

Shattered Scots (but mostly to Tony)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 Aug 2001

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 06 Aug 2001, 12:18

to Michael Straight:

Many Universes means all possible universes exist. I can't believe this is a possible universe.

At this point I'm not sure whether you're talking about Pullman's alternate U in TGC, or Wolfe's in TAD, but in either case, this doesn't disqualify them as possible universes, only as plausible-with-respect-to-Michael-Straight universes.

To Tony Ellis:

Hey, -my- hypothetical child occasionally looks words up when it finds them being used in an unexpected manner, or asks a grown-up. I can't help it if your hypothetical child is too lazy. :-)

Actually, so does mine, and so do I; but frankly, this doesn't seem to qualify as using the word "daemon" in an unexpected manner. It's some supernatural being that changes shapes, okay, that's a demon, my hypothetical ["You bitch about the present/and you blame it on the past/I'd like to find your hypothe, uh, inner child/and kick his little ass" -- D. Henley] child has no problem with that. And then, because said child has read a moderate amount of SF/F, she has no problem adapting when the word is revealed to mean something like an externalized soul. At no point does anything happen which would send such a child scurrying to look it up in her funk & wagnall's.

Nor, if she did, would I bet on said child giving even a glance to the word's etymology; nor, if she did, is said etymology likely to be much help -- consider Merriam-Webster's Collegiate etymology of "demon" (to which "daemon" refers one), for example:

Middle English demon, from Late Latin & Latin; Late Latin daemon evil spirit, from Latin, divinity, spirit, from Greek daimOn, probably from daiesthai to distribute

Nothing in here even hints at Socrates' usage, which is what (I presume) Pullman has in mind. From all of which I stand by my original conclusion: that it is fairly unlikely that a child, reading THE GOLDEN COMPASS, will (as you originally put it) learn that a word used by Christianity to mean an incarnation of evil originally meant something as harmless as "spirit."

As for Pullman's alleged "childishness"... We're getting down to personal taste here, and it seems pointless to argue about that. You say "childish", I say "pleasingly irreverent".

As a veteran of (among many other things) more Robert Anton Wilson books than I immediately care to admit, I think I have a handle on irreverence, including at least some of the pleasing sort. Again and again I have to say that my problem is not that he

dislikes mainstream (whatever that is!) Christianity; it is that he expresses his dislike in a manner that frankly reminds me of a child shouting "poo poo!" over the school PA system as soon as he's sure the microphone is on. Yes, this is a matter of taste, and I have to admit I have developed a rather jaded palate where irreverence and blasphemy (which is not involved here) are concerned; if it can't be at least moderately subtle or original, why bother? And in the context of a book which is in so many other ways tremendously subtle and tremendously original, this crudeness stands out like the proverbial hammer-whacked digit.

The main thing is that you're still enjoying the story. I hope you enjoy the other two books as well.

Picked up the second over the weekend. Probably won't pick up the third until Del Rey issues the paperback -- I don't buy that many hardcovers; Wolfe is a significant percentage of 'em.

To Alga:

What fun to have stimulated such a lively, informative and entertaining sparring-match! Do carry on.

Yes, and thank you for recommending the book in the first place; I enjoyed it and am enjoying this little contret, uh, discussion, a great deal.

And to Tony agin:

I'm willing to bet the Holocaust would turn out not to have happened, at least not in the form and to the extent it actually did.

...[T]here is no shortage of people who think that the one thing their country needs is a good ethnic cleansing.

...Hitler just happened to be in the right place at the right time. There was an emergency backup anti-Semite standing on a chair and shouting in every second beer hall in the Weimar Republic. Kill Adolf, and it would be rather surprising if one of these other men -didn't- rise to power.

All true. And quite true that nasty anti-Semitic shit would have gone down. But I seriously question that anything really closely resembling what we know as "the Holocaust" would have gone down without Hitler's syphilitically-crazed brain in charge of the whole operation. And maybe it would have, and I could be wrong; obviously neither you nor I can know the outcome of such a fantastically complex counterfactual.

Nobody said anything about history "simply healing over", only of it managing to arrive at a similar 1988 to our own -through different means-.

.....mmmmaybe. And maybe there is some plausibility here (the idea of converging forms in evolution comes to mind, i.e., why sharks, dolphins, and ichthyosaurs are so similar in shape); maybe there is some kind of convergentness in the shape of societies at some given tech level.

And maybe not. As I said above, you can't really know "the" answer to a counterfactual this complicated (orders of magnitude more complicated than the "if Hitler had died" thing). But the more different the starting premises, the more unlikely I find convergence.

--Dan'l