cherubim could be seen what looked like the hands of a man.)

Ezekiel 10:3-8

Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes ...

Ezekiel 10:12

Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.

Ezekiel 10:14

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

What do the M.H. initials on the magnifying glass really signify?

Who is the woman in the red jaguar?

CONNECTION WITH OTHER WORKS:

The idea of the monad was expressed overtly in "Procreation", but here it attains a mystical alchemy of consciousness. Much like "At the Point of Capricorn", these stories deal with the mysterious resonance between the pagan and Christian worlds and a spiritual exploration of solar events, especially the obviously and symbolically gravid winter solstice/Christmas season in which the sun loses power and is then reborn. Both "Slow Children at Play" and "The Friendship Light" may have been based on the same mysterious light that Wolfe once saw. The idea that all creatures, high and low, serve a harmonious goal consonant with the will of God will be repeated in both Long Sun and Short Sun, as well as in many other of Wolfe's later

stories.

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Marc Aramini — 05 Jan 2015, 22:54 · follows Marc Aramini

(Did my previous post go through with the long write-up?)

I was just thinking that the biblical allusion with Ezekiel in chapter 10, of the cherubim and the fire, resonates with an earlier sacking and burning of the temple by the Chaldeans, and that the language which David translates from the sun is Chaldean, further complicating the cosmological relationship between pagan and Judeo-Christian symbolism in the texts. (In some ways, the harmony invoked explicitly by the final poem justifies evil and destruction as part of "the plan").

The geography of heaven and the celestial throne is also described in Ezekiel, and it seems that the derelict forlorn things south of the the throne match up with the ruins to the south of the narrator's house.

I think it quite clear that Wolfe had that biblical passage in mind in writing *Slow Children at Play*, especially noting the hands facing the light, as man who warms his hands behind him at a fire. His insectile description of the fallen angel is perhaps derivative of his approach in *Urth of the New Sun* as well.

David Stockhoff — 16 Jan 2015, 00:27 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 1/5/2015 3:36 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:
GOLD, THE MAGNIFYING GLASS, AND M.H.:

David's proclivity for golden and gold-accented things is derivative of the Arimasbian myth. His magnifying glass with its golden initials seems to represent a way not only to harness and focus the power of the sun, but also focuses two eyes into one lens. This may turn David

into a symbolic Arimasbian as well, when he looks through it. Speculation on the actual meaning of M.H. on the magnifying glass could lead just about anywhere, with no real way of determining if we are correct save perhaps David's proclivity for gold: he collects gold gilt volumes and there is gold foil on his wine of choice. The initials are also in gold. This might even be a brand designation. His obsession with the ultimate gold, the message of the sun via sunspots transmuted into a book, might invoke the alchemical text by John Dee, the */Monas Hieroglyphica/*, which deals extensively with cosmogony and decryption. David harnesses the power of the sun with the magnifying glass to inscribe his own initials in a metaphorical process similar to harnessing the sun to create his ideal book.

.... Even the symbol of Dee's Monad can resemble a magnifying glass in some of its components, which are broken down below:

<http://www.jwmt.org/v2n13/partial.html> (Turner).

I really like your association of David with the "wizard" Dee, who himself could be said to be like a magnifying glass, given that he seems to have gathered together and examined material from a variety of ancient sources to bring order and focus to it. This association should be taken as far as it can. I wonder if some mid-century writer made this comparison/metaphor in a Foreword to an obscure old book on a related topic . . .

In support of your discussion of insectile figures, horns, and wings, I wanted to highlight this diagram from Turner:

http://www.jwmt.org/v2n13/images/monas/new%20Theorem%20XV_small.jpg

It needs no further comment.

I also enjoyed this section of your analysis:

MORAL IMPLICATIONS:

In addition to retelling the story of Prometheus, in this case involving not merely altruism but also self-aggrandizement, the second story in the sequence paints an almost astonishing moral picture of the cosmos. The title "Slow Children at Play", while it comes from a sign which sometimes depicts two children on a teeter totter, is another example of semiotic slippage in Wolfe, where he applies the imperative *?[Go] Slow(!)?* to instead function as an adjective. The insinuation that Mark fell from heaven and is a celestial being while Joe came from below and is repelled by fly treatments as a possible minion of the Lord of the Flies shows the high and the low living together, innocent of good and evil, almost as if they are at play in the mortal plane. Perhaps this sign showed the two children on the teeter totter as some of those "Slow Children at Play" signs do — one descending from on high, the other on his way up from the bottom, such that Mark and Joe are headed in opposite directions, one falling and one rising, but balanced for a time in the middle on the material plane.

I can just imagine "the Wolfean mind" turning this image over and over, wondering to what purpose it can be put, as Wolfe drives around his neighborhood.