

ATTENDING DAEDALUS

The Urth list — 26 messages, 13 voices, 28 Jan 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4530>

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Roy C. Lackey — 28 Jan 2006, 07:38

Last spring I argued, largely with Adam Stephanides, in large part about the role of the Hierogrammates in the Increate's designs for humanity. Simply put, I contended that the Hierogrammates were doing the Increate's bidding when they did whatever they did to or for Urth's sun, and therefore to that branch of humanity affected by the coming of the New Sun. By "Increate" I meant God, more specifically the Judeo-Christian God, as I believe the term has been commonly understood, aka "Pancreator" and "Outsider".

Recently I received and read Peter Wright's *_Attending Daedalus: Gene Wolfe, Artifice and the Reader_*. The book was written by 1999, but wasn't published until 2003, so the SHORT SUN books were not discussed.

It is unfair to the author to summarize a whole book in a few lines, but it seems to be his contention that the Hierogrammates were selfish manipulators of humanity, that Severian was a hapless, rather foolish puppet, sans divinity in his orchestrated role as Conciliator. He believes that Wolfe wrote the Urth Cycle to be understood this way, that Wolfe played an elaborate mind game with the reader, playing on reader expectations to hoodwink the careless reader into believing otherwise. He even holds that "Increate" doesn't refer to God; it refers to the Hieros.

Wright goes further, suggesting that the LONG SUN and SOLDIER series, and even PANDORA, serve as "metafictional commentary" on the Urth Cycle. If Wright is right, then I've been wrong. Surely others of you have read ATTENDING DAEDALUS. Nigel? I would be interested in hearing other's comments.

-Roy

Chris — 28 Jan 2006, 12:14 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

It has been a little while since I read that book, but it was interesting and thoughtfully put together regardless of questions of whether Wright's interpretation is "right". My general opinion was that he was overly fixated on a particular theme, and proceeded to force all of the data to fit his theory, which in a couple of places led to almost self-contradictory results.

But one place to start in the way of critique, as I recall, is that Wright leans on a couple of premises pretty heavily:

- 1) Wolfe intended his meaning to be clearly understood and so planned from the beginning to provide all the keys necessary for understanding;
- 2) Some of the most crucial elements for understanding the series as a whole are provided in the fifth book, UotNS.

The first premise by itself might be unobjectionable, but putting the two together causes obvious problems. As far as I know Wolfe did not intend to write that fifth book when he

published the first four, and furthermore I seem to recall that Wolfe's take was that UotNS didn't add anything at all to the original theme, just added an additional perspective.

And I wouldn't bring this up just to nitpick, because if anything I'd want to encourage people to read *Attending Daedalus*. But in context - and I would be hard pressed at this point to explain specifically why - his main argument relies so heavily on this picture of UotNS that it doesn't hold together very well without it.

I'd be interested in discussing it further, though. It is a short enough book that I could dig it out and look up the passages in question. And I recall bookmarking a couple pages where Wright adds some really thought-provoking quotes from Wolfe that I hadn't seen anywhere else; those might be worth a post, if I didn't already do so a while back.

Chris

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-Roy

Stanislaus — 29 Jan 2006, 12:46 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Hello Roy,

Saturday, January 28, 2006, 8:38:43 AM, you wrote:

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....

-Roy

First, I wouldn't say that Increate is specifically Judeo-Christian God. He isn't usually called that, for one thing. I would say that He (or It - Uncreate is usually not personal) is most similar to the Neoplatonic One. Uncreate therefore is impersonal, unknowable and unintelligible. According to Neoplatonic doctrines of hierarchy and mediation (transmitted to Christianity by Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite) a higher and a lower being can meet only through the mediation of a tertium quid, an intermediate. Between God and Man there is the whole celestial hierarchy (the nine choirs of angels of Dionysius). Each of the levels communicates only with the next higher level.

It is best exemplified in the fable of the cock, eagle and angel in "The Citadel". The Angel says there: "The Pancreator is infinitely far from us, and thus infinitely far from me, though I fly so much higher than you. I guess at his desires - no one can do otherwise." I would say that is the situation of Hierodules, or even Hierogrammates.

