

Short Story 24: The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Apr 2015

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6741>

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Stephen Hoy — 26 Apr 2015, 20:25

Marc

I'd like to re-visit something from The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories. You explored the onomastics of Tackman Babcock to connect Tackman to Talar, relying on the German Tacke = bough and Armenian Talar = evergreen. I'm with you on Talar, but I have a different take on Tackman.

'Tackman' was used in Scotland and the north of England to describe a lease-holder or farmer. A tack is what we now call a lease on property. Tack in this sense derives from Old Norse taka meaning 'take;' because the tackman shared in the annual take of the property. The tackman was the natural successor to the bondsman or villain, who in turn was preceded by the serf or slave. See for example "History of the Tack or Lease" <https://books.google.com/books?id=-jwoAAAAYAAJ&lpg=PA120&ots=-PR_EEWaeH&dq=%22History%20of%20the%20Tack%20or%20Lease%22&pg=PA117#v=onepage&q&f=false> in The Scots Magazine (Feb 1803).

I am less certain of the etymology of Babcock--one source suggests it emerges from Babb-, a shortened form of Bartholomew or Barbara, plus cock, a generic diminutive originally used to depict a strutting (cocksure) youth. This suggests an unrefined juvenile.

In the context of allusions to The Island of Dr. Moreau through the Lemurian Talar (and perhaps also to the Silent Planet trilogy of C.S. Lewis through "Captain Ransom"), I sense a theme of a maturing civilization--humankind progressing from serf to villain to tackman. For are we not men?

None of this takes away from Tack as 'bough'--although Tack as 'twig' seems more apt than bough, because according to the old saw, as a twig is bent, so goes the bough.

Marc Aramini — 26 Apr 2015, 20:33 · in reply to Stephen Hoy

Thanks Stephen! I like it - at that point in my write-ups, I honestly wasn't thinking too much about the names, and instead focusing primarily on narrative gaps. Maturation is definitely one of the key themes of the story ... (though when he talks to Doctor Death, Tackman does not "idealize" himself and see himself grown as he does with Ransom - but perhaps this is more mature than thinking yourself something you are not.)

On Sun, Apr 26, 2015 at 1:25 PM, Stephen Hoy <stephenhoy15@gmail.com> wrote:
Marc

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