

Gods and Spirits: Wolfe and Lewis: Till We Have Faces

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 16 Nov 1999

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Michael Straight — 16 Nov 1999, 15:29

I'm replying to a message from the Whorl list, but this seems like it belongs more under general Wolfe discussion. No Whorl spoilers.

On Tue, 16 Nov 1999, Jim Jordan wrote:

The Bible teaches that before the coming of the Son of Man, humanity was under-age, and was under the governance of angels -- which would include fallen angels. Rather like being an officer-cadet in boot camp and under sergeants for a few months. Whether Gene has this particular aspect of Biblical teaching in mind or not, he seems to believe something similar, to wit: that in the ancient world there really were "gods" and "spirits" actively engaged with human beings.

In the introduction to the Soldier books, Wolfe says his treatment of gods and spirits comes from a desire to take seriously the way the ancients wrote about them, that it is not all just stories told from nobody's perspective ("One day on Mt. Olympus, Zeus said to Hera..."), but includes straightforward accounts of people interacting with the gods, and ordering their lives around their worship. Perhaps he feels it is only fair, since Christianity takes seriously such accounts by ancient Jews. And perhaps your theory about angels is part of how he reconciles Greek gods with Christianity. He may have also been influenced on this point by C.S. Lewis.

I'm not sure Lewis "believed" the gods were real, but I gather he hoped and wished it were true, because he loved Greek and Norse mythology so much. Thus, when he imagines heaven in the Narnia books, it includes Dionysus and various other "pagan" figures, all living in submission to God.

I was just thinking about recommending Lewis's book *Till We Have Faces* to fans of Wolfe's Soldier series. It is a re-telling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, but also a tale of adventure and intrigue set in a small barbarian kingdom on the outskirts of Greek civilization. It has a little of the same flavor as the Soldier books, featuring inscrutable gods meddling in the lives of the characters. TWHF also attempts to answer the question of why God, if he exists, does not simply show himself to us, but the book is much less overtly Christian than Lewis's other fiction. I think it's a great story, but would be interested to know what folks who aren't Christians think of it.

-Rostrum

Jim Henley — 16 Nov 1999, 20:16 · follows Michael Straight

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

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

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treatment of gods
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FWIW, in an interview available on the "paulduggan.org" site <G>, Wolfe expresses a belief in
the reality of such powers as the pagan gods, averring that the error was in considering them
worthy of worship.

You make Til We Have Faces sound very interesting indeed. I'll have to check it out.

Best,

Jim

"What fades in time Costello/
will hurt much more" Bacharach, "My Thief"