

C.S. Lewis's influence

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 04 Sep 2007

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Matthew Groves — 04 Sep 2007, 21:29

In the interest of stirring up some discussion on the too-quiet list...

I recently read C.S. Lewis's "Ransom trilogy" for the first time (comprising *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*). I was struck by how much of Lewis's cosmology winds up in Wolfe's works. It's hard to imagine that Wolfe wasn't thinking of the eldila and the Oy?resu when he wrote about the Heirodules and the Heirogrammates. The comparison isn't perfect, primarily because the eldila and Oy?resu seem to have been created as angels by God, but clearly Tzadkiel is, in some sense, the Oyarsa of Urth.

Wolfe's temporal aspect of the three planets Skuld, Urth, and Verthandi, may have been influenced by Lewis's conception of a temporal order to the solar system (the outer planets are older and the inner planets are newer). In Lewis you also have the idea of the Earth, as a planetary body -- not merely humanity as a fallen creature -- as the object of cleansing and renewal.

There are other similarities to recurring themes in Wolfe's works, such as the beast-men of Malacandra (compare them to the animal tribes of "Tracking Song") and the attempts to synthesize Christianity, the Greek myths, and Arthurian legends. Perhaps all this is not news to any of you, but I just hadn't seen a lot of discussion of Lewis's influence, and I was shocked by the sense of familiarity, especially in reading *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*.

Matt G.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 04 Sep 2007, 21:45 · in reply to Matthew Groves

I recently read C.S. Lewis's "Ransom trilogy" for the first time (comprising *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*).

Lucky you! I read them in jr. high school, and missed a lot. While that gave me much to catch on rereads, I never had the experience of a reasonably-informed first reading.

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H'mmm. While I am certainly not prepared to deny any influence of Lewis upon Wolfe, I am inclined to think that it's partly a matter of co-influence -- i.e., Wolfe's being influenced by Chesterton, whom Lewis also greatly admired -- among other things ... especially ...

It's hard to imagine that Wolfe wasn't thinking of the eldila and the Oy?resu when he wrote about the Heirodules and the Heirogrammates. The comparison isn't perfect, primarily because the eldila and Oy?resu seem to have been created as angels by God, but clearly Tzadkiel is, in some sense, the Oyarsa of Urth.

Ummm: I think not-so-much. The Oy?rsu (congrats on getting the Old Solar plural right; most people just say "Oyarsas") hearken back -- as much in Lewis's fiction does -- to the medieval. Specifically, to the concept of "planetary intelligences," angels whose "job" it was to guide the planets through their stately dance to the Music of the Spheres. Lewis was fascinated by this concept and wrote at least one longish poem about the planetary angels.

Wolfe's ideas here are (I think) a bit more idiosyncratic. While I imagine he was probably aware of the concept of the planetary intelligences, I don't think he had them in mind in creating the Hiero*s. And Tzadkiel is certainly *NOT* equivalent to Lewis's Oyarsa of Urth; that is Satan.

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These things all hearken back to the medieval, and Wolfe clearly consulted a fair amount of medieval -- specifically, Byzantine -- history in creating the world of the New Sun. Again, not to deny that there is any influence from CSL to GW, but to urge caution where common sources may be involved.

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This is fascinating to me, for I grew up with Lewis, had read the trilogy several times before tSotT came out, and I quite honestly never felt that sense of familiarity in going the other direction.

Again, not to deny your perception.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

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I am miserable, he is miserable,

We are miserable.

Can't we have a party? Would he rather have a party?

Matthew Groves — 05 Sep 2007, 03:06 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I seem to have overstated my case, thereby losing my point. I don't really mean to say that Wolfe adopts Lewis's cosmology, but I do want to say that there are more resemblances between the Ransom trilogy and some of Wolfe's works than can be accounted for solely by co-influence. (I *want* to say that, but I can't quite, not having read G.K. Chesterton or a lot of other things both Wolfe and Lewis might have read.) Again, it's probably not too surprising that Wolfe, as a Christian sf writer, would be influenced by Lewis (Wolfe even names a character in "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories" after Lewis's protagonist, Ransom). But whereas I've seen some discussion about the influence of H.G. Wells, H.P. Lovecraft, and J.R.R. Tolkien, I haven't seen a lot of discussion of the particular manifestations of C.S. Lewis's influence.

I think the construction of a celestial hierarchy of Heiros for a science-fictional setting is one such manifestation. As to the particulars of Lewis's angelic space beings versus Wolfe's in the New Sun books, in most ways they are obviously very different.

The main point: C.S. Lewis refers to classical, medieval and Arthurian sources; he embeds these into a new, fictional cosmology that is informed by his contemporaneous scientific understanding and by his Christian beliefs; and then he uses it to write sf books. Before I read Lewis, I hadn't known anyone but Wolfe to have done this. Wolfe is more rigorous and casts his net even wider in terms of his sources, but surely Lewis must have been a model for Wolfe in this regard. Also they both like beast men.

Matt G.

Mo Holkar / UKG — 05 Sep 2007, 07:59 · in reply to Matthew Groves

At 04:06 05/09/2007, Matt wrote:

Also they both like beast men.

Don't we all?

I wonder whether Island of Doctor Death in particular represents a playing-out of tension in Wolfe's influences between Wells and Lewis. Lewis supposedly admired Wells's imagination but despised his morality, and I think felt his own SF to be in some sense a counter to Wells's work. Can we see Wolfe as the synthesis of this dialectic?

Mo

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WolfeWiki

<http://www.holkar.net/pmwiki/>

Andy Robertson — 05 Sep 2007, 10:20 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes writes:

grew up with Lewis, had read the
trilogy several times before tSotT came out, and I quite honestly
never felt that sense of familiarity in going the other direction.

Ditto, and ditto

I'm sure Wolfe has read Lewis, but I don't see any sort of direct influence.

What I do see is that Wolfe in the New/Long/Short sun books is writing in the same genre as Lewis in his SF trilogy - religious science fiction that presupposes the objective reality of angelic beings and of god - and that this is a genre so sparsely exploited today that one may see linkages of a type that are not there.

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Michael Straight — 05 Sep 2007, 18:25 · in reply to Matthew Groves

Matt,

You're not the only one who has seen connections between Wolfe and Lewis. One particular standout to me that I wrote about on the list a while back is this scene from *Perelandra*:

Ransom, the protagonist, is in a situation where it seems the Devil himself (or his representative) is trying to do a Very Bad Thing and Ransom wonders why God seems to be allowing it...

"Had Hell a prerogative to work wonders? Why did Heaven work none? ...he was forced to perceive that his own coming to *Perelandra* was at least as much of a marvel as the Enemy's. That miracle on the right side, which he had demanded, had in fact occurred. He himself was the miracle...If the issue lay in [God's] hands, Ransom and the Lady **were** those hands. The fate of a world really depended on how they behaved in the next few hours" (*Perelandra*, p. 140-142).

This seems so close to Silk's formulation of the Outsider's revelation, "I am to receive no help, because I am help" that I'm inclined to believe it must have been an influence on Wolfe.

And note that this theme keeps popping up in Wolfe. There's the bit in *Soldier of Arete* where *Latro* receives a similar response when he remarks on the possible danger of the task given him by one of the goddesses: "If a child could have done it, I would not have chosen you."

The other, minor connection I saw was that (especially in *Nightside* when I thought he was a villain), *Remora*'s speech patterns reminded me a whole lot of *Withers* from *_That Hideous Strength_*.

Rostrum