

Wolfe at Readercon

The Urth list — 55 messages, 22 voices, 26 Jun 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5459>

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Yves Meynard — 26 Jun 2009, 00:57

I can heartily recommend Readercon to anyone who appreciates Wolfe's work. You're likely to find a lot of people who share your tastes. I know I'll be there (but then, I always am).

Yves

Matthew Keeley — 26 Jun 2009, 02:26 · in reply to Yves Meynard

Didn't realize you still subscribed to Urth, though I did see your name on the Readercon guest list. I take it you'll be appearing on some panels? In any case, if I go, I'll make sure to bring along my copy of The Book of Knights.

And is anyone else on this list going? I know there's a lot of "geographical diversity" here, but surely there's more than one Urth lister in New England?

-Matt

On Thu, Jun 25, 2009 at 8:57 PM, Yves Meynard<meynard at videotron.ca> wrote:
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Yves

Matthew Keeley — 19 Jul 2009, 02:57 · follows Matthew Keeley

As I wouldn't have learned of Readercon were it not for this list, I think I would be remiss if I didn't tell you something about the convention.

Readercon was in Burlington, Massachusetts, about an hour away from my house. As I didn't have three hundred dollars to spend on a hotel room (Pity the poor impoverished grad), I decided to commute back and forth each day. As a result, I didn't get to stay very late every day and I doubtless missed many fine and interesting things. As this is the Urth List, I'm only going to discuss Wolfe-related events at the con, though there were several other Major Writers there, including John Crowley and Samuel Delany.

Friday

This was my first con, and it's a trifle intimidating to finish registration and then see your one of your favorite writers standing not twenty feet away. Mr. Wolfe was scheduled to speak at the day's first panel, on "Egocentrism and Creativity." I walked into the room twenty minutes before the program was scheduled to start, screwed up my courage, and approached Gene and

Rosemary Wolfe. I said I was a great fan of his work, etc. etc. Wolfe, as it turns out, is a much nicer person than most of his characters. He introduced me to Rosemary and to Patrick O'Leary, who was sitting with them. I saw Wolfe several times throughout the weekend, and he always knew my name, even when I was too far away for him to read my nametag. Great guy.

The panel itself was very good; when asked to introduce himself, Wolfe just said "I practically invented Pringles." There was a lot of applause. Three writers / books that Wolfe says most influenced him: G.K. Chesterton, Ruth Plumly Thompson, *Style Guide for Engineers* (I'm not sure on that exact title). The Plumly Thompson pick confused one of the other panelists; Wolfe defended her merits over fellow Oz-writer L. Frank Baum.

(Note that this next portion includes some spoilers for future works and for *An Evil Guest*)

One of Readercon's specialties is the "Kaffeeklatsch," where writers meet over coffee with ten or so of their fans. Wolfe's Kaffeeklatsch was on Friday, I made sure to sign up early. The "klatsches" take place in normal hotel rooms, though the beds have been replaced with round tables. Wolfe's klatsch was standing-room-only. When I asked what Wolfe was working on, he talked a little about *Home Fires*, the second draft of which he finished in February. Apparently it involves an energy-poor future Earth, an interstellar war, and complications in love arriving as a result of time dilation. Wolfe is also writing a short story about a talking refrigerator (!) and has written a story called "King Rat" for a Frederick Pohl tribute anthology. Wolfe also briefly discussed his past position as head of the Science Fiction Poetry Association. Apparently many readers would approach him with their poems. Wolfe would ask who their favorite poets were, and they would respond that they didn't read poetry, they wrote it. One gets the impression Wolfe suffered much in this job. Wolfe said his favorite of his novels changes from day to day, but *Peace* is generally near the top of the list. He also said *An Evil Guest* was the most fun to write; he felt bad leaving Cassie. He also said that Bill Reis was an interesting villain because "he was so close to being a hero" but he still wanted to make himself "dictator" of Earth. I suppose this helps AEG interpretation a bit?

Later in the day, Wolfe was on a panel about "Words as Magic." John Crowley discussed the Old Masters' "underpainting" technique; he said Wolfe's books give the sense of having been thoroughly-prepared and "underpainted" in the same way. Crowley, unsurprisingly, was far more eloquent there than I am here. Alas, I left after this panel, so I missed Wolfe, Patrick O'Leary, Yves Meynard, and Michael Cisco discussing "Reality and Dream in Fiction." (http://www.essentialvermeer.com/technique/technique_underpainting.html)

Saturday

Wolfe was scheduled to read from *The Sorcerer's House*, which the Readercon program says is coming out next year. I arrived late, so it wasn't until after the reading finished that Wolfe had been reading his new short story "King Rat." It has lions and spiders and elephants, oh my, and is blackly comic. It is nothing at all like what I've heard *Sorcerer's House* is like, so I felt pretty silly.

