

Chesterton

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 05 Aug 1998

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Michael Straight — 05 Aug 1998, 08:16

On Tue, 4 Aug 1998, adam louis stephanides wrote:

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 But in THE COLLECTED WORKS OF G. K. CHESTERTON vol. 14, which contains hundreds of pages of unpublished short stories, novelettes, and fragments, there is a short story, "Child Street," which did strike me as very Wolfeian.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 (The same volume contains another excellent unpublished short story, "Le Jongleur de Dieu," which is not particularly Wolfeian, but is strikingly un-Chestertonian.)

I've always thought "The Man Who Was Thursday" was a bit Wolfean (albeit less subtle than Wolfe) in its attempts at deliberately misdirecting the reader, and perhaps also in the really weird twist everything takes at the end.

-Rostrum

Alex David Groce — 05 Aug 1998, 10:40 · follows Michael Straight

On Aug 5, 8:16am, Michael Straight wrote:

Subject: Re: (urth) Chesterton

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I think Chesterton's influence is more philosophical than literary.

Wolfe has stated many times his vast admiration for Chesterton and Kipling (as well as Mark's Engineering Handbook), and I think that a lot of what he does at shorter lengths could be described as writing Kipling stories with a Chestertonian worldview. Wolfe's portrayed universe is admittedly far darker in tone than Chesterton's. But then, I think Borges once said that Chesterton is really closer to Kafka than anyone thinks, he just hides it well. As to obvious influences, I think Wolfe's essays and interviews have a

very Chestertonian feel--Wolfe's always saying G. K.-ish things that at first seem silly, then on reflection appear to possibly be profound truths. And his fondness for ideas like the return of cavalry or MX missiles on wooden boats is very Chestertonian in the "cheat-the-prophet" sense. In fact, such ideas seem to me a combination of Kipling's fondness for railroads & other engineering feats and Chesterton's love of the wildly implausible...

And if Silk in NIGHTSIDE isn't Father Brown redux, I'll eat my hat.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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