

Messianic

The Urth list — 20 messages, 8 voices, 19 Nov 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1967>

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.

Ori Kowarsky — 19 Nov 1999, 16:51

The interpretive powers of the cabbalists of the Urth list are subtle indeed if the plain meaning of the text of TBOTNS requires a defense!

I urge anyone with eyes to see to open up Citadel of the Autarch, chapter 34, "The Key to the Universe", and read page 242 of the Timescape hardcover: Biologically engineered beings. Intra-dimensional travel. Breeding humans as their "repayment and their revenge". Any attempt to characterize this as "divine" represents either wishful thinking or an attempt to apotheosize raw brute power, neither of which trends are strangers to the development of religions generally, especially if you believe that you are one of the select few Urthlings who will be supplied with waterwings.

Beyond a purely textual approach, however, the primary argument against the divinity of these powers is the poverty of their (final) solution to the Old Sun; killing a great many people with advanced technology is not a particularly miraculous or novel approach. In fact, when faced with a Pancreator who cannot correct His creation without slaughtering the mass of it, you have to wonder which is the more wretched: Him or His apologists.

Ori

Ron Hale-Evans — 19 Nov 1999, 17:12 · follows Ori Kowarsky

At 04:51 PM 11/19/99 -0800, Ori wrote:

In fact, when faced with a

Pancreator who cannot correct His creation without slaughtering the mass of it, you have to wonder which is the more wretched: Him or His apologists.

I have often thought about this myself. If our universe or multiverse were ruled by a personal Creator God, I think I would agree with you. (Hitler created the death camps, but God, let's say, created Hitler, and invented pain and suffering to boot.)

Fortunately (IMHO) this is not the case in the "real" world. But in Wolfe's pocket universes (Briah, Yesod, etc.) it is the case. Wolfe has explicitly told us that TBOTNS is an extended meditation on the ways in which his God shapes Creation through pain and suffering.

If you believe us to live in that sort of universe, then your quarrel is with God, among others. But if you do not, then your quarrel is with Wolfe himself.

Ron H-E

Ron Hale-Evans: [rwhe at apocalypse.org](mailto:rwhe@apocalypse.org) ... <<http://www.apocalypse.org/~rwhe/>>

Center for Ludic Synergy: <<http://www.ludism.org/>>

Kennexions GBG artgame: <<http://kennexions.ludism.org/>>

Hexagram-8 I Ching Mailing List: <<http://www.apocalypse.org/~rwhe/hex8.html>>

Positive Revolution FAQ: <<http://www.ludism.org/posrev/>>

Ori Kowarsky — 19 Nov 1999, 18:31 · follows Ron Hale-Evans

Ron Hale-Evans wrote:

If you believe us to live in that sort of universe, then your quarrel is with God, among others. But if you do not, then your quarrel is with Wolfe himself.

I think my quarrel, if you can call it that, is with people who invert the plain meaning of a text without providing a cogent analysis which supports their view. Interviews with Gene Wolfe are proof of nothing except the strings of words that came out of Gene Wolfe's mouth in the course of the interview. If an author said "I wrote this book to be a masterpiece" are we therefore bound to accept his word above all of our critical faculties and declare it a masterpiece despite the self-evident qualities of said book? If Wolfe wrote TBOTNS to show how God works through suffering, then that might have been his intention (or his intention ex post facto; I remember his original intention being to write a book about blackmail), but I would argue that in that case he has failed, because he has failed to provide within the text a through-line which connects the sufferings of the people of Urth with any divine power; perhaps he was being too coy, or assumed that each reader would provide his or her own bridge to cross that river and so failed to provide one within the book itself (a mistake which he perhaps recognizes in Urth of the New Sun where he throws in a variety of broad hints which serve to muddy his own theological waters and make the book less interesting to boot). My argument, therefore, is that if Wolfe did indeed have these intentions while writing the four books of TBOTNS, and, as I argue, failed in doing so, in the process of that failure created a superb work about the exact opposite -- perhaps that's where all the mirrors come in.

