



# Blackstar

## And Gnostic Symbolism

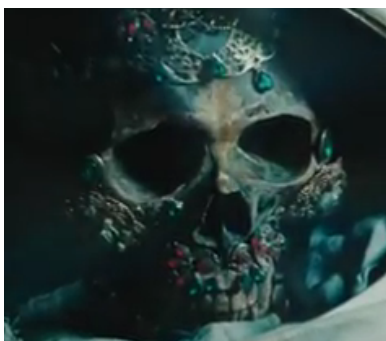
by Joseph Armetta

David Bowie died on January 10, two days after his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. Two days prior he left us with a “parting gift” as described by co-producer Tony Visconti, his final album Blackstar. A video of the title track was also released.

The video of the song Blackstar seemed as enigmatic as Bowie the man himself. It is filled with imagery that is reminiscent of his 1969 big hit, Space Oddity. Yet, Blackstar is much more than a retrospective attempt to relive some past glory days.

With a single stroke, Bowie ties up the account of Major Tom while leading us on a new adventure that yet continues the story of the hero of Space Oddity, post mortem. He also manages to weave in Von Daniken’s ancient astronauts with a heavy dose of Gnostic references and televangelism.

Unfortunately, we will never really know what Bowie truly meant in this production, as if he would really say. So boys and girls take a trip to YouTube.com and dial in this masterwork and see if you agree with the following observations.



## Major Tom

Opening references to Space Oddity with the corpse of Major Tom complete with space suit. In the helmet is

the bejeweled skull of Major Tom. Tom appears to have been dead a while and his skull had been fashioned into some kind of religious relic.

The planet where major Tom landed and died is earthlike but clearly not earth. The opening scene of the video where we see Major Tom's body we also see the primary star of this planet as having a black sun with a bright corona.

(Alchemists saw the Black Sun as unworked , primal matter, still to be on the path to development. To the psychoanalyst, the Black Sun stands for the unconscious, again in its most elemental form.

Traditionally the Black Sun presages the unleashing of destructive forces upon the universe, society or the individual. It heralds disaster, suffering and death, the inverted image of the noonday Sun, hence the universal sense of ill omen attaching to eclipses. Dictionary of Symbols, Jean Chavaliere and Alain Gheerbrant. Penguin Books. 1996)

Did perhaps Bowie think of himself as the Blackstar while facing his own mortality?



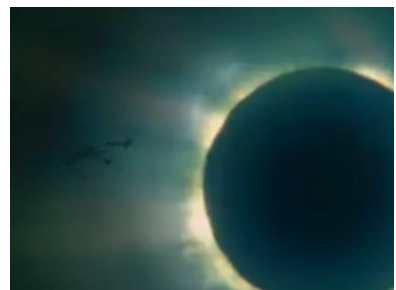
### **Ancient Astronauts**

Enters now the girl with the long tail. At this point we can definitely see that we are not on planet earth, but a planet with humanoid creatures who are not quite homo sapiens. She takes the skull, now in a reliquary into her town. The skull of Major Tom has been converted into an object of worship. This is seemingly a nod to the mythology of ancient astronauts planting the seeds of humanity, the Annunaki, Von Daniken's Chariots of the Gods or Lloyd Pye's Starchild, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nc9oadYD0xY>).

### **Lyric:**

*On the day of execution, on the day of execution  
Only women kneel and smile, ah-ah, ah-ah  
At the centre of it all, at the centre of it all*

Was this lyric a reference to the Major Tom character being incorporated into the mythology of the ONE who was executed? Is this a clear reference to the Christ-like character of this video?



After Major Tom's skull is retrieved a headless skeleton is shown ascending to the Blackstar. This appears to be another reference to the Christian mythology of the ascension of the Christ.

### **Yaldabaoth**

In the first appearance of David Bowie he is wearing a white blindfold with buttons for eyes. It is considered by some that David is portraying the blind, jealous and arrogant god from the Gnostic scriptures, Yaldabaoth.

(‘He is wicked in the mindlessness within him. He said, “I am God and there is no other god beside me,” since he did not know from where his own strength had come...



... When he saw creation surrounding him, and the throng of angels around him that had come forth from him, he said to them, “I am a jealous god and there is no other god beside me” ...’ 116-117. The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper One, 2002)



### **Lyric:**

*In the villa of Ormen, in the villa of Ormen  
Stands a solitary candle, ah-ah, ah-ah  
In the centre of it all, in the centre of it all*

Is the “solitary candle” an analog for the Christian cross? It is also common in almost all Western religious ceremonies. The “solitary candle” could be... wait for it... just a “solitary candle”. However, this author thinks the symbolic reference of the candle is a direct reference of the Christ example proposed by Bowie. The ONE, the Christ figure, is synonymous with the solitary candle. Therefore it may not be a direct reference to the cross but the person, the Christ figure.

### **The Number Three**

During the music interlude sax solo we see three characters experiencing ritualized fits of ecstasy. The number 3 is also of note here. During this point of the video as the girl with the long tail is carrying the reliquary into the



village of Orman we can see an visual arrangement grouping of threes referenced. The distant hill has three obelisks. The doors and window appear to be grouped in threes. The number three is a clear reference to the triune god of Christianity.



Again the number three is here with more apparent religious significance as three dancers shake in religious fits of ecstasy.

### **The Preacher**

David Bowie transforms into the character of a preacher holding a holy book with a Blackstar on the cover. This is another obvious reference to a Christian prayer book or holy book. It is at this point the preacher delivers his sermon.



