

DOORS: The Hero, The Otherworld, The Ending

The Urth list — 23 messages, 8 voices, 14 Jan 2003

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 14 Jan 2003, 21:53

So far people have been mainly wondering about the hero's name (singular). This is valid, of course, and could lead to something, but it seems at the moment to be a (perhaps temporary) dead end.

Since "identity" is such a strong part of TAD, and since the goddess clearly has so many names, it seems like an unnecessary straitjacket to identify a single name as the hero's. Better to list the various names, I think, and look at how they may or may not represent different aspects of the same character.

THERE ARE DOORS is, I think, an interesting take on the work of Robert Graves: the most Gravesean work Wolfe has ever done. But it also strikes me as having the structure and tone of Chesterton's THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY, including the ending, with twists along the way. I cannot comment on the Kafka content, since I still have not read THE CASTLE which is even mentioned in the text ("Das Schloss"), but I can detect some Kafka anyway (beyond the "Herr Kay").

THE HERO

I am struck by the sense of continuity between the men who are lovers of the goddess, but I don't know if it is exclusively the "Wolfe reincarnation" theme or the "Wolfe spirit possession" theme. That is to say, is Green a reincarnation of Captain Billy? Perhaps (and thus the interest he has in the Captain's desk is more than just the lure of the hidden locket showing the goddess: he had that desk in a previous life), and yet we also have the direct evidence/opinion that the hero is "Kay" because he is a "reincarnation" of the not-yet-dead Herr Klamm, which suggests that for Klamm the possessing spirit of "goddess's lover" has moved on, from Klamm to the hero.

This bears another note: Klamm is now "step-father" to the goddess, a role he enjoys but not without some pain. It seems as though a man's biological age is the central factor: Klamm is now too old to be the lover, and is thus reduced to a supporting role as step-father. If this holds true, then the Other World ("Fatherless World"?) has something that looks like male menopause -- that is to say, men there have a biological clock with regards to the goddess.

THE OTHERWORLD

How does Otherworld regard the goddess? At first one might think that they are all goddess worshippers, but it actually seems quite different. Goddess worship seems to be a religion among men only: they dedicate themselves to her and thus to a life of chastity, rather than having sex one time and dying like salmon/drones. Men who marry give up their dolls. The women seem to tolerate this worship, but they break out in violence at times (attacking men, destroying dolls). It seems that the women are not on good terms with the goddess.

So what is Otherworld society like? It is human but with aspects of the social insect world. The following is unstated in the novel, but I suspect it is true: Otherworld women carry the burden of society, since the men are all dying drones (no doubt here); like insects, society is divided into the mass of sterile female workers and super-fertile queens (little doubt here), and as such, every non-impregnated woman is seeking fertilization as a way to vault up from worker to queen level (somewhat speculative). Every "Pawn" wants to become a "Queen." If this is granted, then reproduction for Otherworld women is a Power trip rather than a Love trip (which seems pretty clear when the wife must convince her husband to die in order for her to have his children).

William North is trying to overthrow the government, if not the whole civilization. He is all about Power. He seems to be trying to create a masculinist movement or subvert existing ones in order to shake things up. His taking on the name "William" may be an attempt on his part to lure the goddess into pistol range. More than a rabble-rouser, more than an iconoclast, he may be a wannabe goddess-killer. (Thus the battle seen by Graves between the goddess and the usurping thunder god.)

THE ENDING

Wow, what an ending! It seems like a happy ending to a romantic comedy: when the hero escapes the clutches of the loveless reproductive enslaver, a female version of the "breed farmer" found in such different films as "Shakespeare in Love" and "How The West Was Won" (men who are trying to buy the heroine based on her birthing capacity, whereas she is already in love with another man), we cheer for him as we cheer for she-who-gets-away-to-follow-Love.

And yay, the hero will not fall into the age-trap that Herr Klamm fell into! He will follow without fear!

But when the cheering dies down, we come to understand that the hero is going to his death, with a smile (however "archaic" a smile) on his lips and a song in his heart. He may get to see the goddess one more time, but he might not: it is death to go to Overwood, the physical land of the goddess somewhere out west, and he is going to Overwood. He will not be like Klamm because he will be dead; he will not age into her step-father because he will be dead.

In making this choice, while he is being true to himself and his dream, he is also paradoxically conforming to Overworld: where men die for Love. The choice that Fanny gave him, to live with her and live through the sex act, would make him like a god in Overworld -- more specifically, he would be an embodiment of those potent stag fertility gods. As such he would be an equal to the goddess, at least in the way that she travels to Visitor World (our world) and acts like a goddess. He would be Power, which is the polar opposite of Love. But William North is Power (thundering temper, thundering guns), and the hero rejects that.