Alex David Groce — 20 Nov 1999, 15:46 · follows Ori Kowarsky

I think my quarrel, if you can call it that, is with people who invert the plain meaning of a text without providing a cogent analysis which supports their view. Interviews with Gene Wolfe are proof of nothing except the strings of words that came out of Gene Wolfe's mouth in the course of the interview. If an author said "I wrote this book to be a masterpiece" are we therefore bound to accept his word above all of our critical faculties and declare it a masterpiece despite the self-evident qualities of said book? If Wolfe wrote TBOTNS to show how God works through suffering, then that might have been his intention (or his intention ex post facto; I remember his original intention being to write a book about blackmail), but I would argue that in that case he has failed, because he has failed to provide within the text a through-line which connects the sufferings of the people of Urth with any divine power; perhaps he was being too coy, or assumed that each reader would provide his or her own bridge to cross that river and so failed to provide one within the book itself (a mistake which he perhaps recognizes in Urth of the New Sun where he throws in a variety of broad hints which serve to muddy his own theological waters and make the book less interesting to boot). My argument, therefore, is that if Wolfe did indeed have these intentions while writing the four books of TBOTNS, and, as I argue, failed in doing so, in the process of that failure created a superb work about the exact opposite -- perhaps that's where all the mirrors come in.

Well, you can interpret BOTNS in this manner, but I think you've failed to provide an argument that convinces those who believe Wolfe succeeded in doing what he set out to do that he in fact failed. Obviously, of course, we haven't succeeded in convincing you, but I at least don't claim that there is only one "plain meaning" of BOTNS, or of any interesting Wolfe text for that matter. Although Wolfe is, like Chesterton or Lewis, in some ways a Christian apologist, he is almost infinitely more subtle about it. Wolfe's created worlds, like our real world, admit different interpretations--unlike some writers with theological concerns who create worlds in which

"faith" as such is meaningless, as atheism or anger at God is untenable for a reasonable inhabitant, Wolfe's worlds always allow the "Dr. Crane hypothesis"--Silk's enlightenment is a brain aneurism, the numerous points at which Severian's story takes on a semblance of the Gospel narratives are purely coincidental, and the inhabitants of Yesod are what Ori believe of them. BUT, it is simply a distortion of the "plain meaning of the text" to say that there are no hints of a theological explanation that is describable as precisely "how God works through suffering." Those of us who find this in the text are in no way guilty of ignoring the meaning of the book; that the other explanation is also not utterly dismissed is what separates Wolfe's fiction from simple theodicy. He is subtle and does not dismiss the problems of pain and destruction. But to claim that he doesn't succeed at all in BOTNS is to ignore much of the subtext of the book--the read only the most obviously stated things, and with a willful avoidance of what does not agree with one's philosophy. I don't LIKE Thomas Hardy's explanation of the universe, but I don't deny that he presents it well. Wolfe had a lot of intentions in writing BOTNS, like any author--he succeeded in some (a character with great costume potential, for instance), and failed in others (I don't see a story about blackmail coming through at all). But to say he failed in this one is akin to saying that because I/you don't ACCEPT Plato's philosophical arguments that he failed to even present them.

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

Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)
Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department
8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

Ori Kowarsky — 20 Nov 1999, 15:22 · follows Alex David Groce

Alex David Groce wrote:

"Well, you can interpret BOTNS in this manner, but I think you've failed to provide an argument that convinces those who believe Wolfe succeeded in doing what he set out to do that he in fact failed. Obviously, of course, we haven't succeeded in convincing you, but I at least don't claim that there is only one "plain meaning" of BOTNS, or of any interesting Wolfe text for that matter."

I am not claiming that there is any one plain interpretation of the text, nor am I intending to push a single interpretation on anyone else; I *am* arguing that the text says certain things very clearly which make a theological or theosophical interpretation problematical to say the least, and if I can't convince you that chapter 34 of Citadel reads as it reads then perhaps you own a different edition than I do.

"Wolfe's worlds always allow the "Dr. Crane hypothesis"--Silk's enlightenment is a brain aneurism, the numerous points at which Severian's story takes on a semblance of the Gospel narratives are purely coincidental, and the inhabitants of Yesod are what Ori believe of them. BUT, it is simply a distortion of the "plain meaning of the text" to say that there are no hints of a theological explanation that is describable as precisely "how God works through suffering." "

The intrusions of the divine (well, divine for you, "divine" for me) in the text take three primary forms:

1. Cultural artifacts and institutions which bring to mind religions known in the 20th century;
2. Events which would be miraculous to us;
3. Severian's thoughts and feelings.

In terms of #1, there are a variety of artifacts from earlier cultures and religions within our own religions. Does the fact that Christmas falls on the 25th of December mean that Christianity is a

cipher for Mithraism or it is just an assimilated fragment from an earlier belief put to the service of another system? If a reader approaches TBOTNS with the belief that Christianity is the central fact of the universe and everything which came before it is its prelude and everything which comes after it is its echo (assuming Christ appeared in Briah) then it is reasonable to look at these echoes and say "Aha! Christianity!"; but if a reader does not, then these Christian elements are, frankly, just part of the mulch after so many millenia.

