

Tells; Wounded Feet; The Outsider

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David_Lebling — 04 Apr 1997, 09:44

Tells:

"Tells" are in general cities buried by the subsequent human history of the site. In Mesopotamia in particular, this is because the cities were built of mud brick, which makes good fill material. All over the world it was generally the practice that when the time came to rebuild a house or a city, the technique was to smooth out the previous version and build on top of it. Keep that up for a few hundred years and you've got quite a mound, but not a mountain.

Another example, more appropriate to _New Sun_, is the ancient Mexican city of Cholula, which was buried by volcanic action. Pompei and Herculaneum in Italy come to mind in this regard as well.

However, the description we get in _New Sun_ involves an additional step, which sounds to me like the result of tectonic plate movement, mountain building, and ultimately erosion. This doesn't take quite as much time as you might think (ten million years would be plenty). However, a world without volcanos is probably a little short on tectonic plate movement as well. Also, if we are to believe mantis's map of the Commonwealth, there hasn't been significant mountain-building opportunity -- the coastline looks remarkably like that of present-day South America.

It's a puzzlement.

Wounded Feet:

I just reread Lewis's _Perelandra_, and interestingly enough the protagonist Ransom is wounded in the foot by the Un-Man (the Devil), and the wound doesn't heal until cleansed by the Perelandran Adam. I think the Fisher King motif is operative here.

As for Silk's lameness, it serves two purposes. First, it ties in with the long mythological tradition of lame heroes. Add (for example) Oedipus to the list we've been building, and Achilles with his vulnerable heel. Second, it gives Wolfe a chance to show that Silk is a superman (the duel with Xiphias makes it most explicit). In showing Silk overcoming or transcending his wound, Wolfe is more in the SF tradition than the mythological. In the latter, such wounds are markers, and often have little to do with the events of the story. In SF, where a proactive stance is typical, they are obstacles to overcome (think of Heinlein's Waldo, another superman).

Scourging the Moneylenders:

I have to believe, potential for Wolfean heresy or no, that the description of the fortunate man "enlightened and possessed" by the Outsider is a clear reference to Jesus scourging the moneylenders. Wolfe has remarked on this story before (in _Castle of the Otter_, I think), where he points out that the only thing we are specifically told that Jesus (by profession a carpenter)

made is a whip.

-vizcacha

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Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com