

The proper quote to define Catholic Fabulation

The Urth list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 20 Jan 2003

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Andy Robertson — 20 Jan 2003, 17:17

C S Lewis, PERELANDRA, first chapter somewhere

As to my intense wish never to come into contact with the eldila myself, I am not sure whether I can make you understand it. It was something more than a prudent desire to avoid creatures alien in kind, very powerful, and very intelligent. The truth was that all I heard about them served to connect two things which one's mind tends to keep separate, and that connecting gave one a sort of shock.

We tend to think about non-human intelligences in two distinct categories which we label "scientific" and "supernatural" respectively. We think, in one mood, of Mr. (H. G.) Wells' Martians (very unlike the real Malacandrians, by the bye), or his Selenites.

In quite a different mood we let our minds loose on the possibility of angels, ghosts, fairies, and the like.

But the very moment we are compelled to recognize a creature in either class as real the distinction begins to get blurred: and when it is a creature like an eldil the distinction vanishes altogether.

These things were not animals and to that extent one had to classify them with the second group; but they had some kind of material vehicle whose presence could (in principle) be scientifically verified. To that extent they belonged to the first group.

The distinction between natural and supernatural, in fact, broke down; and when it had done so, one realized how great a comfort it had been and how it had eased the burden of intolerable strangeness which this universe imposes on us by dividing it into two halves and encouraging the mind never to think of both in the same context.

What a price we may have paid for this comfort in the way of false security and accepted confusion of thought is another matter.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jan 2003, 17:32 · follows Andy Robertson

Yes: an excellent description of the method of the type of writing you are using the term "catholic fabulation" to describe -- and, I think, one of the earliest bits Lewis wrote under the clear influence of Williams, whose basic method in fiction this seems to be; this influence would almost completely direct the growth of Lewis' last two novels for adults, *THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH* and *TILL WE HAVE FACES* -- for my money, his worst and best novels for grownups, respectively.

It still remains a puzzlement to me why the word "catholic" seems to have such a grip on you for describing a body of work written at least as much by non-Catholics, and which seems to this Catholic, at least, to have no specifically-Catholic idea, method, or content. But let that

pass, because whatever label eventually fits this, it seems to me that you've got hold of a very real, if somewhat evasive, thread of literary-fantastic tradition here, one quite separate from the one labelled "magical realism" -- a label which too often gets applied indiscriminately to any seriously intentioned work of fantasy set (more or less) in the "real" world. So to recognize this separate thread is far more important than what we call it.

Andy Robertson — 20 Jan 2003, 17:50 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Only because I don't know a better one.

I had resolved to call it "Christian Mythopoeic Fabulation" - but the fact is it could as well be done in, for example, an Islamic world, if that world had any tradition of SF.

But of course it doesn't.

CF requires a fusion of Science Fiction and the religious worldview into one thing.

But SF is a hypostatisation of the European tradition of voyaging and colonisation, and that tradition does not exist in other cultures.

Nor, really, in Eastern Europe, so far from the sea -

Which is in fact why "Catholic" is not so bad a fit. But I'd still prefer another name.

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

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

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James Jordan — 20 Jan 2003, 18:08 · follows Andy Robertson

At 11:50 AM 1/20/2003, you wrote:

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Perhaps an example of Russian Orthodox SF Fabulation can be considered. I recently rewatched Tarkovsky's SOLARIS ("SolYARis" in Russian), which has been released on DVD by Criterion. The accompanying discussions were interesting, but I think missed something important. In Russian Orthodoxy, the Spirit of God empowers nature (that's really true in all Christian thought, but has

been stressed in RO). The water and nature scenes in the film have to do with the Spirit. The watery planet Solaris also has to do with God and the Spirit. Tarkovsky could not do everything he wanted in the film, because Lem did not like the religious aspects, and Tarkovsky had to fool the censors. But on the space station near Solaris, near to the Spirit of God, men find themselves forced to confront their sins, and either repent or go mad. The Spirit is operating in this heavenly realm. Descending (ascending fully) to Solaris at the end, the now penitent son is reconciled to a "heavenly father" generated by the planet, in the pose of Rembrandt's "Prodigal Son" (which hangs in the Hermitage, and with which any Russian intellectual was very familiar). As the son begins to repent on the space station, we see an icon in passing as the camera surveys the room. In the last scene, on Solaris, the water of the lake is frozen, iconic. It is the heavenly "sea of glass" before the throne of God. In this way, Tarkovsky makes a religious allegory out of Lem's novel.

FWIW.

Nutria

Andy Robertson — 20 Jan 2003, 18:35 · follows James Jordan

This really is awfully good.

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

From: "James Jordan" <jbjordan4 at cox.net>

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James Jordan — 20 Jan 2003, 18:49 · follows Andy Robertson

At 12:35 PM 1/20/2003, you wrote:

This really is awfully good.

Thanks. I had a more negative view of the Tarkovsky the first time I watched it, since I did not know he was a "secret believer" (a point brought out briefly in the Criterion edition discussions, but they don't make much of it). Now that I've "caught on" to the film, I'm interested to see the Soderberg again, and see what if anything he has done with this aspect. But I'll have to wait for the video.

Nutria