In terms of #2, it is established in TBOTNS that every single miracle (or "miracle") which Severain effects with or without the Claw is a feat which the Hierodule's masters are shown to be able to do quite easily with their technology. This leads to my assumption that they are watching him, following him around, and shuttling him and everyone else he "resurrects" up and down the Corridors of Time. This is an impressive trick, but it's done with technology and therefore is nothing more than a trick, and calling it evidence of divinity is like saying my flipping on a light switch is evidence of *my* divinity. Given the extreme discombobulation and amnesia this effect has on most people, it leads me to guess that Severain is "chosen" by these powers because he has an eidetic memory which allows his numerous resurrections to occur without making him a basket case -- kind of like having infinite lives in "Doom".

Keeping on with #2, let's examine the one miracle the Claw effects which does not appear to involve the Corridors of Time; the changing of water into wine. Now, if I recall correctly, when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Galilee this was a useful miracle which improved people's lives on the material plane and also has obvious spiritual and symbolic value. Turning water meant for washing in with no benefit (if you can call it benefit -- it ruins Sev's washing) to anyone except for Jonas and Sev seems like a pointless, slapstick accident -- like Jove's thunderbolt misfiring or Moses' bath water splitting when he tries to sit down in it. As another poster pointed out it seems to have at most two purposes -- a meta-fictional Christological flag planted by Wolfe, a possibility which is so inelegant I would prefer to discount it for his sake, or else an attempt by the Yesodites to trigger some half-remembered cultural fragment in Sev's education which will lead him down the path of believing in his own Messiahship. Either way, it's cheap.

On to #3, Sev has certain thoughts and feelings regarding his connection with the Increate and the Increate's connection with the world. These thoughts, though, are entirely subjective and you can either say "Yeah, I dig that!" or "No, I don't dig that!" or "Those words are mighty purty but I don't think the world works that way" but either way they are determinative proof of nothing except Sev's own impressions of what's going on around him, and he's been shown to be wrong before.

"Those of us who find this in the text are in no way guilty of ignoring the meaning of the book; that the other explanation is also not utterly dismissed is what separates Wolfe's fiction from simple theodicy. He is subtle and does not dismiss the problems of pain and destruction. But to claim that he doesn't succeed at all in BOTNS is to ignore much of the subtext of the book--the read only the most obviously stated things, and with a willful avoidance of what does not agree with one's philosophy."

I disagree with you. I am attempting a reading of the text which takes into account what is in the text and does not involve a willful imposition of one's philosophy, whether that philosophy is extra-textually shared with the author or not.

"But to say he failed in this one is akin to saying that because I/you don't ACCEPT Plato's philosophical arguments that he failed to even present them."

I am saying that if Wolfe has said in interviews that TBOTNS is an exercise in theodicy then in

that case he has failed. Why? because he presents a story which *on its face* is about nothing more than the degradation and genocide of the people of a planet for no discernable moral purpose. If the reader is contractually obliged to read this and say, "Well, in some mysterious and unfathomable way this is all for the best" then the reader is being asked to do the author's work for him and so the promised theodicy never even shows up. Which is where the book gets interesting.

For me, at least.

Alex David Groce — 20 Nov 1999, 19:18 · follows Ori Kowarsky

Ori:

