

Baldanders, Acies Castle & the Citadel

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 29 Jul 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4127>

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Andrew Bollen — 29 Jul 2003, 04:55

Very tangentially ... One of the things which makes me a gushing GW fan-boy is the realistic depth to his worlds, despite all the fantasy elements. A small example: I see a natural progression from Baldander's castle, to Acies Castle at Thrax, to the Citadel (or maybe all of Nessus).

In each case, these correspond in purpose to castles historically: not so much to guard against foreign enemies, as to keep a local population in subjugation. (See the afterword to Lictor, talking about Acies; and Jonas' half-finished story presumably about the wall of Nessus in Torturer).

And the Diturna-Thrax-Nessus progression also corresponds to the development of power and nobility common in history: a local brigand establishes his power over a district with a rough fortification; in time his rule becomes established over a wider area and rooted in some kind of noble tradition; once empires form, the most successful brigand gets to rule everything, including the now-provincial barons and magnates, who become his legates and satraps. The Romans seemed to have a strong sense of this progression, an awareness perhaps that their rulers were really just successful brigands underneath all the trappings. When they were able, they would act mightily against any brigands who sought to establish themselves in a fixed position. Eg: Masada - an entire legion out of a total of only about 25 in the whole empire, plus thousands of auxiliaries, against a small band of weak opponents, for many months. I think this kind of progression was probably explicit in GW's thinking about Urth. Baldanders could have become the new Typhon, with better luck.

Chris — 29 Jul 2003, 05:24 · follows Andrew Bollen

Baldanders was the Typhon That Could Have Been, this I think is explicitly intended.

All in all, the allegorical element is so strong with Baldanders, Talos, and Jolenta that my first inclination was to treat Severian as I would a "real" historical author: that is, to say that he invented them to make a point.

All in all I think we pay too little attention to the fact that Severian is, among other things, an author. And despite his disavowals he knows all about literary devices and how to use them properly. And consider this: if Wolfe inventing Borges in a novel is inventive, consider how much more so it is to have Severian (a character invented by Wolfe) invent Borges, or Delaney (who I have not read and can add nothing to the discussion of his influence).

So I think it bears some examination. Is the story of Baldanders an allegory of Wolfe's, or of Severian's? It would be easy to say that it made no difference, but I suspect that it does.

Civet

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Josh Geller — 29 Jul 2003, 06:26 · follows Chris

On Mon, 2003-07-28 at 22:24, Chris wrote:

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I really like the way that you think.

Thecla's friend asked if the Fish was real, Father Inire told her that for an image to exist without something to reflect it is an impossibility. Therefore, the Fish would come into being (I just now noticed that it is a Fish). And at Baldander's castle, Dr. Talos asks Severian if he doesn't realize that events cast their shadow into the past, where they echo and re-echo: see now? The castle, the wise man and the monster?

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Very, very nice.

BTW, I myself don't have a strong opinion one way or the other about Baldanders standing in for Delany. On this list we find all of the puzzles that Gene Wolfe put in his books, all of the puzzles that he didn't put there but are inherent either in the structure of the books or of Reality, all of the puzzles that exist only in our minds, and probably one or two that don't have any existence.

In this connection, I would like to tell y'all a story.

A studious young man, finding himself possessed of unexpected fortune and being both enamored of the pursuit of knowledge and relieved of the necessity of supporting himself, attended the finest universities in his country, but found himself unsatisfied with what was taught.

He heard of a sage who lived quietly apart with a few kindred souls, who gardened and watched the stars, and who were rumored to share a secret knowledge. He humbly introduced himself to them and begged the philosopher to know of their secret. The sage replied that while the secret could be learned, it could not be taught and that if he cared to, the young man could live among them and do as they did, and perhaps he would learn the secret.

That is after all, she added, how we all learned it.

The young man accepted the offer and started living in the community and gardening and watching the stars.

Ten years went by.

The young man learned all that he could from the brethren and felt - and his preceptress agreed - that he was not learning any more. So he went off to search the far and hidden parts of the World, promising to return with whatever he could find.

Twenty years went by. The young man returned, and went to greet his old mentor. They sat quietly for a while.

The sage said, did you find what you were looking for?

I think so, the young man replied.

What is it, then? his teacher asked.

The young man gathered his thoughts and said:

Over the ocean,
The sun rises;
Clouds gather:
Rain falls.

His mentor looked at him for a long moment, and shook her head sadly. She said, look at you. Your hair is grey and sparse. You are missing some teeth. I even see a couple of liver spots on your hands. Ten years you studied here, and twenty years elsewhere, and you are no longer young. Soon you are going to die. This is what you have learned? You are indeed a disappointment.

The no longer young man, shaken, with tears streaming down his cheeks, asked his teacher, please. I beg you. Tell me the secret.

She looked at him and in a voice of passionate intensity said:

Over the ocean,
The sun rises;
Clouds gather:
Rain falls.

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Lisa Schaffer-Doggett — 29 Jul 2003, 07:12 · follows Josh Geller

On Monday, July 28, 2003, at 10:24 PM, Chris wrote:
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by Wolfe) invent Borges, or Delaney (who I have not read and can add nothing to the discussion of his influence).

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Civet

Brilliant! I feel however, that you must soon go mad. Perhaps then you will see that Ymar is the first Severian. hahahahahahahah...ahem.

Chris — 29 Jul 2003, 18:46 · follows Lisa Schaffer-Doggett

Josh said:

Thecla's friend asked if the Fish was real, Father Inire told her that for an image to exist without something to reflect it is an impossibility. Therefore, the Fish would come into being (I just now noticed that it is a Fish).

I always liked that, though it really reminds me something similar I read around the same time but cannot remember. I am tempted to say that it was something from Borges "Labyrinths", but I might be thinking that just because the subject of Borges is fresh.

And at Baldander's castle, Dr. Talos asks Severian if he doesn't realize that events cast their shadow into the past, where they echo and re-echo: see now? The castle, the wise man and the monster?

Particularly interesting, given that Baldanders then slips into the water to join Abaia and the rest; the subsurface "monsters" being seen as events from the past (and presents that might-have-been) casting their shadow on the future.

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Well said.

One of the things about Wolfe which I'm curious about is that I would think he *has* to understand the way in which these puzzles multiply, beyond even what was intended (which is considerable in its own right). Yet in interviews he doesn't come across that way at all; I know it's been commented on before. I guess the general opinion is that he doesn't like to be asked over and over again for simple answers to impossible questions, and employs a sort of "ask a stupid question, get a stupid answer" defense.

On the other hand, it does seem a bit at times like he assumes that the text says nothing more than what he put in it, and that there is a correct reading intended which can be deductively arrived at.

If I had the chance to ask Wolfe one question, I would probably ask him about this rather than anything specific about his stories.

-- Civet