

Thus Spoke Severian? (Nietzsche links)

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 03 Dec 1998

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Jon Camfield — 03 Dec 1998, 09:35

(Yah, I's been quiet. I's been busy. OTOH, I did have a chance to read lots of Nietzsche, and find a few parallels, only one striking one)

In On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life (1874), Nietzsche argued that man must live as a balance between remembering and forgetting, and one passage in particular struck me:

"Cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future -- all of them depend, in the case of the individual as of a nation, on the existence of a line dividing the bright and discernable from the unilluminable and dark; on one's being just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time; on the possession of a powerful instinct for sensing when it is necessary to feel historically and when unhistorically. This, precisely, is the proposition the reader is invited to meditate upon: /the unhistorical and the historical are necessary in equal measure for the health of an individual, of a people and of a culture/." (/../ specify italics, Nietzsche's.)

Now, not to overanalyze, (but I wish I knew if Wolfe had read Nietzsche!), but "line dividing the bright ... and dark"? Terminus Est, you mean? Or what about Severian being the 'memory' for a culture living in the present moment (living unhistorically) while immersed in it? And in being the opposite extreme, gives a healthy balance?

Also, in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Zara announces the future of humanity as having two possible courses, one towards the Last Man (no lie!), of a future bright in technology and comfort, but immersed in decadence and eventual death, and that of the Superhuman/Overman, who is a dramatic change from current man, an evolution from him, but more a revolution in (moral) thought-- Ash, master of the Last House vs. the Green Man?

...nahhhh. ;)

Has anyone else read these connections into Nietzsche, or (as is likely) seen ones I missed?

----- Jon Camfield "GriffJon" |Webmaster, Plan II
Honors Program: GriffJon at mail.utexas.edu | www.dla.utexas.edu/~plan2 Homepage, Gallery,
Resume: |Channel Manager, Undernet #Poetry
ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~griffjon | www.tripod.com/~ircpoetry

----- "Behold the good and the just! Whom do they
hate the most? The man who breaks their tables of values, the breaker, the lawbreaker; yes he
is the creator"

--Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Alex David Groce — 03 Dec 1998, 11:30 · follows Jon Camfield

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Striking, but I'm doubtful. I can imagine Wolfe having read Nietzsche (at least some), as Wolfe is certainly very widely read... On the other hand, I don't see an intentional reference to Nietzsche as very likely--it just seems that Wolfe's general view of things is so non-Nietzschean...

Of course, it could simply be my personal distaste for

Nietzsche--certainly a genius and a brilliant writer, but on the whole his work strikes me as containing a thin vein of clear perception in a sea of murk and error... Severian as the Superman seems quite a bit off (first of all, Wolfe has mentioned somewhere (I think) that he was fond of Chesterton's "Meeting the Superman" or whatever, and I doubt if that's the case he'd have wanted Sev. associated with that...)

But mainly, Nietzsche's "slave morality," etc. analysis doesn't seem to fit well as a source for BOTNS... Although N's self-contradictory enough that you could say that's irrelevant...

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

--

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu)
Senior (Computer Science/Multidisciplinary Studies in Technology & Fiction)
'98-99 NCSU AITP Student Chapter President
608 Charleston Road, Apt. 1E (919)-233-7366
<http://www4.ncsu.edu/~adgroce>

Jon Camfield wrote:
(Yah, I's been quiet. I's been busy...)

It's been quiet, has it? Oh, *I's* been quiet. Dialect, don't you know. Good show.

Griffjon at mail.utexas.edu | www.dla.utexas.edu/~plan2

All explained. Tallyho.

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Sounds like parallel evolution. Lots of mystical views of the future probably have this forking paths theme.

On the other hand, it's certainly interesting how many parallels you can find when you pick writers with that sort of out of the way viewpoint. Like the connections I brought up with Yeats some time ago; I think the conclusion (parallel evolution) was the same there. He's got gyres rather than forking paths though, i.e. both extremes happen repeatedly. (Did that sentence make sense?)

Peter Stephenson <pws at ibmth.df.unipi.it> Tel: +39 050 844536
WWW: <http://www.ifh.de/~pws/>
Dipartimento di Fisica, Via Buonarroti 2, 56127 Pisa, Italy

Derek Bell — 03 Dec 1998, 20:36 · follows Peter Stephenson

In message <199812031631.IAA29045 at lists1.best.com>, Alex David Groce writes:

But mainly, Nietzsche's "slave morality," etc. analysis doesn't seem to fit well as a source for BOTNS...

It certainly would be very difficult to fit it into BOTNS.

Although N's self-contradictory enough that you could say that's irrelevant...

I think Karl Jaspers said that someone wasn't familiar with Nietzsche until they had found every statement and its contradiction in Nietzsche's writings!

Derek

Derek Bell — 03 Dec 1998, 20:33 · follows Derek Bell

In message <199812031539.HAA29562 at lists1.best.com>, Jon Camfield writes:

Now, not to overanalyze, (but I wish I knew if Wolfe had read Nietzsche!),

Certainly he's aware of Nietzsche; *_To the Dark Tower Came_* had Kent punning on the word "Superman" without even mentioning the word itself. (One of the phrases used is a thumbnail portrait of Nietzsche's Superman.)

On the other hand, Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same could be seen as incompatible with the eschatological themes of TBoTNS - it's certainly a new Sun and a new Earth. (A biblical reference, if I'm not mistaken; Nietzsche also referred to the Bible though as well as Plato - who he disliked.)

Just to be contra-contradictory :-), there is also the

oft-quoted passage "I tell you: one must have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star." Well, Severian doesn't create or *give birth* to the New Sun, but he is full of chaos - all those autarchial personas inside!

Has anyone else read these connections into Nietzsche, or (as is likely) seen ones I missed?

In his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche used a couple of symbols that reappeared in *TSZ*: one was an eagle, the other was the Sun!

Then again, I think Nietzsche's sun is associated with the Apollonian spirit and I think Gene Wolfe has explicitly said that the New Sun is non-Apollonian.

He also showed his dislike of Socrates and, by implication, Plato. He accused Socrates of bullying people with talk, IIRC and called for a balance between the Apollonian spirit (rational, linked with moderation) and the Dionisian spirit (chaotic, wild, potentially creative and destructive). This description is only a small part of *TBoT* - it is a very complex book, including Nietzsche's speculations on Greek drama as an outgrowth of religion.

Derek