=mantis=

cilluff1 at optonline.net — 14 Jan 2003, 23:29 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis wrote:

<<Since "identity" is such a strong part of TAD, and since the goddess clearly has so many names, it seems like an unnecessary straitjacket to identify a single name as the hero's.....

I am struck by the sense of continuity between the men who are lovers of the goddess, but I don't know if it is exclusively the "Wolfe reincarnation" theme or the "Wolfe spirit possession"

theme. That is to say, is Green a reincarnation of Captain Billy?>>>

This was my take on it. In support of this, the goddess supplies the name Adam for the hero, making me think that he is the "first man" for her split again and again through all these worlds/lives. Also, she does not comment or reply to his comment that she is drawn to men name William. Of course, North and Klamm both are Williams, and the hero obviously is not them -- although perhaps I should just say he does not seem to be them. I guess the fact that he meets them does not preclude them really being the "same" person from different worlds. In fact, this would explain why Klamm calls the hero "Herr Kay," which is his own name.

The only wrinkle in the "hero as reincarnated Cpt. Billy" theory is Lara's bread test, where he must drop the piece of bread into the wine and if it sinks he can follow her. Why would he need to do this if he really were the same man that Lara herself has been "following" (or at least "finding") again and again? Of course, the dropping the bread into the wine obviously conjures up the Catholic sacrament of Communion, and suggests that the hero is in a sense being brought from the dead or reborn.

<<<William North is trying to overthrow the government, if not the whole civilization. He is all about Power. He seems to be trying to create a masculinist movement or subvert existing ones in order to shake things up. His taking on the name "William" may be an attempt on his part to lure the goddess into pistol range. More than a rabble-rouser, more than an iconoclast, he may be a wannabe goddess-killer.>>

Interesting take that North is not really William, but takes it on to lure the goddess. I do like your reasoning though, but am not sure how he would know the goddess likes Bills.

<<In making this choice, while he is being true to himself and his dream, he is also paradoxically conforming to Overworld: where men die for Love.>>

I'm not sure why he would die. He can have sexual relations with a woman and live even in the other world -- Fanny herself remarked as such. So why would it be death to follow the goddess? I have only read TAD once but must have missed that part, I trust your keen eye to have picked it up but where is this reference?

Roy C. Lackey — 15 Jan 2003, 07:47 · follows cilluff1 at optonline.net

mantis wrote:

THERE ARE DOORS is, I think, an interesting take on the work of Robert Graves: the most Gravesean work Wolfe has ever done.

Oh, no! Not you, too! <g>

William North is trying to overthrow the government, if not the whole civilization. He is all about Power. He seems to be trying to create a masculinist movement or subvert existing ones in order to shake things up. His taking on the name "William" may be an attempt on his part to lure the goddess into pistol range. More than a rabble-rouser, more than an iconoclast, he may be a wannabe goddess-killer. (Thus the battle seen by Graves between the goddess and the usurping thunder god.)

You have noted Graves' position vis-a-vis earth and sky; needless to say, Graves' sympathies were with the goddess. Wolfe's, needless to say, are with the other side. That being so, North, the wannabe goddess-killer, would be, in effect, in the service of the God of the Bible. Green, following the goddess, would be lusting after the very sort of figure that the Old Testament prophets were forever railing against.

That would make North a good guy, Green a bad guy, in Wolfe's cosmology, wouldn't it? How can this reading square with Wolfe's known religious views, and his own opinion that THERE ARE DOORS is his best book?

-Roy

Adam Stephanides — 16 Jan 2003, 13:54 · follows Roy C. Lackey

on 1/14/03 5:29 PM, cilluff1 at optonline.net at cilluff1 at optonline.net wrote:
Of course, North and Klamm both are Williams, and the hero obviously is not them --
although perhaps I should just say he does not seem to be them. I guess the fact that he meets them does not preclude them really being the "same" person from different worlds. In fact, this would explain why Klamm calls the hero "Herr Kay," which is his own name.

Klamm calls the hero "Herr Kay" because Klamm is a character from Kafka's THE CASTLE, and the protagonist of that book is always referred to as K. I don't know why Klamm says K. "was myself also," though. (303, hc) Nor do I know why he calls K. "an old friend": in THE CASTLE Klamm never speaks to K., nor is there any hint that Klamm has any personal interest in K.

