

The Saga of the Urth Mailing List: An Excerpt

The Urth list — 7 messages, 4 voices, 11 Jun 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3308>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Jun 2002, 16:01

Emerging from the murky mists of the Internet,
composing on computers their provident remarks,
James and Jeff have jointly written:

... as Dan'l mentioned, from some Roman Catholic perspectives
the atonement of the Son is "eternal" so it could "happen" in
time more than once.

I should clarify my point here ... it is not that it could happen more than once in time; it is that the spatiotemporally unique event could be eternally present to many, any, or all points of spacetime. (Hey, how often do you get to use relativistic terminology in a christological discussion?) What I mean is, ignoring the question of other universes, in this universe, we (the Roman Catholic church, and I am pretty sure the Orthodox churches also) believe that in the sacrifice of the Mass, we are not repeating the sacrifice of Golgotha but participating in it, being present with Christ at that eternally unique moment.

(If this is still a bit vague, forgive me; I'm trying not to turn this into a theology list, so I'm making non-Lupine theological remarks as brief as possible.)

If this was not in Wolfe's mind, then I doubt if we are supposed to
press the problem of a repeated crucifixion.

Why can't this just be regarded as allegorical? The crucifixion
would not be repeated so much as represented, it avoids all
problems with time-binding statements and promises attributed to
G-d, doesn't make a liar out of the translator, and doesn't
require the Book to travel half a universe backward, get translated,
then come 1 1/2 forward to be published.

Okay, applying the above principle to the "Books" I think we need to look at it with two different heads.

We can regard the references to the "theoanthropos," etc., either as "allegorical of" Christ or simply descriptive of Him. Matters not: the point is that from this perspective, Wolfe is describing stuff which we are clearly intended to recognize as in some way referring to Christ.

But in trying to decipher the proposed internal reality of the books, the universe of the discourse, we need to take a different tack and ask whether the Theoanthropos, the man enlightened and possessed by the Outsider "is" Christ? Now, assuming (as I do assume) that Wolfe is not playing us false in claiming that he intends this as a previous iteration of the universe from Big Bang to Grand Gnab; and assuming equally that he, like myself and most Christians, regard the Incarnation and Sacrifice as a unique event, then either the Theoanthropos is not God, or the person we call Christ is not God.

A simple and, I think, elegant resolution, which is consistent with
the text: in many universes, possibly in many worlds in a single universe, Man or some other

sentient race has Fallen. In one and only one of these universes, the second Person of the Trinity became incarnate and allowed Himself to be sacrificed to reconcile these sentient races to the Godhead. In many other times-and-places, however, the Godhead "enlightened and possessed" a person to perform acts that, in the sense of the Mass but more so, are united with and copresent with the unique Incarnation and Sacrifice. For a person who knows only of these events, belief in them is essentially belief in the unique event.

God is, after all, a torturer.

Then seeking to solve philosophical problems,
of chronic recurrence and Christian belief,
to the light came Roy Lackey, and limned these brave words:

In addition to the objections raised by others, there are all those stories in the Brown Book, clearly recognizable to students of Classical mythology as founded on Earth's mythology.

Well, that could be dismissed as mythic resonance, hero with a thousand faces type stuff, the idea that these archetypes are eternal. Blablablah. But this:

It also contains a direct quote from Genesis, and another from Marlowe's FAUSTUS. No. No. No. Urth is in our Earth's far future.

...is just a wee tad more difficult to dismiss. It is hard to imagine that in a simple repetition of the repeated Big Bang/Grand Ghab variety, such details would be repeated. Perhaps, though, we can suppose that Wolfe is borrowing a page from Nietzsche and considering it all as a species of "eternal recurrence"? Or that the Hieros, seeking to guide the recreation of the species that created their predecessors, do so with the kind of obsessive accuracy that actually does result in such recurrence?

The short of it is, though, that I disagree, because I think putting Urth in a past cycle seems to me to make sense, while admitting that I don't have an easy answer to such problems.

Facts aside, as well as theological difficulties, the notion of Severian, turning water into wine, being baptized, dying and being resurrected, a world savior, etc., in a previous iteration of creation, makes him the prototype for Jesus. Kind of cheapens the whole Holy Spectacle, doesn't it? Putting the cart before the horse.

