

Parkroads (the new Suzanne Delage)

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 31 Aug 2000

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Peter Westlake — 31 Aug 2000, 12:26

In the introduction to "Storeys from the Old Hotel", Wolfe describes "Parkroads" as (quoting it from memory) "as good a piece as I've ever turned out". This is high praise indeed, so I read it again (easy enough, as it's only four pages) to see if I could find anything more in it that last time. Wolfe calls it "a short story written in the form of a film review", which I think is significant; it isn't just a pastiche review. So, what's it all about? There is the plot of the film, which involves a Chinese/Korean family looking for a distant paradise; there are allusions to the making of the film, with all sorts of symmetries in its structure and history; and there is a long discussion of the combinatorial problem of getting all the reels in the right order. This gets quite a lot of space in a very short story, so it must mean *something*. It is suggested that anyone seeing the first six reels might be inspired to produce a seventh; has the whole film been produced by this sort of iterative process? It doesn't seem likely, as we are told it was made in just two times, 1939 and 1984.

So - any suggestions?

Spectacled Bear.

James Jordan — 31 Aug 2000, 10:51 · follows Peter Westlake

I have no idea, other than once again an homage to Borges.

Some things that come to me though, which may be totally offbase: Possibly this is another of Wolfe's "Christian" stories, in some sense. As in "To the Seventh," we have a move through six to seven, which in "To the Seventh" has to do with reaching the eschatological sabbath (death/heaven). The allegorical elements in "To the Seventh," however, are pretty obvious. Here they don't seem to be (not to me, and assuming there ARE any!).

Also, the notion that the family's original home, which they have left, is "the same as" the Golden Mountain Land (in some sense; the reviewer hopes it is not), correlates nicely with leaving the original Garden of Eden and going to the New Jerusalem, which in some sense is Eden restored and also transformed -- the same and not the same.

One would think that the ship would be, in some sense, the Church, and its demi-god captain, in some sense, Christ. But that does not seem to work, unless we assume that Chang/Christ is empowered to "put people through hard times" and even put them under judgment. Possibly. That's a Lupine theme elsewhere, but Chang did not strike me as very close to a Christ figure. See below.

When the six reels (the six days of history) are put in the correct order, then the nature of the as-yet-nonexistent seventh reel will become apparent. When we understand history, we shall understand eschatology also. The seventh reel may already exist, in some sense, as the sabbath already exists in a limited way for human beings in the midst of history.

Now, a westward movement being the course of true history is not uncommon, and journeying to the west as a picture of eschatology is all over the place, from Arthur to Tolkien at least. But here the people are moving in the opposite direction. Adam was cast to the east of Eden, and Cain moved further east after murdering Abel. So, perhaps the characters, in their eastward movement, are making a big mistake. The ship, then, would be an anti-Church, and Chang

would be an anti-Christ. They characters need to turn around and move westward, back toward their original home, which will turn out to be a glorified Eden, the Golden Mountain Land. Perhaps the fact that Chang appears large and like a demi-god, while his passengers appear small, is another sign of a reversal of Christianity. Jesus became small that we might become large; as the early Church put it, God became man that man might become (a) god. Those who would be great among you must be like me, said Jesus, and become the least of all. The triumphalism of Chang and the humiliation of his passengers would be a reversal of this principle.

But maybe this is all wrong. In the *Memoirs of Severian*, we find that lots of people out in space are named Chang, and we can assume many are ship captains. Maybe this story is somehow an allegory of the New Sun books!

Well, that's for what it's worth. I'm certainly not invested in it! But maybe this will stimulate someone else to a better read.

Nutria