

Tidbits of all sorts

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Sep 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1784>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 16 Sep 1999, 13:42

Welcome aboard, Shannon Wilde!

New Wolfe story: "The Tree Is My Hat" is a new Wolfe story in the just released horror anthology _999_. Set on an island in the South Pacific, in the modern moment. Those of you in the Chicago area missed your chance to meet Wolfe at the Stars Our Destination bookstore, where Wolfe was signing _999_ (and other books as well) on 9/9/99.

LEXICON URTHUS sighting in UK: spotted on the shelf in the Manchester bookstore called Waterstone's. And this is not the first time, either--two or perhaps three times. The mildly curious and the simply fanatical are encouraged to make pilgrimage, look the book over, heft it, thumb through it, glance at the pictures of exposed bosoms, put it back, and then personally thank the booksellers for ordering it, and displaying it on their shelf--shake hands all around, shed a few tears of pride (in Waterstone's) and joy (of things Wolfean).

eccentric WATCHMEN spoilers to follow <!avert thine eyes!>

It has been more than ten years since I read WATCHMEN. My memory of the details is largely eroded, but that doesn't matter--I still have my opinion. In a nutshell, I thought it started out great, had a fair middle, and a weak end.

To my mind there are two pillars to WATCHMEN: the obvious one is a parody/scathing satire/savage deconstruction of the entire comicbook hero mode (probably another brainchild engendered by Orwell's notion that comicbook heroes were "fascistic," and how could commie-book heroes or supersocialist heroes be constructed to counter the posterboys of fascism?); and the way this is all accomplished is through a worldview which is starkly Gnostic, in the noir downbeat school of Gnosticism <g>.

In this Gnosticism: there is a True God who is utterly absent from the world, and unreachable in this life; Earth is Hell, more or less; the Demiurge is a Pretender God, a yucky creature who created humankind and Earth and rules over both of them and pretends to be the True God. So in vanilla Christian terms, the True God is God and the Demiurge is Satan, roughly, and with a lot of heretical spin.

So in WATCHMEN we have a universe where "superheroes" helped win WWII, and shape the post-war world; but it becomes clear that these people are twisted individuals, megalomaniacs--thus, the world is not as shiny and bright as a comicbook world, it is dark and twisted (and there cannot be a "happy comicbook ending" where "good triumphs over evil" or "justice prevails" or any of the other traditional comicbook conclusions). There =is= a real superman, Manhattan, but he grows bored with the world and leaves for Mars, where he can contemplate his navel (thus he is a stand-in for the True God). Obviously the villain of the piece is a fellow who stands in for the Pretender God, and he even has a chateau in

Antarctica, a handy literary location for Hell (aside from Superman refs for the comicbook crowd).

Perhaps because the text/images so effectively destroy the authority of the superhero mode, I felt that WATCHMEN was hoisted by its own petard: since we don't believe in superheroes anymore, why believe that WWII is =reallyimminent? Why believe that this psionic monster bomb plot will =reallysucceed in averting WWII? And why believe for a moment, in this "real world" mode, that the ends justify the means?

The psionic monster bomb plot was so lame that I couldn't buy it as real (my disbelief, in part conditioned by the text itself, would not disengage), nor could I appreciate it as parody. It seemed like suddenly the text wanted to have some of the aegis, the aura it had been trashing: as if BORED OF THE RINGS suddenly tried to play it straight as LORD OF THE RINGS, by way of "the Big Lie."

So in the end, the satire devolves into nihilism, and <exageration to make a point here> it seems like a good text for a Gnostic-brand mass-murder/suicide cult: because the world is hell; because the ends justify the means, we can kill some innocent people to possibly avert megadeath (Tokyo train gas attack); etc. (And no, Lawrence Durrell aside, not all Gnostic cults are suicide cults.)

To contrast Severian with WATCHMEN's Pretender God: Severian is a pawn who makes it to the other end of the board and is reborn as a more powerful piece; the Demiurge is game designer and game player.

(I liked MIRACLE MAN better.)

=mantis