Mantis's suggestion that Klamm is modelled on Kissinger is an intriguing one, which hadn't occurred to me; but I would imagine Wolfe would be likely to loathe Kissinger, both for being "soft on Communism" and for his amoral approach to foreign policy (the polar opposite of the Narrator's "statecraft" in TBOTSS).

--Adam

cilluff1 at optonline.net — 16 Jan 2003, 14:41 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam wrote:

<<Klamm calls the hero "Herr Kay" because Klamm is a character from Kafka's THE CASTLE, and the protagonist of that book is always referred to as K. I don't know why Klamm says K. "was myself also," though. (303, hc) Nor do I know why he calls K. "an old friend": in THE CASTLE Klamm never speaks to K., nor is there any hint that Klamm has any personal interest in K.>>

The Kafka reference is straightforward, you are certainly right there, but Wolfe must have had something else in mind other than a thinly veiled (if veiled at all) reference to someone else's story. Without a doubt the names are an homage, but I think it doesn't go far enough simply to detect references to others' works in Wolfe's stories, and simply because it is a reference to Kafka doesn't mean there is a reason within TAD's universe for why Klamm calls him Herr Kay, or that TAD's Klamm is little more than a transplant to TAD's universe of Kafka's Klamm.

<<<Mantis's suggestion that Klamm is modelled on Kissinger is an intriguing one, which hadn't occurred to me; but I would imagine Wolfe would be likely to loathe Kissinger, both for being "soft on Communism" and for his amoral approach to foreign policy (the polar opposite of the Narrator's "statecraft" in TBOTSS).>>

Well, that criticism assumes that GW views Klamm sympathetically as he would not if Klamm=Kissinger. Kissinger is soft on communism, and Klamm is soft on the matriarchal, paganist society of the goddess: perhaps GW views both as, and intended both to be, unsympathetic, soft characters.

James Wynn — 15 Jan 2003, 21:15 · follows cilluff1 at optonline.net

Roy responding to Mantis:

You have noted Graves' position vis-a-vis earth and sky; needless to say, Graves' sympathies were with the goddess. Wolfe's, needless to say, are with the other side. That being so, North, the wannabe goddess-killer, would be, in effect, in the service of the God of the Bible. Green, following the goddess, would be lusting after the very sort of figure that the Old Testament prophets were forever railing against.

That would make North a good guy, Green a bad guy, in Wolfe's cosmology, wouldn't it? How can this reading square with Wolfe's known religious views, and his own opinion that THERE ARE DOORS is his best book?

Crush butts in:

I'd say at this point, Wolfe enchantment by Graves' White Goddess is a foregone conclusion -- trackable over several novels and series. So the question is rather "What does Graves' White Goddess mean to Wolfe considering his Christianity".

Soooo, here I go:

Wolfe almost always presents the Goddess stand-ins as generally in league with his protagonists (in the Soldier series there's some ambiguity here). In the Long Sun, the Goddess' aspect as Love (Kypris/Aphrodite) is the Vironese/Pagan image of the Outsider/Christian God --- the image selected by the Outsider for himself.

Now, consider that Wolfe himself came to Christianity by **first** falling in love with his eventual wife, Rosemary.

Perhaps Wolfe believes that the true God drew him to Himself through something so sublunary (note the pun) as romantic love. Perhaps that is the story he is telling over and over through Graves' White Goddess.

-- Crush

Andy Robertson — 17 Jan 2003, 11:11 · follows James Wynn

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

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at HotPOP.com>

Wolfe almost always presents the Goddess stand-ins as generally in league with his protagonists (in the Soldier series there's some ambiguity here).

In the Long Sun, the Goddess' aspect as Love (Kypris/Aphrodite) is the Vironese/Pagan image of the Outsider/Christian God --- the image selected by the Outsider for himself.

I think we have to look to what seems to be that traditional mode of Catholic Fabulation, the creation of "little gods".

To put it baldly, Catholicism came from the imposition of a male-centered Semitic religion on top of a dyarchical male/female European pantheon. The Goddess keeps on bubbling back up - as Mary, as Theresa - and the Little Gods start reappearing as Saints.

In Catholic Fabulation, the Little Gods (the remains of the old male/female aryan pantheon) pop up again and again.

You see this in Lewis, with his eldils, and in Tolkien with his Valar: in Chesterton's Sunday: and you see it in Laffery with his numerous trickster-gods and demons.

