

Blake

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 May 2000

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Daniel Fusch — 19 May 2000, 19:17

That's interesting; I hadn't thought about connections between Wolfe and Blake.

The most obvious link, I think, would be Blake's "desire of raising other men into perception of the infinite" (from his Marriage of Heaven and Hell). "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." Also, from "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a World in a grain of Sand
Or a Heav'n in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand
And Eternity in an Hour.

Also, again from Marriage of Heaven and Hell: "For every thing that lives is holy."

This perspective is what Severian achieves as he walks along the beach of the ocean in The Citadel of the Autarch. He sees through the material into the infinite, "the doors of perception are cleansed," he sees that the entire beach is holy and has been dropped from the hand of the Infinite, and he tosses away his boots that he might not walk shod on holy ground.

The other tenets of William Blake's vision are:

1) The Standard of Energy (see Northrop Frye's book "Fearful Symmetry" and Martin Price's essay "Blake's Standard of Energy") -- "Energy is Eternal Delight" / "Exuberance is Beauty"; the energetic, passionate, unrestrained are good, while the passive, limited, and confined is harmful. "The cistern contains / The fountain overflows." Also: "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires."

2) Wisdom can not be defined or expressed by one mode, one art form, one law, or one perspective. (This later becomes a tenet of modernism.) Thus, "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" and "Everything possible to be believed is an image of truth."

3) The observation of truth is achieved through a constant dialectic. "Without Contraries is no Progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence."

4) "All deities reside in the human breast"; divinity consists of the "Poetic Genius," or the transcendent, divine inspiration and prophetic/poetic vision of humanity. The Poetic Genius cleanses the doors of perception and sees eternity; the Poetic Genius alone can frame the "fearful symmetry" of the Tyger in Blake's "Tyger, Tyger" by framing it within a poem. (By writing a poem--especially a poem that begins and ends with the same stanza--the Poetic Genius frames the suffering of the world and allows us to see it, draw meaning from it, etc.)

Daniel