Sunday

Alas, I didn't attend any Lupine panels or events Sunday. I did, however, buy a few Wolfe books at the Readercon bookshop. David Hartwell was selling a bunch of books; I picked up a copy of *Operations Ares* from him for \$5. The book was signed, which rather surprised me. Mr. Hartwell says Wolfe no longer cringes quite so much when he sees his first novel and is now willing to sign copies.

All in all a fantastic weekend - Readercon was absolutely full of writers I like and admire, and they all seemed to be extremely nice people. If you're in the New England area, definitely consider Readercon next year.

-Matt

Adam Thornton — 19 Jul 2009, 03:13 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On Jul 18, 2009, at 9:57 PM, Matthew Keeley wrote:
The Plumly Thompson pick confused one
of the other panelists; Wolfe defended her merits over fellow
Oz-writer L. Frank Baum.

I respect Gene Wolfe a great deal, but he's JUST PLAIN WRONG on this one.

Adam

Russ Allbery — 19 Jul 2009, 03:22 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> writes:

On Jul 18, 2009, at 9:57 PM, Matthew Keeley wrote:
The Plumly Thompson pick confused one of the other panelists; Wolfe
defended her merits over fellow Oz-writer L. Frank Baum.
I respect Gene Wolfe a great deal, but he's JUST PLAIN WRONG on this
one.

Yeah, I was going to say -- that's the first time I've ever heard anyone say anything positive about Ruth Plumly Thompson's Oz books. I'm now
very curious what he sees in them and what arguments he was making.

Russ Allbery (rra at stanford.edu) <<http://www.eyrie.org/~eagle/>>

Matthew Keeley — 20 Jul 2009, 01:20 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Forgot to mention that someone asked Wolfe about the prospect of another Latro book. He didn't rule it out, but did say he's getting older.

-Matt

James Wynn — 20 Jul 2009, 14:19 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

Thanks for the run-down, Matthew.

Do you remember what Wolfe's defense of Ruth Plumly Thompson was?

Matthew Keeley — 20 Jul 2009, 17:48 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mon, Jul 20, 2009 at 10:19 AM, James Wynn<crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
Thanks for the run-down, Matthew.
Do you remember what Wolfe's defense of Ruth Plumly Thompson was?

It wasn't very specific or prolonged; he just said he liked her and thought she was underrated. Allen Steele disagreed with him, but the conversation was quite short.

-Matt

JBarach at aol.com — 20 Jul 2009, 18:33 · follows Matthew Keeley

James Wynn writes:

Do you remember what Wolfe's defense of Ruth Plumly Thompson was?

I don't know about Wolfe, but here's what Lin Carter once wrote:

And this past year we lost another writer to whom I owe a deep personal debt -- Miss Ruth Plumly Thompson, of Oz and Philadelphia. When in her twenties, she picked up the Oz books after the death of L. Frank Baum, and continued to write them, one a year, for most of her life. Her twenty-second Oz book, *The Enchanted Island of Oz*, has just been published posthumously. She died on April 6, 1976.

The Oz books are the best and the greatest children's books in American literature. And their excellence, their sparkling sense of fun and adventurous swagger and endless color and variety, are due in very large measure to Miss Thompson. It was these books (and, in particular, *her* contributions to the series) that first caught and held my interest in my boyhood. I owe it entirely to Miss Thompson that, early on, I was turned in the direction of fantasy. Bless her ... she was a lovely lady. -- Lin Carter, "Introduction," *The Year's Best Fantasy Stories: 3* (DAW, 1977).