Ok, it's not that we're reading Chapter 34 differently, as far as what it says. It's that the meaning "behind" those things is something we approach very differently. First of all, probably in part because of the hints of the numinous, I simply don't accept that this is just a pointless genocide, EVEN IF ONE REJECTS a religious interpretation for events. You can say it is, but I think your evidence is fairly weak. I prefer to give Yesod benefit of the doubt--I have no reason to think there is a BETTER solution to the problem of the Old Sun than the arrival of the New Sun. We know from Typhon's day that a simple gift of energy with no other changes would probably bring back the days of mankind as emotionless scourge of the universe, conquering all within his domain. (In one sense, the Briah crew are anti-colonialists, 5HC? having been formed, IIRC, under the scourge of humanity's world-shaking days). In fact, it seems to me that you're thinking the hieros to be more Divine than I am, in that you assume that because they have impressive technology they could, of course, come up with a solution to things that doesn't involve any pain or suffering or destruction for anyone--this reminds me of Wellsian scientific utopianism--"given good tech, there are really NO problems." This is not what Wolfe believes, and while you can hate his premises, it's hard to assault the actions of beings in a fictional world where your premises are almost certainly false. In other words, you doubt the premise that "if Severian and the Briah crew don't bring the New Sun, destructive as it is, then comes Ragnarok." If you don't grant that, then their methods are certainly suspect--but I take it as a granted fact of the fiction, because there seems to be nothing in the text to suggest this assumption is doubtful--Severian's visit to Master Ash isn't presented as a "trick" of his masters (contrast: WATCHMEN where the entire story is built around questioning the "do this awful thing or everyone will die" assumption). Given that, just because the techniques used are manipulative and described as "revenge" (in an ironic sense--painful though it was, the humans' "wronging" of the hieros made them better--and they intend to "return the favor") doesn't necessarily mean what you seem to think it does. I'm NOT saying the hieros are Divine or that Tzad is actually a literal archangel--they use technological methods and means, and seem to have limits to their knowledge; I doubt that the Increate sends down orders every day to them, myself. But I have no problem ascribing the action of Providence to human actions, even those of highly flawed humans. When the priest celebrates Mass, Wolfe & I would say he is acting in the place of Christ, doing something God wants him to do, the instrument of a Divine action--but not that Father Bob IS GOD, or may not drink too much or throw away his money betting on a bad horse. After all, in Wolfe's view, Erebus and Abaia are also doing the will of the Increate, they just don't like it.

In the end:

Why? because he presents a story which *on its face* is about nothing more than the degradation and genocide of the people of a planet for no discernable moral purpose.

I certainly don't think you or I or any of the others on this list deal with a Wolfe story as what it is *on its face*. We are always trying to peel off the mask. And I think

you have to go considerably beneath the mask (the wrong way, IMO) to get to the conclusion that this has "no discernable moral purpose"; you have to start radically doubting everything Severian comes to believe to decide this, and you have to reach deep enough to doubt the basic assumption about the New Sun/Green Man/Master Ash. That's hardly what I would call the obvious interpretation any reasonable person would take--considering it shows a deep involvement in BOTNS, but I think a deeper understanding leads to rejecting it as possible but highly unlikely.

I suspect in the end our disagreement may come down to questions of extra- textual references. Without SOME kind of extra-textual reference, I can't even prove BOTNS is anything but a stream of random ASCII characters. I'm willing to go pretty far in extra-textuality, and throw in Wolfe's statements in interviews, etc., as useful in deciding which interpretations to give more weight, especially as these are the interpretations that I, as a reader, found before I'd read the interviews, although the interviews added depth to some of the ideas. Anyone is free to interpret a book any way they want--but if an interpretation is radically different than the one that (A) readers who come from points-of-view at all similar to the author's arrive at without any help from the author and (B) the author claims he intended, THEN it's curious to blame the author because those who disagree with his premises fail, after reading his book, to share his conclusions.

I disagree with you. I am attempting a reading of the text which takes into account what is in the text and does not involve a willful imposition of one's philosophy, whether that philosophy is extra-textually shared with the author or not.

This is, indeed where we disagree--you give YOUR assumptions (that events recapturing Christian elements in a story are in NO WAY EVER to be read as hints of divine involvement) ground zero value (pure-text reading) and make my assumption (events recapturing Christian elements in a world that doesn't seem to have any Christian institutions surviving in a recognizable form, although some may survive--the Pelerines, for example--are HIGHLY suggestive of divine involvement) evidence of extra-textual imposition of philosophy. There IS no ground zero--in a text like this, you can't interpret it at all without SOME kind of metaphysics, unless you really want to miss the whole point.

At any rate, I think the author's beliefs are kosher in book-interpretation as well. I'm sure there's some way to pull a Christian interpretation out of "No Exit," but I think Sartre & his interpreters have a right to dismiss it more than I have a right to dismiss the atheistic-existentialist interpretation.

Actually, I think we could probably just go and copy our old arguments out of the archives here, I doubt either of us is going to convince the other (or anybody else who's taken a side)--I think we're at a genuine impasse on this, just like the last time this thread showed up, and my lengthy arguments are mostly signs that I don't want to work on this program for my research advisor.

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

Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)
Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department
8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

Ori Kowarsky — 20 Nov 1999, 17:46 · follows Alex David Groce

Ordinarily, Alex, I'd be happy to give you the last word and happily walk away from this debate, which has been recycled a few time before. However, something which you wrote makes me

think that I've failed to make myself clear about what I'm saying, in particular where you wrote:

"In other words, you doubt the premise that "if Severian and the Briah crew don't bring the New Sun, destructive as it is, then comes Ragnarok."