And of course in Wolfe, you see if NOT with say the gods of mainframe (who are not simply false images of God, but false replicas of the Little Gods) but in the numerous lost and fugitive images of ambiguous sub-divinity - Tzadkiel, and the Mother, for example.

(I had a point somewhere, but , . .)

The goddess in "There are doors" seems to me to be a conscious but unsuccessful attempt to address this *directly*. Wolfe is addressing the "little god" theme directly, rather than subconsciously, and it does not really work. Which is why it is not a very satisfying book, full of loss and emptiness.

hartshorn

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jan 2003, 16:00 · follows Andy Robertson

Hartshorn declaimed:

In Catholic Fabulation, the Little Gods (the remains of the old male/female aryan pantheon) pop up again and again.

Well, that's one way of looking at it. A Catholic perspective might be a bit different -- either mumbling about "foreshadowing," or, more constructively, suggesting that the pantheon was there because the structure of the True Faith[tm] is deep in the human psyche and so we naturally create mythologies that resemble it. (A particularly extreme Catholic might simply deny that there was any connection at all.) And some - this is the direction I tend - would claim that in taking up the "good" of the local religions, Catholicism essentially "baptises" them, viz. St Brigid.

You see this in Lewis, with his eldils, and in Tolkien with his Valar: in Chesterton's Sunday: and you see it in Laffery with his numerous trickster-gods and demons.

Whoa. Hee-haw. Hey. HOLD IT.

1. Lewis wasn't a Catholic and would have been very annoyed at you for suggesting he was.

2. The Eldila and the Valar are not "local gods"; they're angelic powers, pure and simple.

Tolkien uses the term "gods" of the Valar to make clearer the difference in power between them and the Children of Ilúvatar. I strongly suspect that, if he had ever published the Silm., he might have deleted that word.

Lewis's Eldila ... well, it's a bit more complex, but the short version is (1) Each planet has its governing spirit, or oyarsa; (2) each of these has a sort of miniature version or reflection on each of the other planets; (3) the oyarsa of Earth is, of course, Satan; (4) the mini-oyarses of Earth, fallen with their master, fool humans into thinking that they are the gods of mythology. In short, the old explanation that the "gods" are demons (fallen angels) tricking humanity.

3. Friday is pretty clearly not a "little god" but God.

4. I haven't read Lafferty in a dog's age...

Andy Robertson — 17 Jan 2003, 16:25 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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

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

1. Lewis wasn't a Catholic and would have been very annoyed at you for suggesting he was.

No, he was a Mere Christian. But he wrote CATHOLIC FABULATION. Which is essentially science fiction that presumes the Catholic God really, objectively, exists, and sort of goes on from there.

2. The Eldila and the Valar are not "local gods"; they're angelic powers, pure and simple.

Within the constraints of CF this is the only possibility. There is only one God. But the lesser angels start looking like little gods.

You will find that Lewis attributes the term "god" to his Oyarses in full knowledge of the fact that the medaeval syncretists did exactly the same - calling each tutelary angel a "god" and identifying it with the classical figure.

It is really illuminating to consider Wolfe's work and in particular his treatment of "gods" through the prism of Tolkien and Lewis

3. Friday is pretty clearly not a "little god" but God.

Sunday, surely? Well, maybe you are right there.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jan 2003, 16:39 · follows Andy Robertson

1. Lewis wasn't a Catholic and would have been very annoyed at you for suggesting he was.

No, he was a Mere Christian.

No, he was a high-church Anglican. He wrote about "mere Christianity" because he (correctly) regarded the "basics" of the Christian faith as more important than the differences between the various denominations. (In fact, he had somewhat hostile attitudes towards Catholicism, though not towards Catholics.)

But he wrote CATHOLIC FABULATION. Which is essentially science fiction that presumes the Catholic God really, objectively, exists, and sort of goes on from there.

You here conflate the terms "Catholic" and "Christian." While "Catholic" is a sub-set of "Christian," it does not therefore follow that all Christian fabulation is Catholic.

2. The Eldila and the Valar are not "local gods"; they're angelic powers, pure and simple.

Within the constraints of CF this is the only possibility.
There is only one God. But the lesser angels start looking like little gods.

... if little gods is what you are inclined to see, yes. I believe that you are viewing these Christian fabulists through the spectacles of your own inclinations, whatever those may be.

You will find that Lewis attributes the term "god" to his Oyarses in full knowledge of the fact that the medaeval

syncretists did exactly the same - calling each tutelary angel a "god" and identifying it with the classical figure.

