

Cerberus (was "The Quiet Ur

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 31 Oct 1997

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Tony Ellis — 31 Oct 1997, 11:01

31/10/97

10:16

Cerberus (was "The Quiet Urth")

Nutria wrote:

Ok, let's use this as an example of what I mean. You say Satan imagery, I say pun. 666 is "the number of the Beast", rather than specifically the number of Satan, and 666 Saltimbanque St is the House of the Beast: the "Maison du Chien", or House of the Dog. The protagonist's extended family is also a kind of Beast, the five-headed Cerberus of the title.

Well, since cerberus is the guardian of hell, I'd say that you cannot completely exclude the religious motif.

<snip>

Wolfe does not positively portray anything Christian that I know of in this book, but his pictures of evil seem largely to be Biblical and Dantean.

Hmmm... I have to nitpick here: I would say Dantean only. Yes, Dante makes Cerberus the guardian of Christian Hell, but he was borrowing from Classical (ie Pagan) mythology. Nor was Dante's Hell a place of "evil" in the conventional sense, but rather a place of human suffering. I still don't see any Biblical\Christian imagery in Fifth Head.

And I think "saltimbanque" means "counterfeit."

Interesting! Can anybody confirm that Saltimbanque = counterfeit for us?

True versus false humanity is really the theme, I think, of the three novellas,

Agreed.

but Wolfe does associate false humanity with hell, anti-christ, a false immortality, sterility, cruelty, etc. Also, a whore-house is a traditional image of the counterfeit or false church.

All true, but I'm still not convinced that Wolfe wants us to make such associations with this particular collection of novellas. If the whore-house in Fifth Head was supposed to be a false church I would expect the rest of the story to reflect this, but as far as I can see it doesn't.

The strongest parallels I can see are with Australian aboriginal culture, and more specifically with its destruction at the hands of white settlers.

Michael Straight — 31 Oct 1997, 09:14 · follows Tony Ellis

On 31 Oct 1997, Tony Ellis wrote:

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Just to nitpick your nitpick, in Biblical thought (contrary to Milton and others), as in Dante, Hell is not the headquarters of "evil" but a place of suffering. Satan is not pictured as the ruler of Hell but its most famous prisoner.

And since this message has no Wolfe content anyway, I'll continue with the observation, after reading Cordwainer Smith's "A Planet Named Shayol," that where at one time people wrote gory descriptions of Hell with the purpose of putting a genuine fear of God into people, several modern science fiction writers have written gory stories about Hell with the (seemingly intended) effect of making the reader say, "surely this cannot be."

ObWolfe: I put off reading "Peace" because it sounded less interesting than Wolfe's other stuff, but I really enjoyed it, found the ending quite satisfying, and am finding that it's staying with me as much or more than any of his other books.

-Rostrum