

King Jesus defense

The Urth list — 4 messages, 2 voices, 13 Nov 2002

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Don Doggett — 13 Nov 2002, 08:32

Hello! Thanks to you all for your warm welcome. I can't tell you how great it is to talk about these works with people who are more than superficially acquainted with them. It's occurred to me that I may be operating on too many fronts at once but we'll see. Prudence dictates that I retreat from my Severian/Ymar origin theory for lack of more than superficial evidence (so far). Rest assured it's not a surrender. Now, I want to address Blattid's criticisms. Then I'll deal with Silk as Typhon in a separate post and last, chime in with my two cents on the Blue/Ushas debate. It may take a few days. But on to Blattid.

Your primary contention seems the easiest for me to refute but, before I do, let me clarify that I said NS is in SOME (sorry, I'm not sure how to underline) ways a reworking of KJ, not in all or even most. I've never encountered an author who supersaturates his works with as many ideas and references as Gene Wolfe. It's nearly unbelievable. That said, I could see your point of Wolfe rejecting the worldview of King Jesus IF Severian were conceived as an incarnation of Christ. He is not and Mr. Wolfe has definitively stated this. He is merely a Christ like figure, a man emulating that ideal (or trying to). I would further argue that this very fact that Severian does not equal Jesus allows Mr. Wolfe to play with the ideas presented in Graves' work with little danger of himself slipping into heresy. In essence, much like Prof. Tolkien, he is engaging in an act of sub creation, carefully engineered not to violate his Catholic worldview. As always imho. Now, on to your point by point arguments:

1. The lameness and the wound. The fact that these images are found all over literature is not a refutation. Graves borrows from all over the map as does Wolfe. The fact is, the two characters have similar markings which Graves describes as signs of divine kingship. Jesus is a king and Severian is Autarch. Even if you are unconvinced you must grant me plausibility.
2. Dorcas. I don't care much about this. I just thought it uncanny. I argue supersaturation.
3. Manipulation of bloodlines. Jesus' bloodlines in KJ are manipulated to produce a messiah. Severian's are manipulated to produce a New Sun. Since Severian is not Christ, Mr. Wolfe is off the hook, and your argument doesn't hold.
4. Severian in relation to Apollo. Severian is the New Sun. Apollo is the Greek sun god. There is also the strong association between Jesus and the sun (Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun, who was Constantine's first god from whom he made little differentiation regarding Jesus) and between Jesus and Apollo (especially in art).
5. The female argument I yield to Mark Aramini's earlier post. He's more articulate on that than I. (It's late)
6. Typhon. Before KJ I would have agreed that Typhon was primarily a Satan figure. Again, I argue supersaturation.
7. Severian's self birth. I am retreating for now, but I will argue that there is no consensus on

Severian's birth or parents. His word is untrustworthy.

8. Jesus/Silkhorn/Arthur. If it looks like a chicken and eats grain, it might be a rabbit with feathers, but since they both taste like chicken, who cares? The parallels are there and both use Arthurian imagery. The only thing Jesus is lacking is an Azoth or a Terminus Est (though he does have the cross-metaphorically speaking). Plausibility to a high degree.

Anyhow, thanks again for your welcome and for forcing me to exercise my brain. I look forward to more conversations. Don

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 13 Nov 2002, 16:55 · follows Don Doggett

Dan (Doggett):

You wrote,

Your primary contention seems the easiest for me to refute ...

I do not feel certain what, precisely, you consider my "primary contention," but as you do not (to me) appear to address (what I consider) my "primary contention," allow me to make it explicit:

First, I agree that G.W.'s basic working method involves what you call "supersaturating ... with ... many ideas and references." He seems nearly unique in the degree of this; I know of only two (SF) writers who come close: Theodore Sturgeon and A.E. van Vogt, who however do this in very different ways -- mostly ideas, far less references.

Second, I certainly do think it reasonable to perceive similarities between NS and KJ. However, as I said in my previous post, "This kind of surface connection can be found between almost any two rich and complex works of narrative literature" -- and, I would add, _especially_ two works which clearly play off the same basic template, in this case, the received story of Jesus the Christ. I think it might constitute an interesting exercise to compare NS with, for example, Dostoevski's THE IDIOT. On the other hand, I don't think it would prove all that interesting to compare NS with Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND, though it uses the Jesus-template rather extensively ... which probably says something about how I perceive the richness and complexity of SiaSL.

Third: But and however, given that one can find such similarities and connections between two such works, it does not follow that the later-written in any way reworks or shows influence from the earlier-written, in some sort of _post hoc ergo propter hoc_ way. Thus my concern for a "smoking gun:" either a direct reference to the earlier work (either internal to the later work or in some external comment by the work's author), or else some complex of details that we can't plausibly call it a "coincidence," a random isomorphism in how the two writers treat similar material.

My "primary contention," then, is that -- even if I grant every one of your points -- they constitute neither such a reference nor such a complex of details, leaving the question of whether KJ might help us to understand what Wolfe is doing in NS open at best.

That said, I probably erred in the directions of "pointless" and/or "misleading" in disputing your specific details one by one.

Don Doggett — 15 Nov 2002, 05:03 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

You are cruel Blattid, cruel. . . but you're right. It seems I've ridden this horse too hard and to fast with too little water and now it's dead. Guess I should dismount and find a new ride. By the way, I only just now understood your reference to the bene gesserit in your original reply (slow, slow). That is intriguing.

Don

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Nov 2002, 16:20 · follows Don Doggett

You are cruel Blattid, cruel. . . but you're right.

If I expressed myself in a cruel manner, I apologize. I did not intend it. I may seek truth and clarity, but not penance (except in myself).

It seems I've ridden this horse too hard and to fast with
too little water and now it's dead.

Gaaah. No. It seems rather thirsty, but hardly dead ... I hoped, not to get you to drop your comparison, but to seek that "smoking gun" - to prop it up with solid props, if you can find such.

We play the game that way ... certainly the other residents of this list have challenged some of my wonky ideas in a similar manner, and I've had to back off some, holding others in reserve until I find more, better evidence ... I suspect your idea here should reside in the latter class.

By the way, I only just now understood your
reference to the bene gesserit in your original reply (slow,
slow). That is intriguing.

Yeah ... it really took me by surprise, but Herbert strikes me as the sort of person who almost certainly would use Graves as a resource (much as, say, Delany did in THE JEWELS OF APTOR). But then, the Bene Gesserit manipulation of bloodlines has long stood as a basic pillar of my theory of DUNE as a fascist novel...