If

you don't grant that, then their methods are certainly suspect--but I take it as a granted fact of the fiction, because there seems to be nothing in the text to suggest this assumption is doubtful--Severian's visit to Master Ash isn't presented as a "trick" of his masters"

I wish to clarify that I certainly do not doubt that Ragnarok is the inevitable outcome of the failure of the New Sun to appear. Nor do I doubt that human expansion into the universe prior to the darkening of the sun was violent and imperialistic. If Gene Wolfe's premise is that humanity is bad news, irremediable, and must be destroyed for the good of everyone else, then, yes, as you point out, I can disagree with that but all I would be doing is railing against the author's point of view. However, if it is correct that Gene Wolfe's premise is that the human urge to conquer and dominate is incorrigible, then why do the Hieros leave the humans on other planets to work their will as they may? If humans cannot be trusted with the energy of this one particular star in a galaxy of billions and must be exterminated as a species and replaced by the Green Man *but on that planet alone*, what is the difference between Ragnaok and Ushas? What evidence do we have -- other than giving Yesod the "benefit of the doubt" -- that this bloody bioengineering program is at all justifiable? And at the end of the day, how can you logically say that the wholesale replacement of humanity by a different type of lifeform constitutes the *redemption* of humanity?

Alex, you can rely on your own interpretation and the interpretation of others who agree with you; you can rely on authorial decree; you can make appeals to the gallery. None of that changes the fact that in the entire text of TBOTNS you cannot find a single instance where the Diety is explicitly a determinative factor in anything that is going on; everything has a rationalist explanation. If you say that you believe in Providence that's great, but the simple, unproven assertion that everything that happens happens for the best does not constitute the justification of the ways of God to man, and if belief in Providence constitutes the whole of TBOTNS as theodicy, then perhaps its time to look at Yesod and Ushas in a new light.

Ori

Ori

Jim Henley — 20 Nov 1999, 21:33 · follows Ori Kowarsky

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

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

However, if it is
correct that Gene Wolfe's premise is that the human urge to conquer and
dominate is incorrigible, then why do the Hieros leave the
humans on other
planets to work their will as they may?

An excellent question! It relates to a new thread I'll want people's views on soon.

What evidence do
we have -- other than giving Yesod the "benefit of the doubt" --
that this
bloody bioengineering program is at all justifiable? And at the
end of the

day, how can you logically say that the wholesale replacement of humanity by a different type of lifeform constitutes the *redemption* of humanity?

Now wait a second - this seems to require the following:

- 1) That everybody dies when the New Sun comes.
- 2) That the Green Man's race was engineered by the heiros.
- 3) That the Green Man directly succeeds the exterminated humans of Urth.

Or failing all that,

- 4) That the Green Guys kill off all the pink, tan and brown guys in short order.

I may well have missed something, but

- 1) I don't assume that everyone (except for the two chicks and the fat guy) on every Urth continent perished in the deluge. While someone certainly landed two new humans, it beggars belief that something so -- macroscopic as a flood could be relied on to get every last one of the bastards.

- 2) I read the Green Man's account of himself as suggesting something that humanity (eventually) does to/for itself.

- 3) The guy Sev meets on his return to Ushas at the very end of Urth seems to be not the least bit green. This supports the idea that the "replacement" of human by "verdant" is no direct thing.

- 4) This just isn't what Green Guys are about, is it?

FWIW, yet another appearance in SF of the "humankind is a pollution on the cosmos" bit sticks in my craw. Seems oddd to find it in even the most "eccentrically" conservative, heirarchical and grave author. But Wolfe never asked if I was going to like it ahead of time.

Best,

Jim

"We can't be certain who the villains are
cause everyone's so pretty"

-- Sheryl Crow

Alex David Groce — 20 Nov 1999, 22:01 · follows Jim Henley

FWIW, yet another appearance in SF of the "humankind is a pollution on the cosmos" bit sticks in my craw. Seems oddd to find it in even the most "eccentrically" conservative, heirarchical and grave author. But Wolfe never asked if I was going to like it ahead of time.

Well, I like to think it's more complex than that--we sure were a pain to have around, apparently, but the hieros (IMO) like us enough to do us a favor in spite of all. I think the Green Man is, definitely, Man. Man changed in many ways, but Man. I mean, I can't imagine that the

other folks in the universe enjoyed Typhon's empire, but I never got that they were doing anything other than a (two-sided and short-term disastrous) favor. I'm sure I'd see things more Ori's way if I thought we actually got exterminated as a species in URTH. Yikes.