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite/>

P. S.

To be precise - I would say theology in TBoNS is more Dionysian than classical Neoplatonist. Eg the Pancreator (a typical Eastern Christian epithet of God) created the world directly, not by mediators.

Best regards,
Stanislaus <mailto:sbocian@poczta.fm>

Kobiety i samochody... piekne! >>> <http://link.interia.pl/f18f5>

Adam Stephanides — 29 Jan 2006, 15:38 · follows Stanislaus

I looked at *_Attending Daedalus_* a few months ago and wasn't impressed. As best as I can remember, these were my main objections:

1. I really would like to accept Wright's reading of UotNS, and by extension the first four volumes, that the whole religious aura with which the Hierogrammates surround themselves is a conscious deception. Doing so would render UotNS much less frustrating. But I can't. The religious elements in UotNS just don't read like they're a fraud; and if they are, too much of UotNS doesn't make sense or becomes irrelevant. (This may seem to contradict my position in the argument with Roy he refers to, but it doesn't. I argued that there was no evidence they Hierogrammates had any direct or privileged access to the Increate's will or commands. They

still believe themselves to be carrying out the Increate's will, just as believers in the real world believe themselves to be carrying out God's will.)

Subsidiary to this, in Wright's discussion of short stories by Wolfe which he views as guides to interpreting the New Sun series, he mentions (iirc) several stories where religious symbols are used to manipulate people, but ignores the more numerous stories where the religion is real.

2. Why would the Hierogrammates go through all this rigmarole? Surely they have the capacity to place a white fountain in the Sun without Severian's help. If their only interest is the reproduction of their species and they don't believe in their "religion," why bother to put a black hole in the Sun, spend a thousand years trying to "uplift" the humans of the Commonwealth, and only then recruit Severian as their "Conciliator," after first arranging for him to become autarch? Wright doesn't have a good answer to this. Iirc, he suggested that the Hierogrammates did all this so that the religion of the Conciliator would be passed down to the Ushasites. But, as we see at the end of UotNS, it isn't: the people Severian meets have forgotten it, and Severian makes no effort to enlighten them.

To be sure, the Hierogrammates' reasons are mysterious in any case. But if they believe in their religion, that at least can explain why they act so mysteriously.

3. This is a lesser point, but I didn't buy Wright's claims for the great influence of evolution (in the biological sense) on the New Sun books.

--Adam

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

From: "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net>

Sent: Jan 28, 2006 1:38 AM

To: urth <urth at urth.net>

Subject: (urth) ATTENDING DAEDALUS

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Chris — 29 Jan 2006, 20:40 · in reply to Adam Stephanides

With respect to #2 below, I believe he wasn't so much talking about the first couple of generations of Ushasites so much as the later (or earlier?) people who would read the Book of the New Sun. Of course I find this equally implausible, in that the Hierogrammates would not need Severian just to write and distribute a book, they could have done that themselves. And this would actually be a more natural interpretation than Wright's based on his premises: even within the context of the world of BotNS, there is no Severian and the BotNS itself is fictional.

This would be a somewhat consistent, if unappealing, reading of the series. But Wright doesn't especially stick to it; there would be no sense in trying to psychoanalyze Severian (or even talk about him as a figure to be manipulated) if this were the case.

And I do think that it is interesting that he runs into so much trouble dealing with Severian as an author, in general. For the most part he ignores Severian's authorship, and treats it as if Wolfe is attempting to communicate directly with the reader. But Wolfe has placed a narrator in between, and this adds an extra dimension that simply *cannot* be ignored no matter who you take that narrator to be.

To this I would add a fourth point. Wright spends some time talking about Wolfe's stories that focus on issues of control - overwhelming, stifling control of the "1984" variety. On Wright's interpretation Severian is completely controlled beyond any hope of free choice. But this is far too simplistic. Wolfe may believe that a sort of complete control is possible, at a mass level. But when it comes to individuals, there are plenty of examples that make it clear that this is not what Wolfe had in mind, even in BotNS. The case of the Ascian translator is the clearest allusion to past fiction on the subject, with the Ascians speaking a sort of Newspeak. Yet Wolfe cleverly and simply shows why a project like Newspeak cannot succeed as a means of thought control at the same time. The Ascians, at least some of them, have subverted the language in order to find ways to convey things that don't fit within the framework of approved thought. The fact that this episode appears within the BotNS itself makes it seem extremely unlikely to me that we are meant to see Sev as hopelessly manipulated.

