

Favorite quotes

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Apr 2003

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Dan Rabin — 12 Apr 2003, 04:34

I agree with Blattid about the beach scene, especially "The idea is absurd. But then, all ideas are absurd," and "I drew off my boots, that had traveled with me so far, and threw them into the waves that I might not walk shod on holy ground" with its echo of Exodus 3:5 (Moses before the Burning Bush).

I am also very fond of the speech of the mate-vendor at Saltus Fair:

"Oh, it rose all right. When my grandson-in-law heard about it, he was fairly struck flat for half a day. Then he pasted up a kind of hat out of paper and held it over my stove, and it went up, and then he thought it was nothing that the cathedral rose, no miracle at all. That shows what it is to be a fool--it never came to him that the reason things were made so was so the cathedral would rise just like it did. He can't see the Hand in nature."

This has something in common with the passage about symbols inventing us, with Wolfe twisting the modern scientific attitude around into a defense of the religious attitude.

But I also agree with Mr. Danehy-Oakes that it's the quality of the construction more so than the striking nature of the sentences in isolation that characterize Wolfe's writing.

I just opened *_Shadow and Claw_* to find the quote above, and I started to marvel once more at how much Wolfe packs into the first chapter of *_The Book of the New Sun_*. We learn in the first paragraph that the narrator, Severian, may have known his future, was a torturer's apprentice, has experienced exile, and also a near-drowning. There follows an exciting fight involving some aristocrats who are doing something involving a recent grave, and a bunch of commoners who want to stop them. The narrator comes in on the side of Vodalus, and concludes the chapter by reflecting, "I was quite correct--it was, as I sensed, perfectly feasible for me to serve Vodalus and remain a torturer. It was in this fashion that I began the long journey by which I have backed into the throne."

Well, I've known people who never finish reading *_New Sun_*, but I can't imagine anybody stopping right there, with a once-exiled present ruler claiming that his acceptance that he could serve both the state and its enemies made him the Autarch he is today. Must be quite a story in that.

(Of course, his predecessor was doing the exact same thing. Did I notice the connection before now? No. Did it have an effect on me anyhow? Of course--things act of themselves, or not at all!)

-- Dan Rabin