We still don't know for sure who put that Black Hole there, but humanity's collapse seems to have been a matter of getting tired of empire (as a race, not that Typhon would have tired) in general, so I think the other planets may be playgrounds for the rich, or guard-posts, but that they're as "burnt out" as Urth.

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

Alex David Groce (agroce+ at cs.cmu.edu)
Ph.D. Student, Carnegie Mellon University - Computer Science Department
8112 Wean Hall (412)-268-3066
<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~agroce>

Jim Henley — 20 Nov 1999, 22:31 · follows Alex David Groce

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

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com] On
Behalf Of Alex David Groce

We still don't know for sure who put that Black Hole there, but
humanity's
collapse seems to have been a matter of getting tired of empire

Which brings up another question: Did someone have to _put_ the black hole there? Might it not have just happened?

Puts me in mind of one of Niven's Louis Wu stories (darned if I know which one, it's been twenty years) in which he meets an alien whose species assumes that absolutely any bad thing that happens is a result of hostile action. Or was it a Beowulf Schaffer story? And did I spell "Schaffer" right? And isn't it interesting that "Neutron Star" could never happen, and what does that imply about "hard" SF? And am I full of questions tonight or what?

Best,

Jim

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

Jim Jordan — 22 Nov 1999, 09:30 · follows Jim Henley

At 05:46 PM 11/20/99 -0800, you wrote:

I wish to clarify that I certainly do not doubt that Ragnarok is the inevitable outcome of the failure of the New Sun to appear. Nor do I doubt that human expansion into the universe prior to the darkening of the sun was violent and imperialistic. If Gene Wolfe's premise is that humanity is bad news, irremediable, and must be destroyed for the good of everyone else, then, yes, as you point out, I can disagree with that but all I would be doing is railing against the author's point of view.

I think Wolfe's premise is that before the coming of Christ, the world was ruled by violent and imperialistic empires. In the ancient world context, Alexander's Hellenistic Empire (which was not very kind to the non-Greeks they subdued), and Rome. Later on, the various imperia that

give way to the Gospel.

Along these lines, and recalling Wolfe's interest in history, consider the fact that such imperia do not collapse into the peacefulness of "let each esteem the other better than himself" overnight. In fact, we see in the conversion of Constantine, and that of rulers in Northern Europe, that there is an initial transition, followed by a long time of outworking. Consider that the initial transition is marked by something very simple: the adoption of the AD chronology. The older way of counting years, back to the founding of Rome, etc., changes to a new way of counting years. Urth to Ushas? But it is a long time before the "green man" arrives, the man who is restored to Eden. The process starts with a definitive break from the old history, and often with a great judgment (such as a plague), but takes centuries/millennia to work out. This kind of construction is what I would impute as background to Wolfe's narrative, since it lines up with his own beliefs and interests.

Continuing to tease out Wolfe's premises: The culture on Urth has forgotten the Gospel, and has collapsed back into tyranny and imperialism. Typhon is an example. A more modified form is in the Commonwealth, Byzantium, which has a dictator, but also an opposition, keeping it in a kind of tense balance that cannot endure for very long.

But the Gospel is still there. It's underground -- where Severian encounters the missionaries near the underground sea, where people are buried -- catacombs? It survives in garbled form, as in Dr. Talos's play, as it survives in garbled form in the Long Sun. Pelerines also. (Hey, is Silk, who is tall, the Long SON, as Severian is the New SON?)

Perhaps it's been discussed here already, but Severian descends underground several times. Each of these could be a death-resurrection sequence. Does he not bring people back to life each time? Are these stages along the way of his entering into his calling?

At any rate, we have a frozen, perverse, and tyrannical society. Accordingly, a judgment day arrives. No, it's not the last one. No, it's not brought by Jesus, or even by a very good copy of him. But it is brought by "angels" working with/through a man who is predestined for this purpose. And it is an "application" of the Gospel, which when it first came was attended by the destruction of Old Jerusalem and then of the Beast-Roman Empire.

As for the other planets in the human starry empire, well, the Long Sun Narrative shows us that the Increate has not left them alone, either. The story of Urth is the story of ... Urth. Wolfe is not obliged to show how the outworking of the New Creation comes to every other planet in the universe, but it seems that he is doing a bit of that in the Long Sun.

This may well be going too far, but the Bible declares that judgment "starts" at the house of God, meaning the Church. But Wolfe can do the same, with a flood and resurrection of the original earth (Urth-Ushas), the implications of which then flow out to the rest of the human imperium.