I looked at *_Attending Daedalus_* a few months ago and wasn't impressed. As best as I can remember, these were my main objections:

1. I really would like to accept Wright's reading of UotNS, and by extension the first four volumes, that the whole religious aura with which the Hierogrammates surround themselves is a conscious deception. Doing so would render UotNS much less frustrating. But I can't. The religious elements in UotNS just don't read like they're a fraud; and if they are, too much of UotNS doesn't make sense or becomes irrelevant. (This may seem to contradict my position in the argument with Roy he refers to, but it doesn't. I argued that there was no evidence they Hierogrammates had any direct or privileged access to the Increate's will or commands. They still believe themselves to be carrying out the Increate's will, just as believers in the real world believe themselves to be carrying out God's will.)

Subsidiary to this, in Wright's discussion of short stories by Wolfe which he views as guides to interpreting the New Sun series, he mentions (iirc) several stories where religious symbols are used to manipulate people, but ignores the more numerous stories where the religion is real.

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Sun, spend a thousand years trying to "uplift" the humans of the Commonwealth, and only then recruit Severian as their "Conciliator," after first arranging for him to become autarch? Wright doesn't have a good answer to this. Iirc, he suggested that the Hierogrammates did all this so that the religion of the Conciliator would be passed down to the Ushasites. But, as we see at the end of UotNS, it isn't: the people Severian meets have forgotten it, and Severian makes no effort to enlighten them.

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-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 29 Jan 2006, 23:53 · in reply to Chris

On 1/29/06, Chris <rasputin_ at hotmail.com> wrote:

with the Ascians speaking a sort of Newspeak.

...sigh, here we go again...

Folks, the Ascians are not speaking "a sort of Newspeak." They're speaking a parody of Chairman Mao Thought, the logical end-result of people running around quoting from the Little Red Book. The Ascians are a resuscitation of the "Yellow Peril" of the pulp stories Wolfe is generally revivifying in the New Sun books.

Yes, I know it's pronounced "uh-SHAY-yun" and I know what it's supposed to mean, but if you really believe that Wolfe didn't consciously intend us to think, at least glancingly, of "Asians," you're not giving him enough credit for deviosity or deviousness or whatever the nominal form of "devious" is supposed to be. Making it uh-SHAY-yuns is a way to dance around being called racist, in a book all full of hypostasized racial theories.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

don doggett — 30 Jan 2006, 00:22 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

--- Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

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Well, that went right by me until now, big surprise. It brings up an interesting shadow of the Korean War, don't you think? Doubly interesting since GW fought in that war. Not that I'm saying it's an allegory, just a strange impression.

As for Attending Daedalus, my problem with it is not with Wright's interpretation of facts, but with his conclusion as to Wolfe's ultimate meaning. Severian is a liar and he is probably being deceived by the Hieros (I still have a strong feeling he is the antichrist, a feeling made stronger by the appearance of the "true" christ like figure in the sun cycle, Silk) but to my mind Wolfe is not reenforcing a humanist viewpoint, he is continually undermining it by revealing its bleakness. In addition, Wright ignores the fact that the stories Severian tells work on many more levels than just a repetition of the main narrative. In short, Wright's book has too narrow an argument for too broad a book.

Don

Chris — 30 Jan 2006, 01:49 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I was of course aware of the references to communism in these passages, and even caught the references to Mao's little red book. Apparently my historical knowledge is inadequate, though, because I hadn't been aware that the Chinese had attempted to force their population to communicate *only* through these little sayings in order to ensure correct thought and total control.

I apologize for my ignorance in making the comparison.

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jan 2006, 06:12 · in reply to Chris

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though, because I hadn't been aware that the Chinese had attempted to force their population to communicate *only* through these little sayings in order to ensure correct thought and total control.