Wolfe also has mentioned her contributions (alongside Baum's) more than once in interviews

[_http://tinyurl.com/nnk3qq_](http://tinyurl.com/nnk3qq_) (<http://tinyurl.com/nnk3qq>)

[_http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/wolfe46interview.htm_](http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/wolfe46interview.htm)
(<http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/wolfe46interview.htm>)

John

*****What's for dinner tonight? Find quick and easy dinner ideas for any occasion.
(<http://food.aol.com/dinner-tonight?ncid=emlcntusfood00000008>)

Milton Jackson — 20 Jul 2009, 21:05 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

I think Wolfe's done all he can do with *Latro* short of killing the character off. Although *Soldier of Sidon* can't claim the level of writing its predecessors had, it still was a fine book and, I believe, a great place to end the story. Wolfe is known for leaving things out of his writings so the readers can exercise their imaginations and reach their own conclusions (sometimes radically different from person to person) about his worlds and characters. I say let it stand at that. He's done a remarkable job with *Latro*, and as the much-lamented Robert E Howard did with *Red Nails*, his last tale of the great barbarian Conan, he's said as much as anyone can expect of the character and should feel the need to direct his considerable talents elsewhere.

On Sun, Jul 19, 2009 at 9:20 PM, Matthew Keeley
<matthew.keeley.1 at gmail.com> wrote:
Forgot to mention that someone asked Wolfe about the prospect of
another Latro book. He didn't rule it out, but did say he's getting
older.

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JBarach at aol.com — 20 Jul 2009, 23:10 · follows Milton Jackson

Milton writes:

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I haven't read Sidon yet, but ... surely the matter of his memory-problem
has yet to be resolved. That is, I assume Wolfe didn't intend it to be
just some weird feature that plays no role in the plot but that allows Wolfe to
do some fun stuff with the narrative.

Of course, that may have been how the idea originated ("What if I had a character who couldn't
remember more than a day at a time?"), but it seems to me that Wolfe usually DOES something
with those sorts of ideas. As he says in one of his essays or interviews about writing, many
people think they have a great idea for a story when they come up with an idea for the premise
of a story or the opening of the story ("What if a guy couldn't remember more than a day at a
time?"). But what is important is knowing the *end* of the story and how the story gets to it.

So if Wolfe came up with this particular idea, it seems consistent to me to
think that Wolfe had some idea of where he wanted to go with the idea.
It's not just a gimmick to allow, for instance, characters to deceive Latro because he can't
remember that they were untrustworthy. It's going somewhere. The memory loss happened for
a reason, and therefore it is something that is both resolvable and needing resolution.

Or so it seems to me. Now you'll tell me that all that stuff was cleared up in Sidon....

John

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(<http://food.aol.com/dinner-tonight?ncid=emlcntusfood00000008>)

Milton Jackson — 20 Jul 2009, 23:24 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

I'll tell you no such thing. You'll have to read the book to determine what you think of what
Wolfe does with Latro. One thing any Wolfe fan should know is that Wolfe rarely gives a
traditional resolution to his works. They are often openended and incomplete in ways that
would damage other authors' reputations though. Wolfe is a writer who rewards both perception
and repeated delving into his worlds by his readers. If you expect the Latro sequence to go from
A to Z, then you're reading the wrong books. If you expect a more Citizen Kane-style mode of
storytelling filled with lacunae, subtle hints, and endings that leave a sense of wonder rather
than completion, then you're definitely reading the right books. Others may disagree with me,
but my perception of Soldier of Sidon is that it effectively brings the sequence to the closest

thing to closure it needs. Anything else, to me--unless superbly done (something Wolfe is quite capable of)--would be meaningless windowdressing.

On Mon, Jul 20, 2009 at 7:10 PM, <JBarach at aol.com> wrote:
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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 20 Jul 2009, 23:32 · in reply to Milton Jackson

Well, Wolfe at one point was talking of having Latro ride a Phoenician boat to the Americas. I suppose that's probably out of the question now.

On Mon, Jul 20, 2009 at 4:24 PM, Milton Jackson<miltonwjackson at gmail.com> wrote:
I'll tell you no such thing. You'll have to read the book to determine what you think of what Wolfe does with Latro. One thing any Wolfe fan should know is that Wolfe rarely gives a traditional resolution to his works. They are often openended and incomplete in ways that would damage other authors' reputations though. Wolfe is a writer who rewards both perception and repeated delving into his worlds by his readers. If you expect the Latro sequence to go from A to Z, then you're reading the wrong books. If you expect a more Citizen Kane-style mode of storytelling filled with lacunae, subtle hints, and endings that leave a sense of wonder rather than completion, then you're definitely reading the right books. Others may

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James Wynn — 21 Jul 2009, 14:10 · in reply to Milton Jackson

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I like Sidon, but I it *does* feel odd that Sidon occurs after Latro has already returned home. The expectation is that the arc of the stories is Latro's attempt to "get back" and to reveal something of his past. So that he goes to Africa instead of Persia (or at least moves in that direction) just feels "off".

