

AEG - borrowings

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 12 Apr 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5405>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Stephen Hoy — 12 Apr 2009, 19:02

Fernando Gouvea recently noted a curious coincidence between Wolfe's 'Peace' (1975) and Bartis's 'Tranquility' (2001), each work sharing a central character named Weer. Gouvea also noted certain stylistic similarities, enough to make us wonder about the extent of the parallels. Let's take a look at a couple of similar items in AEG, and see if we can detect the existence of an invisible line between literary theft and literary allusion.

While reading *An Evil Guest*, I noticed that the character Gideon Chase shares a name with a central character in Timothy Mo's historical novel, *'An Insular Possession'* (1987). This might be a curious coincidence. It also might be intentional. It's impossible to know with any certainty without asking the author (and perhaps not even then).

Suppose that it's not a coincidence. Suppose Wolfe read *'An Insular Possession'* some years ago, and suppose that when he invented the character of the wizard, he chose the name Gideon Chase as a reflection of some aspect of this character, intentionally reinforcing the idea of Chase as a figure bridging the gap between the two cultures colliding in AEG. Is there anything wrong with that? Let's take another case: the trembling mountain and the laundress. As Marc Aramini pointed out in October, Wolfe reviewed a work with a similar motif, Cory Doctorow's *'Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town'* (2005). After reading both works, it's hard to believe that Wolfe was not self-consciously referring to Doctorow's mountain & washing machine, and, further, that Wolfe fully realized Doctorow or any reader of *'Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town'* would recognize the motif in AEG. Is there anything wrong with that?

To each of the above, I'd venture a guess that there's nothing wrong with either act, but I have very different reasons for each guess.

In the case of the name Gideon Chase, it's not clear that Wolfe borrowed from Mo. Assuming there is a conscious borrowing, there are very few similarities between the two characters. Personally, I doubt that readers familiar with both works would suspect Wolfe chose the name as a conscious reflection of Mo's character, but the possibility exists.

In the case of the mountain and laundress, it's possible Doctorow and Wolfe each borrowed from a common source, perhaps some work transcribing Algonquin legends. It's also possible Wolfe asked Doctorow's permission to use the idea--although one might expect to see a word or two about it in AEG or perhaps even in an interview about AEG.

But assume Wolfe borrowed these two things without explicit advance permission, somehow slipping them past the legal team at his publisher. But is this any different from Wolfe's explicit use of a Baskin-Robbins in an early chapter? Does anyone imagine that either Mo or Doctorow would object to Wolfe's particular use as they appear in AEG?

Allan Anderson — 15 Apr 2009, 07:00 · in reply to Stephen Hoy

I was going to postpone commenting on this for a couple of days while I finish the book, but I can't help myself.

So far, I'm thinking that any and all "borrowings" fit nicely into An Evil Guest's nature as a sort of tribute piece, a stylistic pastiche. Maybe no one thinks anyone would care about a implicit literary reference. I'm delighted to hear about these connections you've discovered! When I read "Gideon Chase", I thought of the character "Gideon Stargrave" (aka King Mob) from the comic book series The Invisibles. He's another horror/sf writer who becomes more than that profession might seem. But it's very possible that Grant Morrison referred to Mo's novel in his own choice of names: what makes The Invisibles relevant, I think, is the books' conscious blending of genre, reality, and fiction. It's an unique story, but also very much a borrowed patchwork shirt. And pulpy stories of the type AEG seems to want a family relationship with, well, they have always dipped a range of sources. So it's completely appropriate, to my mind.

But here's my question: at the cast party, someone tells Cassie she looks like she's seen a banshee. Aren't Banshees often seen washing bloody clothing, as a death omen? Is that the mountain's laundress?

Okay, I'll shut up and get back to reading.

On Apr 12, 2009, at 12:02 PM, Stephen Hoy wrote:
Fernando Gouvea recently noted a curious coincidence between Wolfe's 'Peace' (1975) and Barts's 'Tranquility' (2001), each work sharing a central character named Weer. Gouvea also noted certain stylistic similarities, enough to make us wonder about the extent of the parallels. Let's take a look at a couple of similar items in AEG, and see if we can detect the existence of an invisible line between literary theft and literary allusion.

While reading An Evil Guest, I noticed that the character Gideon Chase shares a name with a central character in Timothy Mo's historical novel, 'An Insular Possession' (1987). This might be a curious coincidence. It also might be intentional. It's impossible to know with any certainty without asking the author (and perhaps not even then).

