

Too literal on everything?

The Whorl list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 03 Jan 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1516>

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maa32 — 03 Jan 2002, 03:21

Very interesting stuff about the Maternal paganism in Wolfe, Nutria. Thanks for sharing your conversation with Wolfe.

Hey Andy, when you say I'm being too literal, do you mean about all my word connections or just that Blue/Green time travel thing? Severian doesn't seem to have any problem traveling through time. The only thing I think is very interesting in the text about what whorls we should consider when dealing with inhumu is when the narrator claims (with some authority) that there are only three whorls involved: the whorl, green, and blue. Why, then, does Merryn have a problem with animals on the Red Sun Whorl (certainly a few thousand years would change the constellations, too), and why does Jahlee bring it up? What does it mean? I've just found it interesting how Wolfe can infuse repetitive words with associations that they normally do not have (for example, read *The Book of the New Sun* and look at how many times water and healing are mixed, as well as flooding and salvation -> it happens over and over and over ad nauseum. Obviously, salvation requires a big flood -> and you didn't really have to read *Urth of the New Sun* to make that association) I'm just exploring those word associations, and whether they are fruitful or not. I have always felt that was a good way to read Wolfe (like that whole elm tree being associated with death in *Peace*, or noticing in the *Book of the New Sun* that every time a scary beast shows up, Hethor shows up, too -> I think Wolfe only provides the exposition half the time). Certainly I am not even confident in most of my explorations -> I'm just drawing weird connections. And you must admit that in a book about a journey home, it does not seem very off the wall that there might be some way to reconcile Blue and Green with that homeward journey (especially since their orbits pass within 30,000 leagues of each other). And if you've ever read *Books in the Book of the New Sun* which equates a master's thesis with the story of Theseus or the *BINDING OF A BOOK* with the upcoming appearance of Dorcas, then you know that Wolfe is entirely capable of making the most bizarre and surprising connections in the universe. Marc Aramini

Andy Robertson — 03 Jan 2002, 10:31 · follows maa32

I mean primarily the Green/Blue thing, but it has applicability elsewhere.

The question about whether Green and Blue are Lune and Ushas or even St Anne and St Croix in literal truth is irrelevant. They are figures, archetypes, of something inside Wolfe. Perhaps he had a dream once.

So in one sense they are Ushas/Lune, and in another they are not. Wolfe would not be able to answer the question because he does not yet "know" himself.

I am sure that if we knew the story of Severian's visit to Lune we would understand better. But Wolfe has not written it down yet, so it hasn't happened, so even Wolfe does not know the answer.

It just seems to me that Wolfe is playing it by ear and sometimes has no clear idea of what is

going on himself. He has these massively mythic figures and he combines them and recombines them at his whim. He relies on instinct. Sometimes he is really writing about a sort of dreamspace. Sometimes it is literal. But always it is the mythic import, the moral meaning, that counts, and worrying about things like can inhumani actually swim through space is not relevant.

If Wolfe wants them to, they will.

I am not criticising your attempts to pick up clues. That is part of the joy in reading Wolfe. But I will note that if you start looking at anything with a number tagged on to it as a clue you are sure to be misled. Wolfe is never *quantitative* in any meaningful way. His universe is too dreamy and fluid.

Andy R

----- Original Message -----

From: "maa32" <maa32 at dana.ucc.nau.edu>

Hey Andy, when you say I'm being too literal, do you mean about all my word connections or just that Blue/Green time travel thing?

James Jordan — 03 Jan 2002, 22:08 · follows Andy Robertson

At 08:21 PM 1/2/2002 -0700, you wrote:

Very interesting stuff about the Maternal paganism in Wolfe, Nutria. Thanks for sharing your conversation with Wolfe.

Hey Andy, when you say I'm being too literal, do you mean about all my word connections or just that Blue/Green time travel thing? Severian doesn't seem to have any problem traveling through time.

Yes, but that's only after he's travelled to the sub-heaven of Yesod, and died (again) and been brought back (again) on the Ship. Severian has a fairly unique gift and calling, to be the Conciliator, to be a kind of Christ-Apollo to Urth. (He's not Christ; that's the "theoanthropos" of ancient time.) I don't think we can transfer Severian's unique gifts, and especially those gifts as transformed through his deaths and resurrections, to other people in the Urth universe. BTW, does anyone else see a hint of *Perelandra* in Green? A "fallen Perelandra" perhaps? Lush and verdant and corrupt, and needing a "Ransom" to at least begin to set things right -- to go underground and fight "un-men" and remove the sewage? Of am I streaming my consciousness too much? If this guess is anywhere near the mark, perhaps the Neighbor really is a kind of "angel" to guide "Ransom/Horn" to do this initially redemptive work. The Neighbors want to redeem Green.