~ James

Bryan Alexander — 21 Jul 2009, 14:32 · in reply to James Wynn

I'm just trying to get my head around the amazing co-presence of Wolfe, Michael Cisco, and John Crowley. Wow.

On 7/21/09, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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~ James

Matthew Keeley — 21 Jul 2009, 15:25 · in reply to Bryan Alexander

On Tue, Jul 21, 2009 at 10:32 AM, Bryan Alexander<bryan.alexander at gmail.com> wrote:
I'm just trying to get my head around the amazing co-presence of Wolfe, Michael Cisco, and John Crowley. ?Wow.

I never did see Cisco (though I bought two of his books on sale, as I've heard they're good), but there was a minute or two that I saw where Gene Wolfe, John Crowley, and Samuel Delany were all in the same room together.

-Matt

James Wynn — 21 Jul 2009, 15:51 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

So if Wolfe came up with this particular idea, it seems consistent to me to think that Wolfe had some idea of where he wanted to go with the idea. It's not just a gimmick to allow, for instance, characters to deceive Latro because he can't remember that they were untrustworthy.

I always thought it was intended as a critique on the integrity of history. Wolfe did this even more directly in "Peace". Also, while Severian **says** he has perfect memory, it begs the question "How does he know that?" And in fact immediately after he makes this claim the first time, he commits a glaring error of fact.

Every morning Latro reads a diary that others tell him was written by himself. But he can't really **know** that he wrote it or (assuming he did) if he made it up or if he is crazy. He's like us when we read history.

We assume that history is **real** and myth is not, in part, because history is verifiable. However, the facts of Herodotus's history in which Latro's story is set--the first history so called--was challenged only a few decades later by Thucydides. Also it is full of stories of manticores (verified), flying snakes, wool growing on trees (verified), and a personal encounter with Pan. We can find evidence that **supports** certain claims of history, but we can't truly verify or discount recorded events and conversations. That ability has been lost to the **mists** of Time.

J

Bruce Hayles — 21 Jul 2009, 15:59 · in reply to James Wynn

Doesn't a god force Latro to choose between either finding himself among friends or regaining his memory? I thought his continued wanderings were because being among friends without memory proved to not be enough.

On Tue, Jul 21, 2009 at 10:10 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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~ James

brunians at brunians.org — 21 Jul 2009, 20:20 · in reply to James Wynn

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I don't know what Herodotus was referring to here, but it wasn't nothing.

flying snakes,

There are flying snakes (or at least gliding snakes).

wool growing on trees (verified),

It's a variety of Indian cotton.

and a personal encounter
with Pan.

People have personal encounters with God literally all of the time.

.

James Wynn — 21 Jul 2009, 20:55 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Also it is full of stories of manticores (verified),

I don't know what Herodotus was referring to here, but it wasn't nothing.

"Manticore" is from the Indian word for tiger. Granted, tigers don't have three rows of teeth or a tail with spikes, but Pausanias (2nd century) recognized it as the tiger with fanciful flourishes.

flying snakes,

There are flying snakes (or at least gliding snakes).

Yeah, but Herodotus describes a whole Egyptian ecology involving birds etc.

wool growing on trees (verified),

It's a variety of Indian cotton.

Right.

and a personal encounter with Pan.

People have personal encounters with God literally all of the time.

Yeah, but only Abraham claimed to have met him in the mundane way (on the road to Athens) that Herodotus relates.

Jeff Wilson — 23 Jul 2009, 00:53 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

Also, while

Severian *says* he has perfect memory, it begs the question "How does he know that?"

BTQ abuse makes the Baby Theanthropos cry.

<http://begthequestion.info/>

You can make a difference.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

John Watkins — 23 Jul 2009, 01:11 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

A rare lapse from the erudite Mr. Wynn.

On Wed, Jul 22, 2009 at 8:53 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

James Wynn wrote:

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Matthew Keeley — 23 Jul 2009, 01:29 · in reply to John Watkins

And yet the colloquial usage of "begs the question" does make sense; it's a nice and colorful shorthand. Less irritating than trying to figure out the definition of "nonplussed."

<http://podictionary.com/?p=653>

-Matt

Daniel D Jones — 23 Jul 2009, 01:37 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On Wednesday 22 July 2009 21:29:14 Matthew Keeley wrote:

And yet the colloquial usage of "begs the question" does make sense; it's a nice and colorful shorthand. Less irritating than trying to figure out the definition of "nonplussed."

