

Wolfe the closet Gnostic.

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Jun 2005

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James Wynn — 24 Jun 2005, 18:41

Crush said

If Wolfe were determined to avoid the chance of people thinking he was endorsing the Gnosticism then he should have avoided making Silk so appealing or naming his hero in The New Sun after a Gnostic sect.

Kieran says

It is this sort of postmodern meta-analysis that I find most annoying.

I seem to have found my way under a lot of people's skins today.

I'll take your points out of order.

Third, do you think Wolfe, the author of such works as "The Detective of Dreams" and "Westwind," would write a pro-Gnostic set of novels?

I don't think so. I said so. However, those novels are not *anti-Gnostic* either. A Gnostic Christian might very happily write those stories. That's why Gnosticism was so difficult for Apostolic Christians to tamp out. Christian systematic theology among the apostolic probably flourished originally just to deal with the Gnostics.

However, I doubt that a Gnostic Christian would attempt to show the *reasonableness* of the Trinity. And I think Wolfe did that in The Book of the Short Sun. So there you have it.

Fifth, name play gets a bit silly. Silk was common in New Testament times, and was called "damask", since it was manufactured in Damascus. No doubt by choosing the name "Silk", Wolfe was making an allusion to the role Syria plays in international terrorism.

ho hum. Are you saying that one should not make too much of Severian's name? When Wolfe clearly was so careful in selecting all his characters' names in the Sun Cycle? Heck, when it comes to name-games Wolfe started it right in the pages of The Long Sun: Tussah->Silk->Chenille. Silk sits around contemplating the curious connection between his name and that of the chem soldier Sand! Wolfe certainly created the Vironese naming convention just to encourage name-play. He was careful in every circumstance in assigning designations to things. I don't find anything silly about name-play in the Sun Cycle. Not to do it to some degree is to totally miss a large part of the story.

Second, Severian's name was chosen 13 years before Silk was created. Do you think that when Wolfe set out to create a character that people whose wardrobe fans would emulate at sci-fi cons, he intended to write a pro-Gnostic work over a decade later?

Severian is named after a Gnostic cult. Silk is an "enlightened" [that's a term used by Gnostics to describe how Jesus became the Christ] savior in a world made by a demiurge...the savior is contacted by the true God *outside* the world. That seems to suggest a knowledge of Christian Gnostic heresies and a deliberate riffing on it for whatever purpose.

First, Gnostic is such a syncretic and malleable tradition that it is possible to read it into almost anything in which a powerful ruling figure is overthrown by appealing to a more benign, more powerful figure.

There's a good deal more to the connection than a ruling figure being overthrown. But you are right to an extent, and I posted something similar today.

Fourth, why should having an appealing hero make him necessarily pro-Gnostic? Isn't Silk closer to Moses than to Christ?

In some ways, yes. But then, the Rajan, who has Silk's face, breaks communion with Olivine. Severian...there's that name again... relives the Temptation of Christ with Typhon as Satan.

But I was responding to Chris saying that Wolfe would NEVER want people to think he was promoting Gnosticism. My point was that he could have done a better job if that were his intention. Silk is a Gnostic hero, I'm not saying that's all he is, but he is that. I don't know *what* exactly Wolfe is driving at with the Gnostic setting, but he was not trying to *attack* Gnosticism. He seems pretty lackadaisical about it to me.

~ Crush