Does such a construction make sense to you?

Nutria (JBJordan)

Michael Straight — 23 Nov 1999, 08:15 · follows Jim Jordan

On Sat, 20 Nov 1999, Ori Kowarsky wrote:

Keeping on with #2, let's examine the one miracle the Claw effects which does not appear to involve the Corridors of Time; the changing of water into wine. Now, if I recall correctly, when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Galilee this was a useful miracle which improved people's lives on the material plane and also has obvious spiritual and symbolic value. Turning water meant for washing in with no benefit (if you can call it benefit -- it ruins Sev's washing) to anyone except for Jonas and Sev seems like a pointless, slapstick accident -- like Jove's thunderbolt misfiring or Moses' bath water splitting when he tries to sit down in it. As another poster pointed out it seem to have at most two purposes -- a meta-fictional Christological flag planted by Wolfe, a possibility which is so inelegant I would prefer to discount it for his sake, or else an attempt

by the Yesodites to trigger some half-remembered cultural fragment in Sev's education which will lead him down the path of believing in his own Messiahship. Either way, it's cheap.

You're touching on my main gripe about URTH. I wasn't convinced that the stuff Severian did in his "career" as the Concilator was enough for him to be remembered all the way to Severian's original time. It's just a bunch of Jesus-mimicking wonder working without any apparent purpose to it all. There's no set of memorable teaching to be passed on; there's no sense that his actions have some Greater Purpose that would make him significant to subsequent followers. It all seemed too perfunctory, too brief. If the Concilator was such a powerful historical figure, his career deserves at least an entire book--if not four.

-Rostrum

Jim Jordan — 23 Nov 1999, 09:10 · follows Michael Straight

At 08:15 AM 11/23/99 -0500, you wrote:

You're touching on my main gripe about URTH. I wasn't convinced that the stuff Severian did in his "career" as the Concilator was enough for him to be remembered all the way to Severian's original time. It's just a bunch of Jesus-mimicking wonder working without any apparent purpose to it all. There's no set of memorable teaching to be passed on; there's no sense that his actions have some Greater Purpose that would make him significant to subsequent followers. It all seemed too perfunctory, too brief. If the Concilator was such a powerful historical figure, his career deserves at least an entire book--if not four.

-Rostrum

Perhaps Severian's hohum earlier career has been conflated with the career of the real Conciliator over time, and that is why the myth exists in such a powerful way.

Nutria

Tony Ellis — 23 Nov 1999, 17:55 · follows Jim Jordan

Rostrum wrote:

You're touching on my main gripe about URTH. I wasn't convinced that the stuff Severian did in his "career" as the Concilator was enough for him to be remembered all the way to Severian's original time. It's just a bunch of Jesus-mimicking wonder working without any apparent purpose to it all. There's no set of memorable teaching to be passed on; there's no sense that his actions have some Greater Purpose that would make him significant to subsequent followers. It all seemed too perfunctory, too brief.

As I understand it, what we see of Sev's Conciliator career is just the start. He can travel the Corridors of time, so he can pop back any time he likes to visit pre-deluge Urth, and we're given at least two clear hints that he does. Dorcas, asked by Sev about the Conciliator, says that he used to appear and disappear unexpectedly. And then Sev says of the Chowder Pot:

"Often I have dreamed of going back, and perhaps sometime I shall. Certainly more guests came to our aid when Zama broke our door than there were any reason to expect, and I would like to think that one or even several of them were myself. Indeed it sometimes seems to me that I caught a glimpse of my own face in the candlelight that night." Urth XXXII.

Michael Straight — 23 Nov 1999, 15:53 · follows Tony Ellis

On Tue, 23 Nov 1999, Tony Ellis wrote:

As I understand it, what we see of Sev's Conciliator career is just the start. He can travel the Corridors of time, so he can pop back any time he likes to visit pre-deluge Urth, and we're given at least two clear hints that he does. Dorcas, asked by Sev about the Conciliator, says that he used to appear and disappear unexpectedly. And then Sev says of the Chowder Pot:

"Often I have dreamed of going back, and perhaps sometime I shall. Certainly more guests came to our aid when Zama broke our door than there were any reason to expect, and I would like to think that one or even several of them were myself. Indeed it sometimes seems to me that I caught a glimpse of my own face in the candlelight that night." Urth XXXII.

