

PEACE: geography and interviews

The Urth list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 06 Nov 2000

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 06 Nov 2000, 09:32

Re: the PEACE bit from "Thrust" interview. I have this item (bought it when it was new), and I had recently reviewed it myself, but I couldn't bring myself to post it--so thank you, Robert! Now others have access to it, for further clarity and confusion. <g>

I especially wanted to mention that Logan bit. Based on a town in Ohio (go look at an online street map right now); but is the fictional town actually supposed to be there? Joan Gordon says it is in Ohio (based upon her own reading, based upon her interview with Wolfe which I haven't read; I don't know exactly what it is based upon). The text seems to resist such certainty: the nearest the text comes to saying Cassionsville is in Ohio is regarding Quantrill, who was born "near here"; but then the text seems to retreat from such a tight focus of "here" to being more regional, i.e., "the Midwest." So on the one hand I think of Cassionsville as being in Ohio (despite the text evidence that suggests Ohio is out of state--I'm not giving it here, but I seem to remember Ohio being mentioned in a few contexts where it wouldn't be mentioned if the speakers were located in Ohio), but on the other hand I think of a fuzzy line between Lawrence, Kansas and Dover, East Ohio (birthplace of Quantrill).

That sidhe reading mentioned by the interviewer provoked a mini-debate between Dan'l and myself: he thought it was wild, off the chart, something we never talk about (thus far removed from the current local consensus); I thought I could understand it but admitted that I'd been living with the notion for so long that I may have been contaminated (familiarity breeds faux-understanding?).

Adam wrote:

It's a bit difficult to reconcile what Wolfe says here with his statements re the house in the Jordan interview that I cited earlier.

Oh good: now we can see that interviews, while providing some data points, are not necessarily the be-all and end-all. I mean, not to complain or anything, but I was starting to feel that people around here were beginning to give great weight (perhaps even supreme weight) to data points from one interview or another. Which is fine, I mean, whatever: the answer that fits a given reader is where ever he/she finds it (I really don't mean to knock that); toss out all the lit crit and find all answers in interviews; but the impish side of me always wants to point out, "Just read another interview."

Because it seems to me that the text of all Gene Wolfe interviews will form another complex plate of spaghetti to be interpreted: the drawback is that it is a step removed from the primary text (not to mention the larger margin for editorial error, mistakes in transcribing, and all the other details that make a product of journalism different from a product of fiction writing). And thus a step removed from "your" reading of the primary text, whether this reading is wildly idiosyncratic (like the sidhe reading?) or tightly consensual (the "dead Weer" camp).

I don't want to discard all interview datapoints (I'm happy to use them when they serve my purpose--when they buttress a point that is also in the text): I just want to remind us all that the interviews are not entirely reliable; that conflict and paradox arise when we compare two or

more interviews; and obviously they are not under the same authorial control that a novel is.

I couldn't find the energy to mention all of this before because, as I outline above, the whole thing is tangential to my interests, and I don't want to be seen as raining on anybody's parade. But now that someone else has introduced the problem, I find myself spending all this time to agree--go figure!

=mantis=

Alex David Groce — 06 Nov 2000, 13:06 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

The other difficulty with using Wolfe's interviews is that, while they are useful in a general way, Wolfe is, I think, intentionally gnostic and tricky. Recall the answers to the question list for LONG SUN, and the fact that THE CASTLE OF THE OTTER did surprisingly little to clear up some things about NEW SUN (it gave two different explanations of where the idea came from, for Pete's sake).

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

--

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James Jordan — 06 Nov 2000, 15:42 · follows Alex David Groce

From: "Alex David Groce" <Alex_Groce at gs246.sp.cs.cmu.edu>

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I think that's often true, and I wondered what kind of interview I'd get from him when I did it. But, he had been very forthright in letters to me previously, had thanked me warmly for my use of his writings in my own theological work, and had also said kind things about one of my books that I sent him.

And, in the interview, he seemed almost always to be very frank and open. At one point, I noticed he became coy, or seemed to. This was when I asked about Severian's adultery with the angel in *Urth of the New Sun* (Apheta? was that her name?). His smile indicated to me that I'd missed something. Maybe that at this "time," Severian's wife was long dead? At any rate, I got the distinct impression that he was giving very straight answers to my questions. He had earlier written to me that he was disappointed at how many people did not understand Severian (i.e., making him a "Christ figure" instead of a "Christian figure," a man struggling with his sanctification to become more Christ-like), and I got the impression he was trying to "set the record straight."

At any rate, obviously I can never be sure if he was always being completely straightforward, but I do have the strong impression that in my interview, at least, he was.

Without being critical of any other interviewer, I think Wolfe assessed me not as an "SF" interview, whether "literary" or "groupie," but as a "fellow Christian" interviewer, and responded somewhat differently.

I also wonder if earlier interviews are more coy, and later ones more straightforward. I tend to think that the Silk narrative is something of an answer to those who got the Severian narrative wrong. (Not that any of us have got it RIGHT!)

Nutria
James B. Jordan
(Interview is at Paul Duggan's Wolfe website)

Alex David Groce — 06 Nov 2000, 18:55 · follows James Jordan

Nutria said:

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I think Wolfe is fairly straightforward in that interview, but I also don't recall a lot of the kinds of questions he tends to be devious about ("who killed who?," "which egg was drugged," "what does Silk see when he thinks he sees Pike's ghost"). Wolfe seems to answer these things sometimes, but really regard them as "cheating" on our part if we have to go to him.

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James Jordan — 06 Nov 2000, 18:30 · follows Alex David Groce

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Just so. Good point.

Nutricious