Um, no, they didn't actually do that; but if you read up on the "re-education" camps, it came pretty close at times. Wolfe simply takes it to satirical extremes.

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Roy C. Lackey — 30 Jan 2006, 07:18 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Adam wrote:

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Then we are largely in agreement that the Hierogrammate's actions were religiously motivated. The only real difference is whether or not they in fact had the Increate's ear, so to speak. I had argued that I didn't think they would have been allowed to intervene so drastically in human destiny unless it was by the will of the Increate, and I took that position because of Wolfe's known Christian proclivities. As a Christian, he necessarily believes in a Judeo-Christian God who takes particular, even unique, interest in humanity.

As such, I find it incredible that Wolfe would write a pentalogy with an overt religious theme, then go to great lengths to disguise a secular alien agenda underlying that religious veneer, as Wright contends.

Subsidiary to this, in Wright's discussion of short stories by Wolfe which he views as guides to interpreting the New Sun series, he mentions (iirc)

several stories where religious symbols are used to manipulate people, but ignores the more numerous stories where the religion is real.<<

And in his attempt to explain away Severian's miraculous powers, he invokes the theory put forth by Dorcas, that time was somehow bent back to a time when the resurrected person was still living, or bent forward to a time when wounds were healed. The time twisting he lays at the feet of the Hierogrammates. But in the case of Herena's withered arm, that was a birth defect. There had never been a time when the arm had been normal.

2. Why would the Hierogrammates go through all this rigmarole? Surely they have the capacity to place a white fountain in the Sun without Severian's help. If their only interest is the reproduction of their species and they don't believe in their "religion," why bother to put a black hole in the Sun, spend a thousand years trying to "uplift" the humans of the Commonwealth, and only then recruit Severian as their "Conciliator," after first arranging for him to become autarch? Wright doesn't have a good answer to this. Iirc, he suggested that the Hierogrammates did all this so that the religion of the Conciliator would be passed down to the Ushasites. But, as we see at the end of UotNS, it isn't: the people Severian meets have forgotten it, and Severian makes no effort to enlighten them.<<

There is much too much to quote, but Wright's answer, such as it is, in Chapter 5, is to the effect that humans have an innate need to impose order and meaning on the universe by creating religious myths to live by. The Hierogrammates exploit this need by creating the cult of the Conciliator to pacify mankind and secure its cooperation in the death of Urth and the birth of Ushas, a necessary step in the evolution of man to Hieros, their creators.

The Conciliator cult didn't survive the transition to Ushas because it was no longer needed. Rather, as Wright notes (p. 79, trade paperback) when he quotes the text of URTH, in the post-diluvian world "that the House Absolute and our court had become the frame for a vague picture of the Increate as Autarch."

I agree that Wright seems to pick the textual evidence that best supports his theories, to the exclusion of anything not convenient to them, but he's hardly the only one to do that. He even denigrates some of Borski's theories, but isn't above using whatever parts of them that help his case. While I appreciate scholarly books with lots of notes (alas, endnotes), too many of them for my tastes appeal to general authorities that have nothing to do, directly, with Wolfe or his work. That makes it difficult to quote his text without having to do too much explaining. Nevertheless, learning of other opinions is often interesting and sometimes enlightening.

-Roy

Bob Miller — 30 Jan 2006, 11:38 · in reply to Chris

To comment on only a small portion of the below:

The communists, in both Red China and 1930's and 40's Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, did not attempt to make everyone communicate straight from the book. They did require that all technical commentary, whether social or hard sciences, offer a paean to the party line. This did make the introductions to papers in physics and engineering journals seem a little strange. Fluid mechanics and "right thinking" don't seem to be comfortable bedfellows.

Thanks,
Bob

From: "Chris" <rasputin_ at hotmail.com>

Reply-To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net> To: urth at lists.urth.net Subject: Re:

(urth) ATTENDING DAEDALUS Date: Mon, 30 Jan 2006 01:49:05 +0000

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Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

James Wynn — 30 Jan 2006, 14:12 · in reply to Bob Miller

Even if Wolfe **did** intend the Ascians political structure and language to be a reference to Maoism and Buck Rogers (and the connection, it must be admitted, is only inferable -- I am not aware of any other references in TBOTNS to Ming or Buck Rogers), yet that does not make the make the analogy to Newspeak invalid. Calling the Ascian language "a sort of Newspeak" does not even imply that Wolfe intended a narrative connection to "1984".