This is cool, but doesn't really address my point, which I didn't make clear, so here it is again. It's not so much that there isn't enough quantity to Sev's career as Conciliator, but that the quality that seems lacking. What's he going to do, other than wander around healing people and turning water to wine that will make him such a mythic figure? Not that miracles aren't notable, but most of the world's religious figures are remembered for something more than a bunch of magic tricks.

-Rostrum

Urash, Tom — 23 Nov 1999, 15:51 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum writes:

"This is cool, but doesn't really address my point, which I didn't make

clear, so here it is again. It's not so much that there isn't enough quantity to Sev's career as Conciliator, but that the quality that seems lacking. What's he going to do, other than wander around healing people and turning water to wine that will make him such a mythic figure? Not that miracles aren't notable, but most of the world's religious figures are remembered for something more than a bunch of magic tricks."

I think I have a sense what he's going to do: make a promise - not unlike another alleged miracle worker making the rounds in these discussions made a promise some 2000 years ago. One promises a new sun to replace the dying sun wreaking havoc in the lives of most of the population; another promises, amongst other things, a way to everlasting life to those without hope - again, a pretty big chunk of the population.

tom urash

works

Jim Jordan — 24 Nov 1999, 00:48 · follows Urash, Tom

At 03:51 PM 11/23/99 -0600, you wrote:

I think I have a sense what he's going to do: make a promise - not unlike another alleged miracle worker making the rounds in these discussions made a promise some 2000 years ago. One promises a new sun to replace the dying sun wreaking havoc in the lives of most of the population; another promises, amongst other things, a way to everlasting life to those without hope - again, a pretty big chunk of the population.

tom urash

You're probably on to something here. Simply going around predicting what is going to happen, and giving hope to the oppressed, would fill the bill quite nicely. Rostrum?

Nutria

Ori Kowarsky — 23 Nov 1999, 23:28 · follows Jim Jordan

Nutria wrote:

I think Wolfe's premise is that before the coming of Christ, the world was ruled by violent and imperialistic empires.

...As opposed to the last two thousand years of European and world history?

But the Gospel is still there. It's underground -- where Severian encounters the missionaries near the underground sea, where people are buried -- catacombs? It survives in garbled form, as in Dr. Talos's play, as it survives in garbled form in the Long Sun.

Please explain to me how it survives, where we see evidence of this.

Ori

Tony Ellis — 24 Nov 1999, 10:37 · follows Ori Kowarsky

Rostrum wrote:

This is cool, but doesn't really address my point, which I didn't make clear, so here it is again. It's not so much that there isn't enough quantity to Sev's career as Conciliator, but that the quality that seems lacking.

Well, maybe it was me not making -my- point clear :-). The thing is, we don't -know- what Sev does on those subsequent visits to the past, but since TUOTNS ends with him finally, comfortably, settled into his role as a godling, it seems a reasonable assumption that he could now start giving sermons on mounts or whatever.

Not

that miracles aren't notable, but most of the world's religious figures are remembered for something more than a bunch of magic tricks.

Hmm, how do I say this nicely? Most of the world's religious figures -are- remembered for a bunch of magic tricks. Most of the saints are nothing -but- a collection of magic tricks, with a unique and implausibly nasty death thrown in to make it really stick in the mind. Jesus? We remember him

-now-, 2000 years after the event, for his teachings, but look at the paintings and relics in any medieval cathedral and it's the miracles that spread and sustained the religion during the hundreds and hundreds of years when only an educated elite could actually read the Bible or understand a latin sermon. And especially that Uber-miracle: the resurrection.

Don't forget, too, that Severian leaves behind a Book, which if it bears any resemblance to the BOTNS we know is chock full of thought and philosophy. If Severian had appeared 2000 years ago instead of Christ, today we'd be going to church to hear "Dearly Beloved, we believe that we invent our symbols. The truth is that they invent us..."

Jim Jordan — 24 Nov 1999, 10:29 · follows Tony Ellis

At 11:28 PM 11/23/99 -0800, you wrote:

Nutria wrote:

I think Wolfe's premise is that before the coming of Christ, the world was ruled by violent and imperialistic empires.

...As opposed to the last two thousand years of European and world history?

Did it not write fairly clearly that after an initial change the Gospel only gradually changes things? I thought I made that clear, from my perspective.

But the Gospel is still there. It's underground -- where Severian encounters the missionaries near the underground sea, where people are buried -- catacombs? It survives in garbled form, as in Dr. Talos's play, as it survives in garbled form in the Long Sun.

Please explain to me how it survives, where we see evidence of this.

I thought I just did. The reference to the Theoanthropos would be another example. It's there, but buried.

Nutria