I've just found it interesting how Wolfe can infuse repetitive words with associations that they normally do not have (for example, read The Book of the New Sun and look at how many times water and healing are mixed, as well as flooding and salvation -> it happens over and over and over ad nauseum. Obviously, salvation requires a big flood -> and you didn't really have to read Urth of the New Sun to make that association)

Well, as I'm sure you got, this is all reflections on the sacrament of Holy Baptism, beginning with Severian's initial baptismal drowning and resurrection. There are lots of reflections on the Holy Eucharist throughout also. And these were quite deliberate, as Gene affirmed to me. Severian's baptismal death and resurrection at the beginning simply foreshadows (and in-personates, since he is the "messiah" who walks the path before the rest of us) the baptism

of Urth into Ushas at the end, and tells us how we should consider that flood.

Just a coupla thoughts.

Nutria

James Jordan — 03 Jan 2002, 22:29 · follows James Jordan

At 10:31 AM 1/3/2002 +0000, Andy wrote to Marc:

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The question about whether Green and Blue are Lune and Ushas or even St Anne and St Croix in literal truth is irrelevant. They are figures, archetypes, of something inside Wolfe. Perhaps he had a dream once.

I don't think they correspond, save they each is a duality that invites reflection. Lune is green in anticipation of the Green Man, where Green is green in a primordial and fallen way. They are at opposite ends of the temporal/eschatological spectrum. In other words, Lune relates to Urth eschatologically, while Green relates to Blue protologically. The two worlds in *Fifth Head* are tyrant and slave, exploiter and exploited.

The fact that each pair is joined as a pair, somehow, has something to do with society. Humans need to relate to abos with kindness, not exploitation. Humans on Blue must also redeem somehow the inhumani of Green -- Horn/Silk makes a start of this on Green and on Blue, and the Book of Horn will carry forth his story and that programme.

I think Lune is just kind of up in the sky, in the heavens, an image of Yesod in a way. If the humans of Urth could ever learn to rule their own little world, they might grow up to rule a universe like Briah, and become like the sub-angels of Yesod -- when they have become Green Men.

But I don't think these double planets are supposed to BE the same places (obviously not), nor that they mean the same things in the three novels.

It just seems to me that Wolfe is playing it by ear and sometimes has no clear idea of what is going on himself. He has these massively mythic figures and he combines them and recombines them at his whim. He relies on instinct. Sometimes he is really writing about a sort of dreamspace. Sometimes it is literal. But always it is the mythic import, the moral meaning, that counts, and worrying about things like can inhumani actually swim through space is not relevant.

If Wolfe wants them to, they will.

I am not criticising your attempts to pick up clues. That is part of the joy in reading Wolfe. But I will note that if you start looking at anything with a number tagged on to it as a clue you are sure to be misled. Wolfe is never *quantitative* in any meaningful way. His universe is too dreamy and fluid.

Hmm. Not sure about this. Wolfe rewrites his big hypernovels several times, and I think he works to make them internally consistent. The problems are (a) that his "universe" is bigger than the modern secular universe, with angels (fallen and unfallen), ghosts, a living God, prophets and prophetic dreams, etc.; (b) that his narrators definitely have "limited omniscience" and may even be deceptive at points; (c) that there are correspondences between myths, archetypes, earlier events, and present events; (d) etc. But as a trained engineer, Wolfe has surely figured out how the inhumani get to Blue. If he makes mistakes in the area of science and engineering, they are accidents, not the result of writing a dreamscape. Or so it seems to me.

Nutria

Andy Robertson — 04 Jan 2002, 10:39 · follows James Jordan

----- Original Message -----

From: "James Jordan" <jbjordan4 at home.com>

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But I don't think these double planets are supposed to BE the same places (obviously not), nor that they mean the same things in the three novels.

Very wisely put.

I wish even more that we had seen that visit of Severian to Lune. And I agree about Perelandra showing through in the Green worlds, just a bit. Ransom in the caves.

One other pattern of Green and Blue in the deep strata of SF - Earth/Moon in Hothouse. But Earth is "Green".

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Wolfe has surely figured out how the inhumans get to Blue. If he makes mistakes in the area of science and engineering, they are accidents, not the result of writing a dreamscape. Or so it seems to me.

He hasn't because there is no way they can. As a trained physicist, trust me on this.

I'm not accusing Wolfe of doing anything more than the average SF writer does.

Energy beam weapons, blasters, FTL of any sort, are all nonsense in terms of real scientific practicality, but are familiar SF tropes.

Wolfe employs them all but allows a little mysticism rather than bullshit pseudoscience into his "explanations".

The inhumans' ability to fly through space is of a part with this: it is no more possible than FTL flight would be in the real universe.

It exists because Wolfe's dreams demand that the evil inhumans come from Green and come ****naked****, flying through space like the spirit-ghost-dream-images of humanity they are

(and there's another echo: Lovecraft's night-gaunts)

Andy R