

Wash Post article

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 11 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3141>

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Nicholas Gevers — 11 Apr 2002, 04:41

Thanks to Marc, Dan'l, and Rostrum for their responses to my article. GW himself likes it (but then he would) and Rosemary Wolfe apparently plans to distribute copies of it at the World Horror Convention (starting shortly.) It's also at WHC, of course, that the Wolfe/Gaiman chapbook, WALKING TOUR OF THE SHAMBLES, should first be available.

The matter of 5HC as entry point into Wolfe: yes, it's a difficult and dispiriting book; but where else can one find Wolfe at full power within a single novel? PEACE, yes, but that's equally challenging. 5HC is perforce the best one-volume introduction to Wolfe's SF oeuvre.

And 5HC's place in the Briah Cycle: apart from certain correspondences Robert Borski has noted (like "starcrossers"), there's nothing overt to tie it to the universe of Severian. BUT: in the context of the whole Urth/Whorl series, there is too much resonance with 5HC to be ignored. Three double world systems--Urth/Lune, St Croix/St Anne, and Blue/Green--are in close thematic correspondence, and disregarding the 5HC element here is fatal to any understanding of Wolfe's overall thinking and creative evolution. 5HC is integral to the argument of Briah; nothing overt disqualifies it from the Briah Cycle; it belongs there.

--Nick Gevers.

Michael Straight — 11 Apr 2002, 14:13 · follows Nicholas Gevers

On Thu, 11 Apr 2002, [iso-8859-1] Nicholas Gevers wrote:

The matter of 5HC as entry point into Wolfe: yes, it's a difficult and dispiriting book; but where else can one find Wolfe at full power within a single novel?

I agree. Wasn't Wolfe already being hailed as a genius for 5HC before people had even read any of the New Sun books?

And 5HC's place in the Briah Cycle:
Three double world
systems--Urth/Lune, St Croix/St Anne, and

Blue/Green--are in close thematic correspondence

I mostly agree with this. One of the main reasons I dislike the Urth=Blue theory is that I prefer to think of the double planets more as a reoccurring theme than a literal correspondence.

But I also note that lumping Urth/Lune in with the others is a bit out of place. While in the other two pairs, both planets are important settings for the story, in the New Sun books, Lune is hardly more prominent than Verthandi or Skuld.

-Rostrum

Nicholas Gevers — 12 Apr 2002, 03:08 · follows Michael Straight

Michael Straight: yes, the Urth/Lune pairing is less important than the other two, and I certainly don't believe they are the same worlds as Blue and Green--too much textual gerrymandering and wishful thinking go into that conclusion. But Lune may have a greater symbolic/thematic importance than we realise--if all three two-world systems are mirror-images or models of predatory symbiosis, it may be hugely significant that Lune flourishes with life while Urth sinks towards the lifelessness of Ragnarok.

--Nick Gevers.

Kevin J. Maroney — 12 Apr 2002, 03:16 · follows Nicholas Gevers

At 12:41 AM 4/11/02, Nick wrote:

5HC is

perforce the best one-volume introduction to Wolfe's SF oeuvre.

I agree with this, and have been using it as such for the last 15 years. It is neither Wolfe's best nor worst, nor his "most typical" (is there such a thing for Wolfe?), but if someone reads and enjoys *Fifth Head*, that person is likely to enjoy other Wolfe, and if not, they are unlikely to enjoy other Wolfe much more. When *Fifth Head* was out of print, I made it a point to buy Ace copies whenever I saw them, to pass on to people who hadn't jumped into Wolfe yet.

BUT: in the context of the whole Urth/Whorl series, there is too much resonance with 5HC to be ignored.

Numbering *Fifth Head* as part of "the Briah cycle", as you did in your article, is misleading and, frankly, wrong. There is no plot, character, or setting connection between *Fifth Head* and the various *Sun* novels, and calling it such sets up expectations in a new reader which I feel will not be met. Does it resonate with the other novels? Yes, but so does "Seven American Nights"; that doesn't make "Seven American Nights" part of "the Briah cycle".

Kevin J. Maroney | kjm at panix.com | Games are my entire waking life

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Nicholas Gevers — 12 Apr 2002, 03:29 · follows Kevin J. Maroney

I concede that listing 5HC as part of the Briah Cycle is an experimental proposition, but if it leads to a fuller understanding of Wolfe's baroque/SF oeuvre--and it should, for reasons evident in my article--it has some chance of becoming axiomatic. Wolfe himself sees no difficulties with the Briah structure as I present it...

--Nick Gevers.

--- "Kevin J. Maroney" <kjm at panix.com> wrote:
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Michael Straight — 12 Apr 2002, 13:13 · follows Nicholas Gevers

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My introduction to Wolfe was the New Sun books, followed by the Soldier books, all of which I loved. Then I read 5HC and didn't like it very much. If that had been my introduction to Wolfe, I doubt I would have gone out of my way to read more of his stuff.

I re-read 5HC recently, after having read a whole bunch more Wolfe, and enjoyed it much more. I like Wolfe's writing in 5HC and he does some very interesting things with the story, but I don't find St. Anne/St. Croix and the abos themselves all that interesting compared with Urth, the Whorl, Silk, Severian, Latro, the inhum, etc.

-Rostrum