J

Los Arboles Del Frio — 30 Jan 2006, 17:30 · in reply to Bob Miller

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in the New Sun books.

What other aspects of pulp do you think he using in his books?

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around being called racist, in a book all full of hypostasized
racial theories.

I recall the conversation between Severian and the Pelerin's servant in which they mention that
in the past 'the darker your skin was the more enslaved you were' but the books didn't seem to
be that big on race to me. Am I missing something?

James B. Jordan — 30 Jan 2006, 17:53 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

A point or two.

1. Wolfe in his ancient interview with me makes it clear that Severian's God is the Christian God,
and that he is a "Christian figure," a person seeking by grace to grow out of a horrible
background, still deeply flawed for all that, but becoming more Christlike, which is what grace is
supposed to do.

2. While Wolfe uses the heirarchy of angels notion, the God at the top is not that of pure
neoplatonism. Remember that the "real" conciliator is the Theanthropos, who set salvation in
motion. Severian as conciliator is carrying forward but an aspect of His work.

3. Not that this is all that obvious. As I've mentioned before, the first time I read the original
quartet, I figured Severian to be an antichrist, like Number 5.

Nutria

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jan 2006, 19:17 · in reply to James Wynn

On 1/30/06, James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

Even if Wolfe *did* intend the Ascians political structure and language to
be a reference to Maoism and Buck Rogers (and the connection, it must be
admitted, is only inferable -- I am not aware of any other references in
TBOTNS to Ming or Buck Rogers), yet that does not make the make the
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to Newspeak invalid. Calling the Ascian language "a sort of Newspeak" does
not even imply that Wolfe intended a narrative connection to "1984".

h'mmm. I guess the point, for me, is that Newspeak is
both more and less radical than Correct Thought. More radical in that it attempts to limit the
vocabulary (and to a lesser extent the grammar) of an existing language, so as to limit what the
speakers can say and, by logical extension via the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, think.

Correct Thought is more radical, however, in that it attempts to remove "language" in the usual
sense from the plate entirely. If Correct Thought were implemented at the deep psychological

level it would require to succeed (and we see from Loyal to the Group of Seventeen's utterances that it has _not_ succeeded), it would be no more a language than the hootings of chimps; it would cease to have any generative capacity at all. In Loyal to the Group of Seventeen, however, Wolfe demonstrates the cleverness and flexibility of the human language-organ in generating new meaning from what would seem a fixed set of possible utterances. It becomes necessary to create a new level of grammar where, rather than fitting words together to form sentences, preset sentences are fitted together to form ... I don't know what you'd call them, because the significance of each sentence is allowed to vary hugely with its context, in two senses: the circumstances of utterance and the preceding/following sentences. What Wolfe has done, albeit sketchily, is proposed a working language where no signifier has a well-defined signified. Really astonishing stuff.

--Dan'l

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jan 2006, 19:31 · in reply to Los Arboles Del Frio

On 1/30/06, Los Arboles Del Frio <losarbolesdelfrio at gmail.com> wrote:

The Ascians are a resuscitation of the
"Yellow Peril" of the pulp stories Wolfe is generally revivifying
in the New Sun books.

What other aspects of pulp do you think he using in his books?

Please tell me you're kidding?

Huge, Lovecraftian monsters under the sea, in caves, and in the Antarctic. The fated hero with the magic sword who rises to become King of the Universe. The whole "Dying Earth" scenario. The mix of forgotten technology and weird magic. Swords and rayguns, horses and flying saucers, mixed on a single battlefield.

Need I go on?

Heck, even Severian's inability to stay dead reminds me more than a wee bit of van Vogt's heroes, especially the archetypical Vogtian hero, Gilbert Gosseyn.

Making it uh-SHAY-yuns is a way to dance

around being called racist, in a book all full of hypostasized
racial theories.

