

Urth Digest, Vol 53, Issue 59

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 03 Feb 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5331>

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David Stockhoff — 03 Feb 2009, 23:42

Dan'l

Frankly, the way you appoint yourself Guardian of the Sacred Texts rubs me the wrong way. Besides, it's a cliché that such Guardians often turn out to have been protecting only their own parochial perspectives and interpretations, not the Texts themselves. So why bother?

This is where we disagree: "As a result, it is legitimate to say that Severian is "Christ-like," but not to say that he is "a Christ." "

Logically, that rule can only legitimately operate within Wolfe's belief system. Since I don't operate or observe from within Wolfe's belief system, I don't have to follow it. I am free to use ordinary terms in their ordinary senses.

The only way there can be a difference between these 2 statements is if you accept Wolfe's beliefs, essentially, as your own, as the basis of your critical process---as unquestioned assumptions made before you even start thinking about his works. To me, there is no difference, and if I can see no difference while I acknowledge---and factor into my analysis---that Wolfe sees a difference, then I do no violence to Wolfe's work.

Indeed, I can put Wolfe's apparent beliefs on and off like a hat, just as though I were reading any mythological literature from an alien civilization that I don't and can't entirely understand and whose basic beliefs I don't share. This is an especially important point in light of Wolfe's own tearing down and building up of other people's mythologies. All he does is privilege a certain interpretation of a literary or mythological figure. So what?

It's a subtle distinction, I suppose, but it means a lot to me, and therefore I ask you (and brunians) to respect it and not peremptorily demand that I or anyone else bow to any belief system.

To summarize, I don't have a problem with Wolfe as a privileged interpreter of his own work---but he can be wrong. And so can his interpreters.

David

Message: 2

Date: Thu, 22 Jan 2009 15:55:57 -0800

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

Subject: Re: (urth) Silk corrupted?

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID:

<1f761737090122155516ffc9d9ft1213041e835c0b1 at mail.gmail.com>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset=ISO-8859-1

On Thu, Jan 22, 2009 at 3:45 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

These are 2 separate ideas: (1)

What is key here is that we are interpreting a work by a writer who takes the position that Jesus was a unique historical figure, the sole Theanthropos and Redeemer, an event which will not and *can* not be repeated. This is *Wolfe's* position,
and
(2)

to interpret his work in a way that violates this position is to do that work a violence which I cannot condone.

I do not accept Wolfe's position. I acknowledge Wolfe's position. This is my point.

We are in agreement so far. It is necessary, in interpreting Wolfe's work, to acknowledge his positions. To do otherwise is to wilfully misinterpret.

And it hardly does violence to anything except certain people's assumptions---which I reject as assumptions_. Especially assumptions to be forced on the debate as though they were facts_. Do you see the difference?

I do indeed. It is an *assumption* (or a belief) that Jesus is the unique etc. It is a *fact* that Wolfe takes this assumption as a starting point for his work. This fact should always be taken into account when interpreting relevant aspects of his work.

As a result, it is legitimate to say that Severian is "Christ-like," but not to say that he is "a Christ." The former fits the writer's intent and assumptions; the latter does not. Unless you take an extreme postmodernist "death of the author" point of view -- with which I have very little sympathy, though I do believe that the text is the text and the author is not a privileged interpreter -- anyway, unless you take that position, saying that Severian is "a Christ" is precisely what I say: a violence against Wolfe's work.

Chris P — 03 Feb 2009, 23:55 · in reply to David Stockhoff

There is wiggle-room for interpretation, but generally interpretation is supposed to stay close to the original intention of the speaker or at least not contradict it without absolute necessity. This may sound nitpicky but without it you get "radical" interpretation where everything can mean anything you want at any time.

I could basically use the same form of argument you used there to say that well, to me in my belief system, calling someone "Christ" or "Christ-like" is the same as saying that they are Richard Nixon. Thus you can't argue that my interpretation of BotNS as a retelling of the Watergate story without privileging an interpretation based on Wolfe's religious beliefs, right?

"When small men begin to cast big shadows, it means that the sun is about to set." -- Lin Yutang

Date: Tue, 3 Feb 2009 18:42:16 -0500

From: dstockhoff at verizon.net

To: urth at lists.urth.net
Subject: Re: (urth) Urth Digest, Vol 53, Issue 59

Dan'I

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 04 Feb 2009, 00:11 · in reply to David Stockhoff

David,

"Guardian of the Sacred Texts" is childish and insulting.

But I should lay my cards open on the table: I am, like Wolfe, an adult convert to Roman Catholicism.

Independently of this, I believe that the Catholic episteme offers perspectives on Wolfe's work that point, if not to his achievement, at least to his intent.

For example, there are a _lot_ of scenes in the Briah cycle that parallel, parody, or otherwise reflect upon the Eucharist. Reading these scenes with a knowledge of the Eucharist imbues

them with a narrative energy that is simply not present without that knowledge.

That doesn't mean that a specifically-Catholic reading of Wolfe is "right" or even "better than others."

But it does make a reading that's aware of Catholic practice and imagery a whole lot more interesting -- at least, to me.

The text is the text and, finally, any reading in good faith is a good reading. (But we are always already in bad faith with this or any text...) A reading that completely ignores the generically Christian and specifically Catholic imagery and ideas can be valid.

Such a reading, however, strikes me as like a reading of "Ulysses" by someone without (or who doesn't show) the slightest knowledge of the Odyssey. I've read such readings, and they can be interesting enough, but they lack a dimension.

This is where we disagree: "As a result, it is legitimate to say that Severian is "Christ-like," but not to say that he is "a Christ." "

I overspoke my case by saying "legitimate." I would say however that a reading that made Severian "a Christ" would be (a) contrary to the author's intent, for what that may matter to you, and (b) less interesting than one where Severian is "Christ-like."

Why less interesting? Well: for one thing, "a Christ" is too far removed from the merely-human for me to find much application to my daily life. (This is a problem for me in my own religious life, you betcha.) A Christ-like person, with the sinfulness and failings that beset all humans but One, is far more interesting to me.

(And, as a side note, Severian is clearly a sinful human himself in need of redemption, not a perfect Redeemer.)

For another, making Severian "a Christ" forces a schema on the book that I think just doesn't fit. Some of Severian's adventures clearly reflect, refract, distort some of the episodes of the Gospels - probably most obvious, his encounter with Typhon, as a reflection of Christ's temptation in the desert; but there are quite a number of others.

But to make Severian "a Christ" seems to me to require us to seek these parallels everywhere in the text, even where they simply don't exist.

But then ... you seem to mean something different by "a Christ" than what I would mean. It may be that, if we could decode each other properly, "a Christ" in your language might mean something more like what "a Christlike person" does in mine.

Or not?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

brunians at brunians.org — 04 Feb 2009, 02:09 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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And politically and culturally and so on you are very much like him, wouldn't you agree? You and he share many attitudes about the individual and society and traditional roles and values etc?

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 04 Feb 2009, 15:51 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

On Tue, Feb 3, 2009 at 6:09 PM, <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:
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Somewhat. But where Wolfe maps mostly to "conservative" values, I map mostly to "liberal" values (and I use the scare-quotes because I think neither of us really "is" a liberal or conservative).

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes