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The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 Apr 1999

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Ori Kowarsky — 29 Apr 1999, 19:19

Nicholas Gevers wrote:

In response to Ori Kowarsky's recent defence of his non-Christian reading of the Urth Cycle: eloquently argued, Ori, but I detect a major inconsistency in your posting. Initially, you describe the Christian allusions in BOTNS as detritus from past ages, part of the eclectic symbolic soup of Wolfe's posthistory; then, you maintain that there's no sign that Christ has been present in Severian's universe, that Christian salvation can apply there, etc. But surely the survival of Christian iconography and theology into Severian's age means that Christianity has been present on Urth, but has faded into abeyance over time? There is plenty of textual evidence to support the existence of the Bible as a text familiar in some respects to the people and hierodules of Briah: the presence of Christian missionaries who can read from Exodus in the Jungle Garden; copious references to Genesis in Dr. Talos's Play; the fact that the religion of Typhon's time was analogous to Catholicism, and as such parodied by the gods of the Whorl in LONG SUN. Surely, Severian is a reiteration of a messianic pattern encountered previously on Urth or Earth, not only in Apu-Punchau and the Conciliator, but also in Christ.

As for the Urth Cycle not enacting the pattern of Revelations, etc.: how literally should Biblical prophecies be taken?

Thank you, Nicholas, for your generous words. My post, I think, was a little muddled, so I'd like to quickly re-iterate:

I agree with your analysis that the idea of an Urth without a Christian past is unsupportable, and would happily leave it at that. In UOTNS Tzad makes a cryptic little asides (it's quoted in my "urth ... Christain Text" post) which seems to imply that Tzad is from a universe in which Christ existed, as opposed to Sev's universe, in which it is implied (for the first time in the series) that he did not. Neither situation dramatically erodes my point.

In any case, as

I've argued previously, the God described by Wolfe is a highly perverse being, at least from a mortal perspective; His Plan is vast and complicated, entailing cruel manipulation of humanity, to the point of genocide; in my view, the Increate's behaviour is a warning to the reader that the actions of God (and his counterpart the Author) are best not taken for granted. If Severian's cosmos is not ours, it emanates from the same Creator, and any variations it presents on the pattern of our universe are deliberate and elegant, if often inscrutable, variations performed by that Artist.

I think a characterization of the Increate as a science fiction author would be a theodicy which surpasseth Job.