

Hierogrammates; Chesterton

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 Aug 1998

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adam louis stephanides — 04 Aug 1998, 20:59

In THE SILENCE OF THE LANGFORD, Dave Langford discusses British critic Nick Lowe's (presumably not the rock musician) observation that some science fiction novels circumvent tiresome questions of plausibility by incorporating the plot itself as a character in the book, with a name such as the Force or Hari Seldon's Plan. Langford gives an illustration from the Hyperion books, which makes clear he is talking about characters whose function, and motivation, is to force the other characters to do what the author wants them to do. I don't want to believe that Wolfe is guilty of this in URTH, but I haven't seen any better explanation for the Hierogrammates' activities. (And if my dissatisfaction with this makes me a Vulcan, then so be it.)

On a completely different topic, I know that Wolfe admires Chesterton, but Chesterton has never seemed "Wolfeian" to me, to employ a Borgesian temporal inversion. But in THE COLLECTED WORKS OF G. K. CHESTERTON vol. 14, which contains hundreds of pages of unpublished short stories, novelettes, and fragments, there is a short story, "Child Street," which did strike me as very Wolfeian. It's an excellent story, and worth seeking out in a library or through interlibrary loan. (The same volume contains another excellent unpublished short story, "Le Jongleur de Dieu," which is not particularly Wolfeian, but is strikingly un-Chestertonian.)

This will be my last post for a while, as I am moving and losing my email connection.

Au revoir,

Adam