I recall the conversation between Severian and the Pelerin's servant in
which they mention that in the past 'the darker your skin was the more
enslaved you were' but the books didn't seem to be that big on race to me.

Am I missing something?

Well, one of the underlying theories, not mentioned but once
(and that may have been in one of the auxiliary pieces) but clearly present, is Wolfe's peculiar
idea that each continent has its own racial "type," and after you've lived there a thousand years
or so your people tend to become that "type." Then, too, there's the repeated note that the
castes of the Commonwealth have distinguishing physical features (including but not limited to
height), and Wolfe's own comments that _New Sun_ embodies a certain amount of Lamarckian
genetic theory.

Uhh... whatever. Either you see it, or you don't, or maybe you don't one day and you do the next.

--Dan'I

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Adam Thornton — 30 Jan 2006, 19:32 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Jan 30, 2006, at 1:17 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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There's something else that everyone misses about the storytelling contest.

As Wolfe loves to do, we get the story through various layers of intermediaries. We do not get the Ascan's story as such. Or rather, we do, but we get it presented with a commentary that turns it from a string of Correct Thought phrases into a coherent narrative.

Why should we believe that Foila is both knowledgeable and trustworthy? We really have no way of knowing either the story Foila interprets for the Ascan is the story he meant to tell, and if it isn't, we don't have any way of knowing whether Foila was unable to interpret his story correctly or whether she received one story and told another.

Adam

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jan 2006, 19:39 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On 1/30/06, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

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True as far as it goes -- but we do know that Loyal to the Group of Seventeen understands the language of the Commonwealth. He continues telling his story unperturbed, without seeming to offer Foila any corrections or protests.

One could argue that Correct Thought is sufficiently well embedded in his brain that he can't actually understand Commonwealth-speak unless it's a translation of Correct Thought, so he can't really criticize her; but on the few occasions Ascians interact with others they don't seem to have this problem.

I conclude therefore that two things are going on here.

First, that Foila does indeed produce an acceptable (at least to Loyal to the Group of Seventeen) transmogrification of his story.

Second, that Foila knows an awful lot about Ascians' ways of speaking and thinking. There's something more to her than meets the eye. I don't think she's an Ascian spy, but she might be a traitor, or a Vodalaria.

--Dan'l

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Chris — 30 Jan 2006, 21:55 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Well, let me be more clear about something. If Wolfe is calling anything to mind here with Correct Thought, it is unlikely to be *just* the phrases from the little red book or *just* something from 1984. That is not the way Wolfe works, especially in this particular series; the entire structure of BotNS relies on layers of overlapping allusions (which, incidentally, is something that I think Wright brings out fairly well). So we can expect a fusion of references, meant to recall all of them at once. When I made the original comment I took this to be obvious, so I was a little taken aback with Dan'l's objection: the connection to Mao's book does absolutely nothing to indicate that there is not also a nod to 1984, and furthermore the connection to Mao's book also does very little (by itself) to explain the particular features of the passage that are pertinent here.

But just to set something straight, someone directed me to an interview with Wolfe in which he addresses some of the points Dan'l makes (and looking at the archives, has been making for several years). The interview appears in "Across the Wounded Galaxies" - Amazon's search feature does work on this book.

p. 251 "What I didn't anticipate was that nine-tenths of the readers and reviewers would look at the word 'Ascian' and say 'Oh, these guys are Asians!'"

More importantly, on p. 241 (the bottom half of the page) Wolfe goes into detail making pretty much exactly the point that people attribute to him when they compare the Ascians to 1984; the only thing Wolfe does not do in that passage is mention the Ascians directly. But to paraphrase Hume, if any man wish to hold that (a) Wolfe has a view of language and control that he deliberately contrasts with Orwell, and that (b) that this view of language and control is presented in just this way in the BotNS, but yet still think that (c) the passage in BotNS has nothing to do with Orwell - then I must confess that I can reason with him no further.