Suppose that it's not a coincidence. Suppose Wolfe read 'An Insular Possession' some years ago, and suppose that when he invented the character of the wizard, he chose the name Gideon Chase as a reflection of some aspect of this character, intentionally reinforcing the idea of Chase as a figure bridging the gap between the two cultures colliding in AEG. Is there anything wrong with that? Let's take another case: the trembling mountain and the laundress. As Marc Aramini pointed out in October, Wolfe reviewed a work with a similar motif, Cory Doctorow's 'Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town' (2005). After reading both works, it's hard to believe that Wolfe was not self-

consciously
referring to Doctorow's mountain & washing machine, and, further,
that Wolfe
fully realized Doctorow or any reader of 'Someone Comes to Town,
Someone
Leaves Town' would recognize the motif in AEG. Is there anything
wrong with
that?

To each of the above, I'd venture a guess that there's nothing wrong
with
either act, but I have very different reasons for each guess.

In the case of the name Gideon Chase, it's not clear that Wolfe
borrowed
from Mo. Assuming there is a conscious borrowing, there are very few
similarities between the two characters. Personally, I doubt that
readers
familiar with both works would suspect Wolfe chose the name as a
conscious
reflection of Mo's character, but the possibility exists.

In the case of the mountain and laundress, it's possible Doctorow
and Wolfe
each borrowed from a common source, perhaps some work transcribing
Algonquin
legends. It's also possible Wolfe asked Doctorow's permission to use
the
idea--although one might expect to see a word or two about it in AEG
or
perhaps even in an interview about AEG.

But assume Wolfe borrowed these two things without explicit advance
permission, somehow slipping them past the legal team at his
publisher. But
is this any different from Wolfe's explicit use of a Baskin-Robbins
in an
early chapter? Does anyone imagine that either Mo or Doctorow would
object
to Wolfe's particular use as they appear in AEG?

Jordon Flato — 15 Apr 2009, 16:14 · in reply to Allan Anderson

The Invisibles is great.

On Wed, Apr 15, 2009 at 12:00 AM, Allan Anderson <rubel at goosemoon.org> wrote:
I was going to postpone commenting on this for a couple of days while I
finish the book, but I can't help myself.

So far, I'm thinking that any and all "borrowings" fit nicely into An Evil
Guest's nature as a sort of tribute piece, a stylistic pastiche. Maybe no
one thinks anyone would care about a implicit literary reference. I'm
delighted to hear about these connections you've discovered! When I read
"Gideon Chase", I thought of the character "Gideon Stargrave" (aka King Mob)
from the comic book series The Invisibles. He's another horror/sf writer who

becomes more than that profession might seem. But it's very possible that Grant Morrison referred to Mo's novel in his own choice of names: what makes *The Invisibles* relevant, I think, is the books' conscious blending of genre, reality, and fiction. It's an unique story, but also very much a borrowed patchwork shirt. And pulpy stories of the type AEG seems to want a family relationship with, well, they have always dipped a range of sources. So it's completely appropriate, to my mind.

But here's my question: at the cast party, someone tells Cassie she looks like she's seen a banshee. Aren't Banshees often seen washing bloody clothing, as a death omen? Is that the mountain's laundress?

Okay, I'll shut up and get back to reading.

On Apr 12, 2009, at 12:02 PM, Stephen Hoy wrote:

Fernando Gouvea recently noted a curious coincidence between Wolfe's 'Peace'

(1975) and Bartis's 'Tranquility' (2001), each work sharing a central character named Weer. Gouvea also noted certain stylistic similarities, enough to make us wonder about the extent of the parallels. Let's take a look at a couple of similar items in AEG, and see if we can detect the existence of an invisible line between literary theft and literary allusion.

While reading *An Evil Guest*, I noticed that the character Gideon Chase shares a name with a central character in Timothy Mo's historical novel, 'An Insular Possession' (1987). This might be a curious coincidence. It also might be intentional. It's impossible to know with any certainty without asking the author (and perhaps not even then).

Suppose that it's not a coincidence. Suppose Wolfe read 'An Insular Possession' some years ago, and suppose that when he invented the character of the wizard, he chose the name Gideon Chase as a reflection of some aspect

of this character, intentionally reinforcing the idea of Chase as a figure bridging the gap between the two cultures colliding in AEG. Is there anything wrong with that?

