

Wolfe, Tolkien, Brooks...

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 02 Jan 2002

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 02 Jan 2002, 22:02

Adam wrote...

(Has Wolfe ever mentioned Tolkien in print before?)

I'm pretty sure JRRT is mentioned, at least in passing, in a couple of the essays on fantasy in _Castle of Days_. And I believe he's quoted at least once in _The Castle of the Otter_ (which is, of course, now a component of _Castle of Days_).

Some aspects of his work definitely need to be reconsidered in light of it, such as the presentation of the Autarch's rule in BOTNS as the best possible under the circumstances,

Well, the point here is that "the circumstances" are not merely the specific political situation, nor even the specifics of the dying sun and the Monsters Under the Sea; "the circumstances" most relevant to this point is that the Autarchy is a governance in the Fallen World. By this (Christian) view, no government can be better than "the best possible under the circumstances" until the Parousia and the Restored World, of which Ushas itself is only a foreshadowing.

I haven't looked at MEDITATIONS ON MIDDLE-EARTH, but possibly Wolfe's essay was rejected because the image of Tolkien as propagandist for a society in which the lower orders cheerfully obey and serve their betters was not one the editor wanted to project.

For me, this is one of the things most blatantly missing from the FotR film: while they got the look of Middle-earth right, and didn't damage the plot too badly, they did not carry most of the characters I know and love into the movie very well. The most horrid examples:

- o Saruman as a rug-chewing Mad Scientist from a Hammer movie (well, what _did_ I expect from Christopher Lee...?)
- o Merry and Pippin as a couple of juvenile delinquents - frankly more reminiscent of Pepsi and Moxie from BORED OF THE RINGS
- o Gimli's horrendous "speaking to the modern audience" remark that "nobody tosses a dwarf!"
- o Etc.

But in amongst this, subtle but utterly undermining one of my favorite characters: the very _essence_ of Samwise Gamgee in Tolkien is that his relation to Frodo is an idealization of the Master-Servant relationship - the British class system "as it should have been." And that's totally gone from the movie, dammit.

And Terry Brooks again! First Pullman praises him, then Wolfe criticizes his detractors.

Note that this is not to praise him but to say that his enemies are Wolfe's. I think Wolfe has gone a bit around the bend here; Brooks's first novel isn't so much imitation as borderline plagiarism: but I see Wolfe's point, which is that originality is overrated, and Tolkien is a model

eminently worth emulating.

And Andy wrote:

Wolfe is a Conservative Catholic Christian right-winger. Deal With It!!!!

Bingo. So, more or less, was Tolkien. Deal with that, too.

And Heinlein was a - well, whatever he was (since most of the labels usually used to slam him are blatantly untrue). Deal with it.

And Le Guin is a rather muzzy Taoist liberal. Deal with it.

And Pullman is a rabid anticlerical nutcase. Deal with it.

Who gives a frog's bottom? They all write some astonishing stories, filled with the kind of humanity that allows us, whatever our politics, whatever our religion, to attain (if only for a moment) to a higher wisdom than daily life allows us.

Andy Robertson — 02 Jan 2002, 22:32 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

It's not the master-servant relationship: it's a war-leader - warband-follower relationship. Achilles and Patroclus. A vital facet of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Of course the LOTR subsumes the fact that the english master-servant relationship is a modern fossil of this.

Thus as Sam and Frodo move from the "domestic" Shire to the "heroic" outer world their relationship mutates, taking on its archaic configuration.

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
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