Ummm ... no more and no less than do the Jesus-parallels you find when you look at (say) Moses, Samson, Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Almost all of Christ's miracles and many of the other events of His life are "previewed" in one or more of these characters. It doesn't seem particularly more difficult to assume that Severian also figures Christ without being Him.

Not to mention it plays hell with Nick Gevers' idea of placing 5HC in the SUN universe. A separate creation with an Earth, complete with Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and New York City, DAVID COPPERFIELD, and Catholic saints (all mentioned in the text), stretches credulity past all endurance.

Well, if you can swallow or could have swallowed quotes from Genesis and Marlowe, the rest is not only not harder but in fact necessary

-- I mean, it would actually be harder (for me at least) to accept the presence of such quotes, and then to be told that Ireland, Scotland, Wales, New York, and David Copperfield were not present in that universe. At least if they're present, the whole is consistent.

A final correction to the "facts" used by Crush:

But in my heart of hearts I believe Wolfe concocted this explanation to rescue himself from having to constantly justify

theologically everything in the BOTNS. I DO recall that he denied Severian is Christ. He said he was a "Christ figure", but that's merely a literary term.

Actually, he went a step further than your memory, Crush -- he actually denies that Severian, or any of his protagonists, are "Christ figures," and insists that they are rather "Christian figures." I believe that the distinction is made fairly clearly in the interview Wolfe gave to James Jordan, to which a link was posted in this group within the last day or so.

Andy Robertson — 11 Jun 2002, 16:56 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
I should clarify my point here ... it is _not_ that it could happen more than once in time; it is that the spatiotemporally unique event could be eternally present to many, any, or all points of spacetime. (Hey, how often do you get to use relativistic terminology in a christological discussion?)

Umm, Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophae* . . .

hartshorn

James Wynn — 11 Jun 2002, 19:24 · follows Andy Robertson

Ah! Yes. Here's the quote:

JJ: The holy slaves [Heirodules], Famulimus or one of them tells Severian that he is the center of his race, the savior of his race. That is such Christlike language you can see why interpreters would say well Severian is a Christ figure. But is there a Christ figure in the book, or is he simply for this universe? GW: In so far as there is a Christ figure it is Severian. That doesn't mean he has to be identified with Christ. He is in a position similar to that of Christ. But really it is a different position because Christ really is both God and man. Severian is not. Severian is a Christian rather than a Christ. But he is been taken as the representative of humanity by whom humanity is to be judged. This I think is what has happened perhaps with the actual human Jesus. He is or was is as fully human as you or I and we are saved by Him. By the fact that he passed. That the corruption did not destroy Him. I think that St. Paul is absolutely correct when he says that Jesus was tempted in all the ways that we are tempted. I think that Jesus was tempted to commit murder or any other sin that you want to name just as the rest of us are. And the difference is that He did not sin.

-- Crush

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

From: Dan'I Danehy-Oakes [mailto:ddanehy at siebel.com] Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2002 11:02 AM To: 'urth at urth.net'

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 11 Jun 2002, 22:51 · follows James Wynn

Crush:

I suppose this is a question of interpretation... To me, the "in so far as there is a Christ figure" seems to me to be a way of saying that there really isn't, but if you have to find one, Severian would be it.

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

From: James Wynn [mailto:crushtv at HotPOP.com]

Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2002 12:25 PM
To: urth at urth.net
Subject: RE: (urth) The Saga of the Urth Mailing List: An Excerpt

Ah! Yes. Here's the quote:

JJ: The holy slaves [Heirodules], Famulimus or one of them
tells Severian
that he is the center of his race, the savior of his race.

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-- Crush

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

From: Dan'I Danehy-Oakes [mailto:ddanehy at siebel.com]

Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2002 11:02 AM

To: 'urth at urth.net'

Adam Stephanides — 12 Jun 2002, 03:30 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

on 6/11/02 4:01 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:

Emerging from the murky mists of the Internet,
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James and Jeff have jointly written:

[snip]

A simple and, I think, elegant resolution, which is consistent with
the text: in many universes, possibly in many worlds in a single
universe, Man or some other sentient race has Fallen. In one and only
one of these universes, the second Person of the Trinity became
incarnate and allowed Himself to be sacrificed to reconcile these

sentient races to the Godhead. In many other times-and-places, however, the Godhead "enlightened and possessed" a person to perform acts that, in the sense of the Mass but more so, are united with and copresent with the unique Incarnation and Sacrifice. For a person who knows only of these events, belief in them is essentially belief in the unique event.