Let's take another case: the trembling mountain and the laundress. As Marc Aramini pointed out in October, Wolfe reviewed a work with a similar motif,

Cory Doctorow's 'Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town' (2005). After reading both works, it's hard to believe that Wolfe was not self-consciously

referring to Doctorow's mountain & washing machine, and, further, that Wolfe

fully realized Doctorow or any reader of 'Someone Comes to Town, Someone Leaves Town' would recognize the motif in AEG. Is there anything wrong with that?

To each of the above, I'd venture a guess that there's nothing wrong with either act, but I have very different reasons for each guess.

In the case of the name Gideon Chase, it's not clear that Wolfe borrowed from Mo. Assuming there is a conscious borrowing, there are very few similarities between the two characters. Personally, I doubt that readers familiar with both works would suspect Wolfe chose the name as a conscious reflection of Mo's character, but the possibility exists.

In the case of the mountain and laundress, it's possible Doctorow and Wolfe each borrowed from a common source, perhaps some work transcribing Algonquin legends. It's also possible Wolfe asked Doctorow's permission to use the idea--although one might expect to see a word or two about it in AEG or perhaps even in an interview about AEG.

But assume Wolfe borrowed these two things without explicit advance permission, somehow slipping them past the legal team at his publisher. But is this any different from Wolfe's explicit use of a Baskin-Robbins in an early chapter? Does anyone imagine that either Mo or Doctorow would object to Wolfe's particular use as they appear in AEG?

Stephen Hoy — 30 Apr 2009, 15:15 · in reply to Allan Anderson

Not long ago, Allan Anderson asked:

<<< But here's my question: at the cast party, someone tells Cassie she looks like she's seen a banshee. Aren't Banshees often seen washing bloody clothing, as a death omen? Is that the mountain's laundress? >>>

Allan's question prompted me to review some discussions we've had on urth-I about AEG's banshee. For example, Henry Eissler's reply to Dave Tallman (16 Oct) and Tallman's reply to Eissler (18 Dec).

The word 'banshee' derives from a Gaelic term for 'faerie woman' (alternately 'faerie washer-woman', if we start with the Scots' version). One aspect of the banshee legend is the familiar figure of the washer-at-the-ford.

Let's take a closer look at the text and see what else may turn up. Here's the banshee / Grey Neighbor exchange at the cast party:

Palma smiled, and brushed an invisible yellow feather from his lips with a manicured and be-ringed paw. "She has heard the banshee."
"Seen it," Cassie said, "and I think I'm going to be going out with it in a day or two."
"Why Cassie!" Norma was grinning. "You always seemed to so hetro."
"English speakers," Palma lectured her smoothly, "are invariably deceived by the second syllable. It merely conveys that banshees are to be numbered amongst the Grey Neighbors."
"I'll be damned if I've got the foggiest idea what that's supposed to mean," Norma said, "but doesn't Cassie have a gray neighbor right now?"
"She's talking about me," Margaret whispered.
- AEG p64

Strictly speaking, Cassie and Palma are incorrect. A banshee is a female figure (the first syllable

describes a 'woman'). However, Palma's wordplay on the second syllable is on point. Despite being homonymous with the pronoun 'she', the term 'sidh' indicates a member of the race of faeries or fallen angels. 'Grey Neighbors' is a common conversational euphemism for the 'sidh'. I imagine Wolfe's larger point in this exchange is to alert the reader to the idea that at least some of the fantastic characters in AEG are 'sidh'.

It's not a great leap to infer that Margaret is a Grey Neighbor. Her surname Briggs (bridge) is just a step away from Ford / Ferry, recalling the washer-at-the-ford. She later styles herself "an expert seamstress and laundress, and a discreet companion." (p54) 'Discreet companion' fits a bain-sidh, who follow a family's progress through generations without detection, except when a family leader dies. Also from this description on p54, we might reasonably infer that Margaret Briggs is the un-important laundress-spouse of the sentient mountain mentioned almost in passing by Chase during the hike to the mountain's altar (p41).

Margaret-as-Banshee does not preclude a Margaret-as-werewolf theory, because another idea in Gaelic myth is that each 'sidh' has a particular animal form in addition to its human form. This in turn leads to other speculations bandied about that Margaret and Cassie are the same entity, either displaced in time, or a clone one of the other, or infused with the same spirit, etc.