Mmm. I don't know enough about "tutelary angels" to answer this. I am quite certain, however, that Lewis's use of the term "gods" wrt the Oyarses was not intended to suggest that they were gods, but that humans would take them for gods. A niggling difference, perhaps, from where you sit; from where Lewis sat, it would seem quite important - the difference between harmless or even "wholesome" fabulation and heresy, in fact. -- note that I do not argue that your point of view is "wrong," only that one shouldn't attribute its views and conclusions to Lewis (Tolkien, etc.).

It is really illuminating to consider Wolfe's work and in particular his treatment of "gods" through the prism of Tolkien and Lewis

With this, at least, I have no quarrel -- even agree. Wolfe is working in a kind of tradition that would include all four of the writers you name.

3. Friday is pretty clearly not a "little god" but God.

Sunday, surely? Well, maybe you are right there.

Duuuh. Terminal brainfart. Yes, Sunday.

--Dan'l

Matthew Weber — 17 Jan 2003, 16:40 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

At 04:25 PM 1/17/03 +0000, Andy wrote:

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

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

1. Lewis wasn't a Catholic and would have been very annoyed at you for suggesting he was.

You could say he was a "small-c" catholic. The Apostles' and the Nicene Creed (both of which are features of the Anglican Church's Morning Prayer & Communion services) each include a line professing belief in "the holy catholic church". Obviously, he had doctrinal differences with the Church of Rome, but it didn't prevent him from accepting them as fellow Christians.

No, he was a Mere Christian. But he wrote CATHOLIC FABULATION. Which is essentially science fiction that presumes the Catholic God really, objectively, exists, and sort of goes on from there.

Lewis was an Anglican, and not just because of the accident of his having been born in England. There's no indication in any of his devotional or didactic writings that he disagreed with any of the teachings of the C. of E.

MERE CHRISTIANITY should be understood, not as an explication of the totality of Lewis' beliefs and sympathies, but--as the title states--the "bottom line" of Christian belief and practice; i.e., what all Christian sects, denominations, and divisions hold in common despite their doctrinal and practical differences. I don't have a copy handy, but I'm fairly sure it was intended as a primer for non-Christians, or non-practicing Christians.

Matthew Weber
Curatorial Assistant
Music Library
University of California, Berkeley

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

The Holy Bible (The Old Testament): _The Book of Job_, chapter 13, verse 15

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jan 2003, 16:52 · follows Matthew Weber

Lewis was an Anglican, and not just because of the accident of his having been born in England.

Northern Ireland, actually...

There's no indication in any of his devotional or didactic writings that he disagreed with any of the teachings of the C. of E.

Well, there's a quibble, and one that shows him to be very High Church indeed: in "Letters to Malcolm" he indicates, if not a belief, at least a _desire_ to believe, in Purgatory.

(who is beginning to think he knows far more about CSL than he should)

Andy Robertson — 17 Jan 2003, 17:03 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

---- Original Message ----

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

To: <urth at urth.net>

Mmm. I don't know enough about "tutelary angels" to answer this. I am quite certain, however, that Lewis's use of the term "gods" wrt the Oyarses was not intended to suggest that they were gods, but that humans would take them for gods.

I should explain that reading C S Lewis's books converted me to Christianity when I was young (but I got better) , and I was an obsessive fan of Lewis, Tolkien and the Inklings for years.

I think, however, that you are fearing a word here.

When Lewis wrote (at the triumphant climax of PERELANDRA) that his hero was no longer going to regard Malacandra and Perelandra as eldilia, but as "Mars and Venus" I believe he fully understood everything that you are worried about and more.

I invite you to reread that bit.

Whether or not this is heresy does not concern me, much. I am an Asatruistic pagan nowadays :).

What I am trying to explain by the coinage "Catholic Fabulation" is that there is a tradition of storytelling that runs along these lines.

It includes the Inklings' work (Williams too) but does NOT include such unambiguously religious works as, for example, A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ

The difference lies in the treatment of the supernatural.

CF embraces the supernatural and ****enables**** it:

It occurs in the stories, but in drag, in disguise.

The keynote is that angels or demons or gods pop up and they pretend to be aliens. God pops up, but he pretends to be The Increate or The Emperor Over The Sea.

I believe Wolfe is writing WITHIN that tradition.

I further believe it goes back a long way - and that it is a very European tradition, enforced by the historical fact that the ancient giants and gods and fairies had to be fitted into a dominating Semitic/Christian framework.

It occurs in many Arthurian romances, for example, where the ancient Celtic legends have to be jammed into the framework of Christian explanation: and so in Beowulf.