Now with regard to the points about how the Ascian language works with regard to differences with Newspeak, I think that this is probably examining the issue a little too closely, mainly

because if you attend to the mechanism of the Ascian language I am pretty sure that a linguist would tell you that the language wouldn't work at all. If you attend to the salient features as they pertain to the story, however, you do find that the Ascians attempt to eliminate incorrect thought by editing the vocabulary of an existing language - it's just that the 'existing language' is only taught to children, which they are supposed to discard later in life.

As a side note this is an interesting little additional detail that may or may not be deliberate, but that I have rarely seen commented on... If you follow one modern line of thought, children have brain structures that lend themselves naturally to the learning of natural language. 'Ascian' is not at all a natural language, as is pretty clear from what Dan'I already said. So the strange detail of how Ascians learn their language - sort of in two stages - may also be a nod to Chomsky.

On 1/30/06, James Wynn <thewynns at earthlink.net> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jan 2006, 22:09 · in reply to Chris

Okay, Chris, you're right (and I should have remembered the bit from *Wounded Galaxies*); certainly there's nothing preventing the Ascians' speech from also being a nod to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell's actual title: *1984* is a collection of letters by Samuel R. Delany, he said with pedantic irony, fully intending to continue calling Orwell's book by the shorter title...). I suppose my point here is that most of these things have a primary point of reference, and I think Marxist-Maoist dialectical "thought" is Wolfe's primary point of reference for the Ascians' Correct Thought. Remember that when the *Book* was written, Marxism was still fashionable among American intellectuals...

--Dan'l

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Jeffrey Lefstin — 31 Jan 2006, 00:02 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On whether "Ascian" is supposed to invoke "Asian":

While no doubt Wolfe's ideas of a totalitarian state were influenced by Maoist China and North Korea, I have always wondered what to make of the fact that the Ascians seem to come from NORTH AMERICA.

The Commonwealth, as I am sure has been discussed before, seems unquestionably placed in South America. The Ascians come from the continent to the north beyond the equator ("the waist of the world."). Barring some serious continental drift, that puts them right here in the good old U.S. of A!

Besides, there are explicit Asian references in several parts of the book (see discussion in Lexicon Urthus) so implying one seems superfluous. Didn't Wolfe claim a classical origin for the word Ascian?

James Wynn — 31 Jan 2006, 00:35 · in reply to Jeffrey Lefstin

Didn't Wolfe claim a classical origin for the word Ascian?

Yes, Ascian means "shadowless". Since the Ascians work for Erebus (which is the "darkness of Tartaros" according to Hesiod), they are ironically without a shadow, because they are in total darkness. To review this discussion, see here <http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0208/> <http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0208/1509.txt.shtml>

<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0208/1510.txt.shtml>
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0208/1512.txt.shtml>
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0208/1515.txt.shtml> etc.etc.etc.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 31 Jan 2006, 00:48 · in reply to James Wynn

What James said: plus, the idea that the Commonwealthers thought that they came from equatorial lands, where one would cast "no shadow" at noontime, when in fact they came from northaway beyond the Equator.

Whether the Commonwealth is actually in South America has been the subject of semi-heated discussion. While I favor the preponderance of evidence that suggests it is, Alga has made a very plausible case that -- presumably after considerable continental drift (which has since stopped as the centre of the Urth solidified) -- Nessus stands on the former site of Byzantium.

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mournings glory — 31 Jan 2006, 01:09 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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"Insofar as I was trying to create any parallels with an actual historical period here on Earth--and obviously I wasn't aiming at developing an exact analogy--I was thinking of Byzantium. Incidentally, I also got into trouble with some reviewers over my presentation of the Ascians, who were my equivalent of the Turks. If you read the book carefully, it's clear that the action takes place in South America and that the invading Ascians are actually North Americans."

From the Gene Wolfe interview in "Across the Wounded Galaxies."

don doggett — 31 Jan 2006, 02:59 · in reply to James Wynn

You could also think of them as slaves to ASCII, that is, their computers and technology (possibly this influences their language as well?). A somewhat prescient notion to judge from all the cel phone

lights that come on in the theater when my wife and I
are trying to enjoy a movie. :(

Just my 2cents and a half

Don

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etc.etc.etc.

Stanislaus — 01 Feb 2006, 19:54 · in reply to James B. Jordan

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