

Numerological Wolfe

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 19 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3177>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 19 Apr 2002, 22:16

I made a numerological reflection relevant to 5HC:

"666," the Number of the Beast, is "the number of a man." Kaballistically, 6 is a man and 3 is God; 666 is Man making a God of himself.)

In Rev. 13 the number is six hundred, sixty, six, not three 6s. A lot of people are confused on this, simply because we say "sixsixsix" and the English could be read either way.

Well, yeah. The Arabic numeral system simply wasn't around when John had his vision. Still, I misdoubt whether the standard translations (like KJV's "six hundred, three score and six") are any better reflections of the original Gk than a simple 666. I frankly find it very unlikely that St John in writing this down was unaware of the hexaplicity of the three components of his number.

I wasn't really familiar with the whole Solomon thing -- but I guess it works in context.

Whatever meaning the number may have had to St John -- I think that is an entirely different question from what it may have meant to Gene Wolfe in the early-to-mid-'70s. And certainly it seems that much of the activity at 666 Saltimbanque is oriented toward man deifying himself.

And, really, given

- o the popular association of the number with a certain Caesar,

- o the identity of GW's favorite fictional detective,

- and

- o the family's "real" last name

I find it extremely unlikely that GW would miss the opportunity to make that association...

H'mmm. I have a couple of kind of separate things to say about 5HC. I'll make them in a separate post or two.

James Jordan — 20 Apr 2002, 15:17 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

At 05:16 PM 4/19/2002, you wrote:

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St John in writing this down was _un_aware of the hexaplicity of the three components of his number.

Not to disagree, but just to provide a bit more for anyone interested:

The text of Rev. 13:18 is not "hex, hex, hex," (6,6,6) but

"hexakosioi hexekonta hex" (600,60,6). But of course you are right: Three

sixes is significant, since man was made on the sixth day. Goliath is 6

cubits and a span high, and his spearhead weight 600 shekels (1 Sam. 17). Nebuchadnezzar's

idol in Daniel 3 has dimensions of 60x6 cubits. Numerologically, 666 is a climactic extension of

this theme. Also, 666 is the triangular of 36 (6x6). So, sixes abound in this number.

What we see in all this, and climactically in 666, is man's

attempt make himself god by his own bootstraps. He never gets to God's gift

of sabbath ("7") -- God's elevation of him by grace into "little godhood,"

as another line of posts has been discussing. He just keeps multiplying

himself over and over. This is pretty much a standard thematic

understanding of these multiplied sixes, and of course it fits perfectly

with the first 5HC novella -- as you say: man deifying himself.

I doubt if Wolfe made the connection to Solomon (though that's

what any synagogue-trained 1st c. Jew hearing the passage would first think of), and I agree

that Wolfe may have enjoyed thinking of Nero in this connection, since that is a frequently

encountered specific understanding of 666 as a code. That would be secondary, though. The

multiplication of 6s never getting to 7 is the more basic thematic link.

Nutria

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 22 Apr 2002, 16:23 · follows James Jordan

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And now we see another significance of "Number Five." By this generation (which probably isn't the fifth at all; "that number is either far too small or too large"), the Wolfes are not even able to make it as far as Number Six ("I am not a prisoner...I am a free man!"); they are no longer quite human...

James Jordan — 22 Apr 2002, 17:01 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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--Blattid

Good thot. Either that, or that an evil No. 6 is coming someday, which is how I've taken the last sentence.

BTW, thematically this feature might be linked to Wolfe's story "To the Seventh" in *Stranger

Travellers.* Of course, the seventh here refers to chess, and when the pawn gets to the eighth

after dying on the seventh, he becomes a Queen (the bride of Christ). Still, 6 as inadequate and

stuck in time versus 7 as fulfilling and completing humanity -- the two stories make a nice

complement. The one thing the "Wolfes" in 5HC refuse to do is "die" and be truly transformed.

Nutria