Tolkien reflexed back on this - he was in love with "The Northern Thing" like Lewis, but he had to fit it within "The Southern Thing" - Christianity - as a worldview. Wolfe is doing the same thing and may be taking both Tolkien and Lewis as mentors.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jan 2003, 17:43 · follows Andy Robertson

I should explain that reading C S Lewis's books converted me to Christianity when I was young (but I got better) , and I was an obsessive fan of Lewis, Tolkien and the Inklings for years.

Those books, and especially "Mere Christianity," preserved me in Christian faith at a time when I was particularly prone to falling off. I find them far less, ah, persuasive now, but they served their purpose at the time.

I think, however, that you are fearing a word here.

Perhaps. I think, rather, that I am attempting to use words clearly. Words tend to get in between us and "reality," but we can minimize that by using them carefully (and remembering not to let them use us).

When Lewis wrote (at the triumphant climax of PERELANDRA) that his hero was no longer going to regard Malacandra and Perelandra as eldilia, but as "Mars and Venus" I believe he fully understood everything that you are worried about and more.

I invite you to reread that bit.

Well, I agree with what you say, and while I disagree with your interpretation of it, I don't think the list at large probably cares very much, so I'll drop it at this point.

Whether or not this is heresy does not concern me, much.

This was not my point; nor do I (as a practicing Catholic) necessarily consider it heresy. My point was that _Lewis_, who was far more conservative than I, would have considered it heresy, and so a liberal dose of caution is indicated prior to attributing such a view to him.

I am an Asatruistic pagan nowadays :).

And I don't even know what that means. Neither the dictionary nor Google helped me any.

What I am trying to explain by the coinage "Catholic Fabulation" is that there is a tradition of storytelling that runs along these lines.

It includes the Inklings' work (Williams too) but does NOT include such unambiguously religious works as, for example, A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWIZT

I suppose I'm quibbling about the word "Catholic" because it seems confining - you point out Williams, and I agree; I might add Tim Powers and James Blaylock as writers who have worked in this tradition. Possibly Connie Willis, but that may be pushing your intent.

And the point of my quibble is that the word "Catholic" is so strongly associated, in most peoples' minds, with the Roman Catholic church that -- well, that I didn't even feel a need to say "Roman" when I identified my own denominational association above. It seems better to use the word (mere) Christian to avoid confusion - for, again, clarity.

The difference lies in the treatment of the supernatural.

CF embraces the supernatural and ****enables**** it:

It occurs in the stories, but in drag, in disguise.

The keynote is that angels or demons or gods pop up and they pretend to be aliens. God pops up, but he pretends to be The Increate or The Emperor Over The Sea.

I believe Wolfe is writing WITHIN that tradition.

Nothing here I'd even begin to disagree with. You've identified the elements of a tradition that (as you say) goes back a long way. However, this ...

I further believe it goes back a long way - and that it is a very European tradition, enforced by the historical fact that the ancient giants and gods and fairies had to be fitted into a dominating Semitic/Christian framework.

while related, seems to be almost the reverse process: where CF (I like the initials, they're usefully ambiguous 8*)) disguises Christian entities as "naturalistic" entities -- eg, angels as aliens -- the older syncretism disguised non- Christian entities as Christian entities -- e.g, a goddess as St. Brigid.

It occurs in many Arthurian romances, for example, where the ancient Celtic legends have to be jammed into the framework of Christian explanation: and so in Beowulf.

I think what's going on in Beowulf is a bit more complex -- if you've read "The Monsters and the Critics?" To do with the poetic expression of a transitional period when the culture had nominally adopted Christianity but was still largely pagan in outlook, language, and traditions.

Tolkien reflexed back on this - he was in love with "The Northern Thing" like Lewis, but he had to fit it within "The Southermn Thing" - Christianity - as a worldview. Wolfe is doing the same thing and may be taking both Tolkien and Lewis as mentors.

Again, I should not be the least surprised. He could do far worse.

Andy Robertson — 17 Jan 2003, 18:39 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

OK. Do you have a better term than "Catholic fabulation?" It seems that would resolve our remaining differences.

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

From: "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com> Again, I should not be the least surprised. He could do far worse.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jan 2003, 18:52 · follows Andy Robertson

OK. Do you have a better term than "Catholic fabulation?"
It seems that would resolve our remaining differences.

I guess I don't understand why "Christian Fabulation" won't do here, which is why I like the idea of just calling it "CF" and leaving the "C" semi-ambiguous. Though "CatFab" has a nice ring to it.

