

Borges and Vance

The Urth list — 8 messages, 4 voices, 26 Oct 1999

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David_Lebling — 26 Oct 1999, 14:58

Alex David Groce writes of Borges' influence on Wolfe:

<<Borges is also always looming over Wolfe's work ... "Funes the Memorius" and "The Circular Ruins" are obvious ones.>>

I'd like to add, as a less obvious one, also from _Ficciones_, "The Approach to al'Mutasim." This is a story about a pulp genre (mystery) novel which eventually concerns the search for a messiah-like figure. It is a work with many levels, but one of them is a meditation on the importance of mystery (or perhaps the unattainability of truth) in fiction. One part of the story concerns a revised edition of the book in question, in which all the mysteries are revealed, producing a much inferior work. At another level it is about religion, and subtle hints, and many other bits and pieces (including a planetary, um, Indian adventure) which are quite lupine.

But then, all Wolfe fans are Borges fans already, right?

Also,

<<Jack Vance is the real center of science fiction's literary influence of Wolfe.>>

Couldn't agree more. However (as mantis has pointed out elsewhere), there is quite a contrast between Vance's picaresque, areligious, sometimes amoral heroes and Wolfe's tormented, sometimes unknowing seekers after God. To be honest, Sev's behavior is not unlike that of a Vance hero; he just agonizes over it more.

But then, all Wolfe fans are Vance fans already, right?

(A sad parallel between Borges and Vance is that Vance is now blind or nearly so.)

Dave Lebling
(aka vizcacha)

Jim Jordan — 26 Oct 1999, 14:46 · follows David_Lebling

At 02:58 PM 10/26/99 -0400, you wrote:

But then, all Wolfe fans are Borges fans already, right?

To be sure. And Borges was a super-Chesterton fan. As is Wolfe, of course.

One should probably also add, as regards religious influences, C.S. Lewis, who of course also was influenced by Chesterton.

Ultimately, however, Wolfe is ... Wolfe. Sui generis.

Nutria

Jim Henley — 26 Oct 1999, 22:14 · follows Jim Jordan

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

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

But then, all Wolfe fans are Borges fans already, right?

You betcha!

(A sad parallel between Borges and Vance is that Vance is now
blind or nearly so.)

And they haven't given Vance the damned Nobel Prize yet either. Say, has anyone ever seen
Vance and Borges _together_?

Best,

Jim

"I once was lost
but now I'm just blind"
- Kid Rock

Michael Straight — 27 Oct 1999, 09:32 · follows Jim Henley

On Tue, 26 Oct 1999 David_Lebling at avid.com wrote:

Alex David Groce writes of Borges' influence on Wolfe:

<<Borges is also always looming over Wolfe's work ... "Funes the Memorius" and
"The Circular Ruins" are obvious ones.>>

I'd like to add, as a less obvious one, also from _Ficciones_, "The Approach to
al'Mutasim."

I'd also like to add "The Immortal," a story which reminds me more of Wolfe's style than any
other. For instance, the narrator gives offhanded comments from which one can infer his
cruelty, not because he's trying to hide anything, but because torturing slaves for information
or crucifying seditious soldiers is such standard operating procedure that it hardly bears
mentioning.

Also the cool, distanced tone of the narrator reminds me of one of Wolfe's narrators (Severian,
Latro).

-Rostrum

Jim Henley — 27 Oct 1999, 19:14 · follows Michael Straight

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

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

Also the cool, distanced tone of the narrator reminds me of one
of Wolfe's narrators (Severian, Latro).

Wow. "Cool" and "distanced" are the last words I'd have applied to Latro. I can see it for Sev
though.

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"

Michael Straight — 27 Oct 1999, 22:14 · follows Jim Henley

On Wed, 27 Oct 1999, Jim Henley wrote:

Also the cool, distanced tone of the narrator reminds me of one
of Wolfe's narrators (Severian, Latro).

Wow. "Cool" and "distanced" are the last words I'd have applied to Latro. I
can see it for Sev though.

What I'm thinking of is that both narrators have a tendency to report extraordinary events in an
almost casual way sometimes neglecting to go into detail about what we would consider the
most interesting or unusual aspect of events.

-Rostrum

Jim Henley — 27 Oct 1999, 23:38 · follows Michael Straight

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

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

What I'm thinking of is that both narrators have a tendency to report
extraordinary events in an almost casual way sometimes neglecting to go
into detail about what we would consider the most interesting or unusual
aspect of events.

Ah, but so much of the time, Latro has no standard by which to tell the events are unusual, is
the impression I get. He describes meeting, say, the river god casually because for all he knows
this sort of thing happens all the time.

Best,

Jim

"Here's a song that you can sing
by which to do the measuring"
-- Elvis Costello, "45"

Michael Straight — 28 Oct 1999, 09:13 · follows Jim Henley

On Wed, 27 Oct 1999, Jim Henley wrote:

What I'm thinking of is that both narrators have a tendency to report
extraordinary events in an almost casual way sometimes neglecting to go
into detail about what we would consider the most interesting or unusual
aspect of events.

Ah, but so much of the time, Latro has no standard by which to tell the
events are unusual, is the impression I get. He describes meeting, say, the
river god casually because for all he knows this sort of thing happens all
the time.

Well sure, I didn't mean to malign Latro and say that he personally was cool and distanced, it's his narrative style I was talking about.

You could make a similar argument that it's Severian's perfect memory rather than his actual temperament that creates that effect in his narrative.

-Rostrum