Then say "...begs one to ask the question.." or "...begs that the question be asked..." If you find those a bit cumbersome, "raises the question" is just as clear and succinct as the misused phrase.

James Wynn — 23 Jul 2009, 14:32 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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Thanks for not reporting my BTQ abuse to Logic Protective Services. ;-)

Still, while I can see how the term "begs the question" might be misused ("Which begs the question, who made James a logician?") , it has never been clear to me why "begs the question" is bad form to introduce a question that *properly* illustrates an unsupported premise in a statement.

For example, I could have said: "This is begging the question. How does he know that?" That would have protected me from allegations of BTQA, but the two phrases convey the same meaning and the modified form does not distort the etymological intent of the term (as I understand it). Granted, the modified form is not "easier", but I think reflexive outrage at the mere use of the term "begs the question" is oversensitivity on the part of some logicians...which is reason enough to use it.

"[Irony is] like rain on a wedding day" is not true. The statement is an outrage to "irony". But the problem is not the syntactical form.

James

Adam Thornton — 23 Jul 2009, 15:18 · in reply to James Wynn

On Jul 23, 2009, at 9:32 AM, James Wynn wrote:
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Outraging logicians has never been a particularly good motivator for me. I must be doing it wrong.

Adam

Lane Haygood — 23 Jul 2009, 15:30 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Outraging logicians is never a good idea. We come armed with syllogisms.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jul 23, 2009, at 10:18 AM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Jul 23, 2009, at 9:32 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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James Wynn — 23 Jul 2009, 15:31 · in reply to Adam Thornton

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You must be, Adam.

Logicians are not Vulcans, they only enjoy pretending to be ones. They have petty pet peeves just like the rest of humanity. In some cases, those who assume the title "logician" are not at all removed from those taking part in the annual "Klingon Beauty Contest" in Atlanta. When meeting a person who is showing off his invulnerable armor, how can one resist poking an uncovered sore?

Jeff Wilson — 23 Jul 2009, 15:49 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

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Because it was coined to refer not to a premise but a conclusion supported in a specific, fallacious way, that of circular reasoning. Sev's claim is supported in a different fallacious way, involving confirmation bias.

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

James Wynn — 23 Jul 2009, 17:12 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

James Wynn wrote:

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Because it was coined to refer not to a premise but a conclusion supported in a specific, fallacious way, that of circular reasoning. Sev's claim is supported in a different fallacious way, involving confirmation bias.

Okay. Attempting to put it another way, you are saying that the question Severian is begging is "Is it possible for one to know for certain if one has forgotten or misremembered something?", not "How does Severian know he remembers everything?"

Well, okay, the first question is better *phrased* logically. However, the answers to both are congruent ("It is not possible" and "Severian cannot"). IMO the latter is perfectly suitable unless I'm constructing a logical equation, and it is *superior* rhetorically in that it is more directly to the point. I'm categorizing this so-called error with the Split Infinitive rule (<http://www.newdream.net/~scully/toelw/Lowth.htm>).

I agree it is dangerous to handle BTQ in this way unless you know what you are doing; but, I didn't use the term to say "His claim brings to mind such and such speculation". I used the term to say "Severian's statement is based on a specific unsupported premise undermined by an obvious Socratic proposition which I shall hereby phrase in a way that is applicable to our current discussion." Sans evidence that my usage is misleading, I intend to be incorrigible about this.

Irrelevant aside: I don't remember learning Confirmation Bias as one of the logical fallacies. After looking up a couple of websites I see that it is defined as a "fallacy of evidence". If that's the case, it can *lead* directly to Circular Reasoning (among, I presume, other logical fallacies although I can't think of any at the moment).

Jerry Friedman — 23 Jul 2009, 20:10 · follows James Wynn

--- On Thu, 7/23/09, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

...

I'm categorizing this so-called error with the Split Infinitive rule (<http://www.newdream.net/~scully/toelw/Lowth.htm>).

...

Speaking of pet peeves, that article hit one of mine. Lowth's grammar book never mentions split infinitives. Yes, I read the whole book looking for that. Everything I know about split infinitives (and some things other people know) is at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split_infinite

On the subject of ending sentences with prepositions, I quoted at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Lowth

what Lowth actually said, which isn't exactly what Scott E. Kapel's article (linked to above) might lead you to think. (If you can read the gray on black.)

I'd say BTQ is what Bryan Garner calls "skunked". Whichever sense you use it in, people will misunderstand or criticize you. When it's used to mean a logical fallacy, I don't remember seeing it with the question in apposition.