Your use of the word Catholic seems to stem from the proposition that "Catholicism came from the imposition of a male-centered Semitic religion on top of a dyarchical male/female European pantheon." While this is accurate enough from one point of view, it seems to me that, at the time and in the place where this occurred, the words "Catholic" and "Christian" were essentially synonymous ... and since the Orthodox church inherits much of the same thing, the primary function of saying "Catholic" here would be to exclude "Protestant" Christianity. Yet members of Protestant sects definitely seem to write this sort of thing ...

I also understand that you want a word which would exclude, say, A CANTICLE FOR LIEBOWITZ. (H'mmm ... would you include A CASE OF CONSCIENCE, or HYPERION?) It seems to me that the word "fabulation" does that fairly effectively. Or perhaps "Christian Mythopoeic Fantasy," which would be accurate but ugly ...

Matthew Weber — 17 Jan 2003, 19:02 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

At 11:52 AM 1/17/03 -0700, Dan'l wrote:
Your use of the word Catholic seems to stem from the proposition that "Catholicism came from the imposition of a male-centered Semitic religion on top of a dyarchical male/female European pantheon."

Dan'l, I think I'm getting your posts before Andy's, so excuse me for reacting to him through you.

Anyway, what exactly is this "dyarchical male/female European pantheon"? Are we talking about the Horned God & Lady thing? I thought it had been pretty well established that the so-called Old Religion was mostly invented by Gerald Gardner. There were multitudes of local practices and beliefs across the whole of Europe, and lots of them were similar, but Wotan is not Zeus is not Lud.

Oh, and to answer your question, Asatru is a contemporary revival of Old Norse pre-Christian religion.

Matthew Weber
Curatorial Assistant
Music Library
University of California, Berkeley

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.
The Holy Bible (The Old Testament): _The Book of Job_, chapter 13, verse 15

Matthew Weber — 18 Jan 2003, 02:54 · follows Matthew Weber

Lewis was an Anglican, and not just because of the accident of his having been born in England.
Northern Ireland, actually...

Coorect, of course.

There's no indication in any of his devotional or didactic writings that he disagreed with any of the teachings of the C. of E.

Well, there's a quibble, and one that shows him to be very High Church indeed: in "Letters to Malcolm" he indicates, if not a belief, at least a _desire_ to believe, in Purgatory.

Although it's true that the 39 Articles pooh-pooh Purgatory, it's important to remember that they were written by Puritans. Modern Anglo-Catholic practice and belief tramples all over them.

I think Lewis' A-C tendencies have been overstated by the Hooper wing of Lewisites, just as the Wheaton College wing has overstated his evangelical leanings. The reality of Lewis is more complex than either (see A. N. Wilson's biography for a fairly balanced portrayal).

Matt

To many people Victorian wit and humor is summed up by Punch, whose every joke is supposed to end with "Collapse of Stout Party", though this phrase tends to be as elusive as "Elementary, my dear Watson" in the Sherlock Holmes sagas.

R. Pearsall, Collapse of Stout Party (1975), Introduction

Adam Stephanides — 18 Jan 2003, 15:39 · follows Matthew Weber

on 1/15/03 1:47 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:
You have noted Graves' position vis-a-vis earth and sky; needless to say, Graves' sympathies were with the goddess. Wolfe's, needless to say, are with the other side. That being so, North, the wannabe goddess-killer, would be, in effect, in the service of the God of the Bible. Green, following the goddess, would be lusting after the very sort of figure that the Old Testament prophets were forever railing against.

That would make North a good guy, Green a bad guy, in Wolfe's cosmology, wouldn't it? How can this reading square with Wolfe's known religious views, and his own opinion that THERE ARE DOORS is his best book?

I can't comment on the Graves angle. But my reading of the book, for what it's worth, is that it takes off from a certain view of gender relations which around that time, iirc, had been popularized by George Gilder's book SEXUAL SUICIDE, though I doubt it originated with him. As I understand it (not having read Gilder), this view asserts that men are naturally predatory and violent, and that it is women who keep civilization going by luring men into going against their nature and becoming husbands and fathers. (Gilder went on to say that the "bait" with which women lured men was the role of patriarchal superiority in the home, and hence feminism would destroy civilization by removing the incentive for men to become family men; but I don't see this part as being reflected in TAD.) Whether or not Wolfe believes this, it seems to me that in TAD he is dramatizing this view by pushing it to the extreme. In Otherworld, the survival of humanity itself depends upon women persuading men to give up, not their unbridled masculinity, but their very lives. This persuasion is what North is rebelling against: the male conspirators in the play North's group puts on have apparently taken vows of celibacy. If North were to succeed, the result would not be patriarchy but extinction; so it's not inconsistent of Wolfe to prefer the Goddess over North.

