

Zoroastrianism? Buddhism?

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 03 Sep 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1768>

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DhSunanda — 03 Sep 1999, 15:34

"And the Ascian, his voice no louder than my own had been, and perhaps even softer, answered, 'How shall the state be most vigorous? It shall be most vigorous when it is without conflict. How shall disagreement be banished? By banishing the four causes of disagreement: lies, foolish talk, boastful talk, and talk which serves only to incite quarrels.

Hi, I'm new too, and the archive search doesn't seem to work for me, so I don't know if the Buddhist side of the Ascians has been discussed before. I know nothing about Zoroastrianism, but the Ascian's talk struck me on first reading as a parody of both Communist and Buddhist texts. Leaving aside the Communist....

'How can a state be vigorous?' is a question asked of the Buddha (via an intermediary) by King Ajatasattu about the Vajjians. (Ajatasattu wants to use the answer to subvert the Vajjian State, and thus wage a winning war). The Buddha lists 48 conditions that under which a state might be expected to prosper and not decline.

The four causes of disagreement are a direct translation, if slight rearrangement, of the traditional four speech precepts ('I undertake to abstain from false speech, harsh speech, useless speech, slanderous speech'). Traditional Buddhist precepts (guidelines for ethical action) are divided into those for the body (physical actions), those for the speech (communication acts) and those for the mind (wrong views about reality).

Alex David Groce — 03 Sep 1999, 11:57 · follows DhSunanda

DhSunanda wrote:

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So, then, is Wolfe parodying the Buddhist text, or the Ascian version thereof? After all, what Loyal-17 says most strongly suggests that the problem is (A) the restrictions imposed on the Ascians are in fact enforcing "real speech" to be translated through a medium that repeats lies (about the wonderfulness of the Ascian way) and (B) it doesn't, in the end, prevent much from being said (the anti-Orwell/Whorfian subtext).

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

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Jim Henley — 03 Sep 1999, 13:59 · follows Alex David Groce

-----Original Message-----

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On
Behalf Of DhSunanda at aol.com

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Wow. _That_ goes in the "News You Can Use" file. Thanks!

Best,

Jim

"It ain't the knife thru your heart that tears you apart
it's just the thought of someone sticking it in"
-- Graham Parker, "Protection"

DhSunanda — 04 Sep 1999, 21:13 · follows Jim Henley

Hi Alex,

So, then, is Wolfe parodying the Buddhist text, or the Ascian version thereof? After all, what Loyal-17 says most strongly suggests that the problem is (A) the restrictions imposed on the Ascians are in fact enforcing "real speech" to be translated through a medium that repeats lies (about the wonderfulness of the Ascian way) and (B) it doesn't, in the end, prevent much from being said (the anti-Orwell/Whorfian subtext).

Well, Wolfe quotes the Buddhist text pretty straight (if that is what he is doing; he's a tricky writer to pin down), but the Ascians are using the teaching to create a State of mindless conformity. That's the exact opposite of what Buddhism aims at.

In that sense it is a parody of the Buddhist text. Wolfe could be parodying the followers of religions in general, saying "'look at the effects of memorising texts rather than acting on their spirit").

Of course, as you point out reality can always break through cliché. That's true, but difficult. Doesn't Shadow somewhere near the beginning have a remark to the effect that concepts are much weaker than the words we use to bind them? (Sorry for not looking it up. My copy has unaccountably vanished).

The theme of innovation and experience versus tradition and ritual runs through all five Urth books.

Alex David Groce — 05 Sep 1999, 14:19 · follows DhSunanda

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I'm not sure what the reference is to--Severian's statement about symbols (the "We believe we create symbols..."), perhaps?

At any rate, as usual Wolfe is not presenting a simple black/white dichotomy between innovation and experience and "cliches". Vodalus is, in a real sense, the "innovator" as opposed to the Autarch. But Vodalus' "reach for the stars, reclaim the future" turns out to be a false coin, at best a weak parody of Typhon's malignant grandness, used as a tool both by the Autarch and by Erebus and Abaia. The torturer's guild is another prime example--the best of it is what remains of ancient traditions--the feast of St. Catherine, etc. On the other hand, Severian's purpose in many ways seems to be to discover the points where the Increate's Reality shines through the fabric of life on Urth, and the good traditions arise from these direct experiences of a higher order.

The textual similarity to the Buddhist texts is striking. I'm just wondering what Wolfe's aims were--maybe nothing more complicated than suggesting that just as Communism can be seen as a secular parody of Christianity, it can be seen as a secular parody of elements of Buddhism as well.

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