God is, after all, a torturer.

So in every universe, there is a figure who is regarded as a sacrificed God-become-man, but only one of these universes has it right? In that case, how do we know that we're the lucky ones?

What occurred to me when I first read Wolfe's past-universe comment was that the Theoanthropos could be an anticipated future figure, rather than a past figure. Is there anything in the books which rules this out?

It also contains a direct quote from Genesis, and another from Marlowe's FAUSTUS. No. No. No. Urth is in our Earth's far future.

...is just a wee tad more difficult to dismiss. It is hard to imagine that in a simple repetition of the repeated Big Bang/Grand Ghab variety, such details would be repeated. Perhaps, though, we can suppose that Wolfe is borrowing a page from Nietzsche and considering it all as a species of "eternal recurrence"? Or that the Hieros, seeking to guide the recreation of the species that created their predecessors, do so with the kind of obsessive accuracy that actually does result in such recurrence?

If that's the case, then presumably Severian and his story would recur too, rendering the whole question academic.

The short of it is, though, that I disagree, because I think putting Urth in a past cycle seems to me to make sense,

Why? I don't see a single advantage to it, aside from partially answering the question "How did we get Sev's story?" which, after all, arises with every SF story set in the future.

--Adam

James Wynn — 12 Jun 2002, 13:31 · follows Adam Stephanides

I agree. Actually, I think the operative sentence here is "Severian is a Christian rather than a Christ." Although, to me for some reason, saying Severian is a Christian is a more jarring statement than saying he's a Christ.

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

From: Dan'l Danehy-Oakes [mailto:ddanehy at siebel.com]

Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2002 5:51 PM

To: 'urth at urth.net'

Subject: RE: (urth) The Saga of the Urth Mailing List: An Excerpt

Crush:

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To: urth at urth.net

Subject: RE: (urth) The Saga of the Urth Mailing List: An Excerpt

Ah! Yes. Here's the quote:

JJ: The holy slaves [Heirodules], Famulimus or one of them tells Severian

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But he is been taken as the representative of humanity by whom humanity is

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Sent: Tuesday, June 11, 2002 11:02 AM

To: 'urth at urth.net'

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 12 Jun 2002, 16:24 · follows James Wynn

Adam done wrote:

So in every universe, there is a figure who is regarded as a sacrificed God-become-man, but only one of these universes has it right? In that case, how do we know that we're the lucky ones?

Through faith, of course. 8*)

No, you see ... the point is that by participation, we're all right, even though it only happens the once. Don't think in time, think in eternity.

Or (for the Gaiman/Pratchett fans amongst us) think ineffability.

What occurred to me when I first read Wolfe's past-universe comment was that the Theanthropos could be an anticipated future figure, rather than a past figure. Is there anything in the books which rules this out?

Nope. And the nature of such prophecies is often to confuse past and future.

This idea would seem to support the whole "cyclic" thing, though, wouldn't it?

... Perhaps, though, we can suppose that Wolfe is borrowing a page from Nietzsche and considering it all as a species of "eternal recurrence"? Or that the Hieros, seeking to guide the recreation of the species that created their predecessors, do so with the kind of obsessive accuracy that actually does result in such recurrence?

If that's the case, then presumably Severian and his story would recur too, rendering the whole question academic.

Yep. I have no problem with this. After all, he himself is aware that there was at least one previous Severian.

The short of it is, though, that I disagree, because I think putting Urth in a past cycle seems to me to make sense,

Why? I don't see a single advantage to it, aside from partially answering the question "How did we get Sev's story?" which, after all, arises with every SF story set in the future.

True: the primary difference being that most SF writers simply ignore the question, where Wolfe, at least as far back as PEACE and 5HC, has made a point of including the provenance of the story -- the motives and reliability of the narrator, the time at which the story is actually written -- an intrinsic part of his texts.

Where have you been, my blue-eyed son?