He appears in the same dilapidated building set serving as a church reference where the three were engaged in their religious ecstasy. Notice the round window in the back giving the impression of a stained glass window commonly seen in Christian churches. This allegory of a decrepit church setting suggests the church is in decay morally and philosophically.



### **Lyric:**

*Something happened on the day he died  
Spirit rose a metre and stepped aside  
Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried  
(I'm a blackstar, I'm a blackstar)*

**(In the Mouths of Lions.** I was in the mouth of lions. They hatched a plot against me, to counter the destruction of their error and foolishness, but I did not give in to them as they had planned. I was not hurt at all. Though they punished me, I did not die in actuality but only in appearance, that I might not be put to shame by them as if they are part of me. I would have become bound by fear, but I suffered only in their eyes and their thought, that nothing may ever be claimed about them. The death they think I suffered in their error and blindness. They nailed their man to their death. Their thoughts did not perceive me, since they were deaf and blind. By doing these things they pronounce judgment against themselves. **As for me, they saw me and punished me, but someone else, their father, drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I.** They were striking me with a scourge, but someone else, Simon, bore the cross on his shoulder. Someone else wore the crown of thorns. And I was on high, poking fun at all the excesses of the rulers and the fruit of their error and conceit. I was laughing at their ignorance. pp. 480. The Nag Hammadi Scriptures, edited by Marvin Meyer, Harper One, 2002)

Who took the place of the Christ at the crucifixion as his “spirit rose a metre and stepped aside”? Was it Simon Peter who substituted for Christ as the Nag Hammadi Scriptures suggest?

In the screen adaptation of Nikos Kazantzakis' controversial novel and film, The Last Temptation of Christ, Christ is tempted off the cross by Satan disguised as an angel so that he may live and die as a man and not the savior Christ. The man who took the place of the Christ was not named in the film.

### **The Sermon**

Here David goes into full preaching mode. In this “sermon” one gets the impression that the preacher is speaking from the pulpit as illustrated by David singing in the “church” setting. In this sermon the preacher is speaking in the person of the “savior”.

#### **Lyric:**

*I can't answer why (I'm a blackstar) - God has “mysterious ways”.*

*Just go with me (I'm not a filmstar)  
I'm-a take you home (I'm a blackstar)  
Take your passport and shoes (I'm not a popstar)  
And your sedatives, boo (I'm a blackstar)*

This is seemingly a parody of a typical televangelist making promises to get his or her flock to heaven. In following them they will please god.

*You're a flash in the pan (I'm not a marvel star)*

It is also worth noting that according to the God of the Old Testament based on the following passage below, it appears that this "God" jealously guards his creation, humanity, from becoming more like him. In an effort to prevent our anti-heroes, Adam and Eve, from partaking of the "tree of life" and thus having everlasting life, they are banished from the Garden of Eden after partaking from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

("Then the LORD GOD said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, least he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever" – therefore the LORD GOD sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he has taken...' Genesis:3.22)

*I'm the great I am (I'm a blackstar)* – Reference to Adonai/Jehova/YHWH/I AM WHO I AM.

('God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'", Exodus 3:14)

*I'm a blackstar, way up, on money, I've got game  
I see right, so wide, so open-hearted pain  
I want eagles in my daydreams, diamonds in my eyes  
(I'm a blackstar, I'm a blackstar)*

*Something happened on the day he died  
Spirit rose a metre and stepped aside  
Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried  
(I'm a blackstar, I'm a star's star, I'm a blackstar)*

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*I can't answer why (I'm not a gangstar)  
But I can tell you how (I'm not a flam star)  
We were born upside-down (I'm a star's star)*

*Born the wrong way 'round (I'm not a white star)*

These four lines are in reference to the book of Genesis story of Adam and Eve. The end result of the first humans who ate from the Tree of Knowledge is that they passed on what was called Original Sin. For

this Original Sin, each person must spend their entire life in atonement.

(‘And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”’ Genesis 2:16-17)

*(I’m a blackstar, I’m not a gangstar  
I’m a blackstar, I’m a blackstar  
I’m not a pornstar, I’m not a wandering star  
I’m a blackstar, I’m a blackstar)*

*In the villa of Ormen stands a solitary candle  
Ah-ah, ah-ah  
At the centre of it all, your eyes  
On the day of execution, only women kneel and smile  
Ah-ah, ah-ah  
At the centre of it all, your eyes, your eyes  
Ah-ah-ah*



### **The Crucifixion**

Again some more obvious Christian references plus the reappearance of the number three at the crucifixion. There are the three who were crucified at Gul’Gotha (place of a skull). The Christ figure is in the center flanked by two others.

(“Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left”, Matthew 27:38)

The center figure, the Christ reference appears more like a scarecrow than a real man. Straw is hanging out of his clothing, a **strawman**!

A strawman is a proxy or a stand-in for someone or something else. This refers back to the “In the Mouths of Lions” quote from the Gnostic scriptures where

Simon according to the Nag Hammadi Scriptures, stood in for Christ at the crucifixion.

While on the crosses the three gyrate at the hips in a very sexual manner. Religion is very sexy. The Christ figure is a superstar with sex appeal. Also, the three wear similar blindfolds with buttons for eyes that David donned when he was the Yaldaboath character. This is a deviation from the Gnostic readings. In the Gnostic readings the Christ figure came from the God above God, the unknowable.