

Another tangent

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 16 Aug 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2352>

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Jim Russell — 16 Aug 2000, 10:21

Still writing my paper for the symposium and another question has occurred to me that I don't really know the answer to (although I have some ideas).

Basically its this; What would you guys say is GW's political stance? What is he, where is he coming from? Obviously he is not particularly left wing ('Particularly' is probably too tame a word, now that I think about it), but would you say that he is right, or republican or democrat or what, really? At the moment I only really know what he is against, not what he is for.

Also, how do you feel about the antipathy expressed towards Vodalus intentions - to send man to the stars again. Is Vodalus problem that his method is suspect, or is Sev (or GW himself) being completely negative about man's technology and space travel? I appreciate the 'bringing original sin to other worlds' argument, and the 'quest for balance' reading of the novel (which I tend to agree with), but nevertheless I find this desire not to succeed or achieve wierd. I can see that Vodalus intentions inevitably contradict the idea of achieving balance between the natural (mythic, folkloric, etc) and the technological that Cyraicia talks about, but I am interested in how people think this works in relation to the rest of the work.

Cheers,

Jim Russell
University of Exeter

Alex David Groce — 16 Aug 2000, 10:16 · follows Jim Russell

Wolfe's political views are probably not easy to peg. Wolfe talks about his political beliefs in Nutria's interview (<http://world.std.com/~pduggan/gwjbj1.html#pol>).

I would suspect that the closest classification would be as a "conservative," but not in the usual American sense of the word--despite what he says in the interview about freedom, I suspect that Wolfe is not a libertarian, and he certainly has strong views about environmental conservation, which would seem not to suggest that. I've read the phrase "baroque conservative" used to describe R. A. Lafferty (and Mark Helprin), with connotations of a complex, non-ideological political approach based strongly in religious or metaphysical belief. That might roughly cover Wolfe as well.

Wolfe's opposition to Vodalus seems similar to the opposition to space exploration in C. W. Lewis' three science-fiction novels: space exploration isn't so much bad in and of itself, but it certainly is bad if we go about it with dreams of galactic empire. THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS suggests how Wolfe thinks we would likely end up behaving in a populated universe (and based on experience on Earth doesn't seem too far out, I'd think). Vodalus clearly wants to reestablish something like Typhon's world-spanning tyranny, which would certainly "pollute the universe." Clearly all space travel isn't bad though--Severian's travels are ok, and there seems to be a positive element to the remaining space travel by humans on the ship (although many sailors

turn to the side of Abaia and co.) The passage at the end of the first chapter of CLAW, which we've quoted recently, suggests that Vodalus' aims are sinful in that he is trapped in the past mistakes of humanity--it isn't the future or growth that is originally sinful, but the endless repetition of evil patterns and the rejection of divine guidance to something better: "That we are capable only of being what we are remains our unforgivable sin."

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

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Jim Henley — 16 Aug 2000, 10:57 · follows Alex David Groce

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

From: urth-errors at lists.best.com [mailto:urth-errors at lists.best.com]On

Behalf Of Jim Russell

Sent: Wednesday, August 16, 2000 6:22 AM

Basically its this; What would you guys say is GW's political stance? What is he, where is he coming from? Obviously he is not particularly left wing ('Particularly' is probably too tame a word, now that I think about it), but would you say that he is right, or republican or democrat or what, really?At the moemtn I only really know what he is against, not what he is for.

I would say Wolfe is a Catholic conservative in the mold of his heroes like Chesterton. Because he is a _religious_ conservative, he makes more conscious shows of sympathy for the poor than conservatives are assumed to have these days. Also, like his Savior, Wolfe seems to be comfortable in the (imaginative) company of whores and thieves. I've never been able to get behind interpretations that link any given prostitute in the Wolfe corpus to "the Whore of Babylon" or whatever, because it's so obvious that Wolfe _likes_ his (fictional) prostitutes, and makes them likable to us, too.

Worth noting as a token of Wolfe's _social_ conservatism: that story-whose-title-I-forget in Strange Travellers that people have compared to Delany - the story-within-a-story about the archaeological expedition that ends with the drug overdose. This story's style really _is_ Delanyesque - it reminds me especially of "We in Some Strange Power's Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line" and "Driftglass." And yet the action of the story amounts to a _critique_ of Delany's themes. (Wolfe's theme boils down to "Drugs are bad for you." The theme of a real Delany story would be "Drugs are good for you.")

Also, how do you feel about the antipathy expressed towards Vodalus intentions - to send man to the stars again. Is Vodalus problem that his method is suspect, or is Sev (or GW himself) being completely negative about man's technology and space travel? I appreciate the 'bringing original sin to other worlds' argument, and the 'quest for balance' reading of the novel (which I tend to agree with), but nevertheless I find this desire not to succeed or achieve wierd. I can see that Vodalus intentions inevitably contradict the idea of acheiving balance between the natural (mythic, folkloric, etc) and the technological that Cyraicia talks about, but I am interested in how people think this works in relation to the rest of the work.

I don't think it can be that Wolfe's view is contra space travel per se. For one thing, he says that the future he imagined in the book began as "What happens if we just stay in place right here on earth and stagnate until everything runs down and runs out." At some point the background mutated into one where humanity is bottled up, but the original impulse is in line with the Dark Future If We Stay Put imagined by the most gung-ho space enthusiasts.

Best,

Jim

Jim Henley

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