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The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 30 Apr 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2614>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 30 Apr 2001, 08:42

I wrote:

Au contraire: I am in fact too sophisticated _not_ to be offended by religious bigotry, whether it favors or disfavors mine own belief-system. I find, e.g., books like "This Present Darkness" quite as intolerable as, I suspect, I should find the Pullmans.

And Alga responded:

You might not find them so intolerable. He's not drum-beating, he's just presenting the Gnostic PoV.

As well as (say) PKD does in the VALIS triplet? (Of course, PKD's gnosticism is as quirky as anything else PKD wrote...)

Considering the millions of reams of printed paper that have shored the other side, I think that's fair enough.

Millions? Billions. Sagans.

Interesting, too. And, man, does he do suspense well!

Okay, I'm convinced to (at least) give them a try. Probably be a while (I'm in the middle of half-a-dozen other things right now, including the very bogged-down COMMEDIA, a Sayers novel, CSL's volume of OHEL...)

But I suppose I ought to at least ask what you mean by "presenting the Gnostic PoV." In the sense of showing the Gnostic worldview? Fine. In the sense of "the evile Xtians suppressed the good and noble Gnostics?" I have no more tolerance for that than I do for "the evile Xtians suppressed the good and noble Wiccans," where the "Wiccans" (at least as presented) are almost entirely a 20th-century invention, or "those horrible Muslims suppressed the good and noble Christians and Jews," equally fictitious. (If you haven't caught the pattern here, it's the "good and noble" far more than the "suppressed" that I regard as an outright lie.)

His villainess, Mrs. Coulter, starts out, you think, as a fairly standard Morgan la Fay-type heavy, but she gets a lot more complex as she goes along.

Oh, good. The ability to portray evil characters is all too rare in fantasists -- Tolkien is redeemed here only by Gollum (and to some extent Saruman); Lewis' villains, except for Screwtape (and Weston, but only in Perelandra) are hideous strawmen; and don't get me started about Donaldson. The problem seems to be that, once the fantasist has characterized a character (in his own mind -- and the "his" is deliberate) as "evil," he then places that character beyond all sympathy, and so all hope of sympathetic or realistic portrayal.

The alternative seems to be to have no conflict between "good" and "evil" but rather between competing interests -- this is for example the solution we find in Eddison's Zimiamvia books (but not really in WORM), and to a lesser extent in Martin's current "Ice and Fire" epic (wherein one faction is portrayed with their own PoV but remains, nonetheless, pretty much beyond the pale of the readers' -- and, I suspect, the writer's -- sympathies).

As for Wolfe (he said, desperately attempting to drag the conversation back to something like topic) ... H'mmmm ... I thought Typhon was pretty much a caricature in the NS books, but LONG and SHORT seem to have refurbished him rather severely, albeit offstage. Is there a single flat villain to be found in Wolfe?

[...]

What is "This Present Darkness?" Is that one of those
"Christian best-sellers?"

Yes. Bad CSL imitation -- in fact, very specifically, bad imitation THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH, which is probably CSL's single weakest novel.

Did you read it?

Not all of it. Only up to the loud bang where it hit the wall.

I'm gonna read one a them thangs one a these days just
outa curiosity.

Probably the best of the bunch would be JOSHUA, by a guy named Girzione.

--Dan'l

John-Paul Wellcoat — 30 Apr 2001, 16:29 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

'and don't get me started about Donaldson'

Just keen to learn what it is exactly that you would wish of the author when it comes to portrayal of evil characters. especially concerning Donaldson (Seeing as I am reading his gap series at the minute) It must come down to which side you are on in the end. You can't honestly belief in an inherently evil being. They just don't stand up in life.

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| | "Dan'l |
| | Danehy-Oakes"|
| | <ddanehy@sieb|
| | el.com> |
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| To: urth at lists1.ba.best.com |
| cc: (bcc: John-Paul Wellcoat/OMT/OMGROUP) |
| Subject: (urth) RE: Digest urth.v030.n100 |
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