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 20 Jan 2003, 17:03 · follows Adam Stephanides

on 1/16/03 8:41 AM, cilluff1 at optonline.net at cilluff1 at optonline.net wrote:
The Kafka reference is straightforward, you are certainly right there, but Wolfe must have had something else in mind other than a thinly veiled (if veiled at all) reference to someone else's story. Without a doubt the names are an homage, but I think it doesn't go far enough simply to detect references to others' works in Wolfe's stories, and simply because it is a reference to Kafka doesn't mean there is a reason within TAD's universe for why Klamm calls him Herr Kay, or that TAD's Klamm is little more than a transplant to TAD's universe of Kafka's Klamm.

Klamm is a transplant to TAD's universe of Kafka's Klamm, although older. TAD's Klamm is "a crag-faced old man with long, pointed mustaches dyed jet black and cheeks pulled flaccidly downward by the weight of years." (96) In THE CASTLE, Klamm's "face was still smooth, but his cheeks were already somewhat flabby with age. His black moustache had long points..." (Chap. 3, Muir translation)

While I don't understand the connection between TAD and THE CASTLE, I have no doubt that the explanation for Klamm's calling Green Herr Kay lies there.

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 20 Jan 2003, 17:03 · follows Adam Stephanides

on 1/17/03 11:03 AM, Andy Robertson at andywrobertson at clara.co.uk wrote:
What I am trying to explain by the coinage "Catholic Fabulation" is that there is a tradition of storytelling that runs along these lines.

It includes the Inklings' work (Williams too) but does NOT include such unambiguously religious works as, for example, A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWIZT

The difference lies in the treatment of the supernatural.

CF embraces the supernatural and ****enables**** it:

It occurs in the stories, but in drag, in disguise.

The keynote is that angels or demons or gods pop up and they pretend to be aliens. God pops up, but he pretends to be The Increate or The Emperor Over The Sea.

I believe Wolfe is writing WITHIN that tradition.

I confess that I'm not quite clear on this. Wolfe's fiction is full of gods and goddesses explicitly identified as such. And in TBOTNS, God is no more "pretending" to be the Increate than Earth is pretending to be Urth: "the Increate" is how the Commonwealth refers to God. As for cases like Tzadkiel and the Mother, here it's a matter of interpretation whether they're gods and angels pretending to be aliens, or aliens pretending to be gods and aliens. I don't remember UotNS too well, but in the case of the Mother my money would be on the latter.

Lafferty, who you mentioned in an earlier post, seems to fit even less well, though I haven't read him in a long time either. While many of his characters are extraordinary in various ways, I'd say that they are nearly all clearly human (even when they're aliens or ktestic machines). The only gods I can recall offhand in his works are Snuffles (from the story of the same name) and Anteros (from "Continued on Next Rock").

I don't know Lewis or Tolkien well enough to comment. But in general, is there anything specifically "Christian" about the use of gods in fantasy? It seems to me to be virtually ubiquitous, from Dunsany (where it's clearly pagan in inspiration) to Gaiman's "Sandman" series to the run-off-the-mill ersatz-Tolkien trilogy.

--Adam

Andy Robertson — 20 Jan 2003, 17:12 · follows Adam Stephanides

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

From: "Adam Stephanides" <adamsteph at earthlink.net>

To: <urth at urth.net>

As for cases like Tzadkiel

and the Mother, here it's a matter of interpretation whether they're gods and angels pretending to be aliens, or aliens pretending to be gods and aliens.

The whole point of Catholic Fabulation is this.

"One thinks in one mood, for example, of fairies, elves and goblins - and in quite another of Mr Wells' Selenites or his Martians. But whenever one is forced to recognise a creature in either class as *real*, the distinction becomes blurred. And in the case of the eldils, it vanishes altogether . . ."

C S Lewis, quoted very inaccurately, from PERELANDRA

Adam Stephanides — 22 Jan 2003, 14:51 · follows Andy Robertson

on 1/14/03 3:53 PM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:

like insects, society is divided into the

mass of sterile female workers and super-fertile queens (little doubt here)

Could you elaborate? It's been a long time since I've read the novel, but I don't recall any indications of this.

--Adam