Jerry Friedman

Daniel D Jones — 23 Jul 2009, 22:50 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thursday 23 July 2009 10:32:38 James Wynn wrote:

Also, while Severian *says* he has perfect memory, it begs the question "How does he know that?"

BTQ abuse makes the Baby Theanthropos cry.

<http://begthequestion.info/>

You can make a difference.

Thanks for not reporting my BTQ abuse to Logic Protective Services. ;-)

Still, while I can see how the term "begs the question" might be misused ("Which begs the question, who made James a logician?") , it has never been clear to me why "begs the question" is bad form to introduce a question that *properly* illustrates an unsupported premise in a statement.

It's bad form to use the phrase incorrectly, regardless of whether or not it's in relation to a fallacy.

For example, I could have said: "This is begging the question. How does he know that?" That would have protected me from allegations of BTQA, but the two phrases convey the same meaning and the modified form does not distort the etymological intent of the term (as I understand it). Granted, the modified form is not "easier", but I think reflexive outrage at the mere use of the term "begs the question" is oversensitivity on the part of some logicians...which is reason enough to use it.

I disagree that the two forms convey the same meaning. You stated that "it," not "he," begs the question and then stated the question that "it" was "begging." I think the vast majority of readers would interpret that to mean that Severian's claim (the "it" in the statement) raises the question you explicitly stated: How does he know that his memory is perfect? I think few readers, even those who are quite familiar with the correct definition, would interpret it to mean that Severian has committed a logical fallacy.

"[Irony is] like rain on a wedding day" is not true. The statement is an outrage to "irony". But the problem is not the syntactical form.

If you truly meant to say that Severian committed the logical fallacy of begging the question, then you phrased it in such a manner that almost everyone who read your statement would misinterpret it.

Jeff Wilson — 24 Jul 2009, 03:15 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

Okay. Attempting to put it another way, you are saying that the question Severian is begging is "Is it possible for one to know for certain if one has forgotten or misremembered something?", not "How does Severian know he remembers everything?"

Oy!

There's no begging of either question that I can see. Severian feels his memory is perfect because he can find no gaps in it *and* apparently neither can Palaemon. Until his attention is drawn to an inconsistency, any forgetting was both holistic, as if the object of the memory never existed at all, and trivial, regarding matters that no one else cared about or remembered and did not involve objective, physical consequences like being unable to open a door because of forgetting where the keys were left.

And there may be things excusable as being different in the not-English idiom the Urthlings use, similar to the way our "I forgot my keys" can really mean forgetting, or it can mean "I was distracted from my responsibilities and no attempt at recall was made".

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

James Wynn — 24 Jul 2009, 12:55 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Severian feels his memory is perfect because he can find no gaps in it
and apparently neither can Palaemon.

But having gaps in your memory is not the only way you can "forget". Severian's tale exemplifies this at the tippy-top of page 2 of The Shadow of the Torturer:

"I would have hidden, but __Roche__ held me, saying, 'Wait, I see pikes.' " [snip][short exposition about how Severian never forgets anything because it is "recreated" each day][snip] "...they had pikes, as __Drotte__ had said."

You can say this is a trivial detail, and it is. But it is also quite glaring and occurs in the first 10 inches of text, closely embedded around his first and one of his more elaborate claims of perfect memory. The intent seems to be to make a mockery of Severian's claim. You detail the conditions of all of Severian's forgetting episodes, but everything we know about the events surrounding Severian's life comes solely from himself. Yes this carries the Unreliable Narrator to an absurd level. That seems to have been Wolfe's point.

J

Craig Brewer — 24 Jul 2009, 13:42 · in reply to James Wynn

I also find it strange that he loses his way in the Corridors of Time. It happens so early that it seems like another flag that even his memory of immediate events is far from perfect.

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

From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com>

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

Sent: Friday, July 24, 2009 7:55:35 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) Severian's memory

Severian feels his memory is perfect because he can find no gaps in it *and* apparently neither can

Palaemon.

But having gaps in your memory is not the only way you can "forget". Severian's tale exemplifies this at the tippy-top of page 2 of The Shadow of the Torturer:

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J

Jeff Wilson — 25 Jul 2009, 00:53 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

Severian feels his memory is perfect because he can find no gaps in it
and apparently neither can Palaemon.

But having gaps in your memory is not the only way you can "forget".
Severian's tale exemplifies this at the tippy-top of page 2 of The
Shadow of the Torturer:

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glaring and occurs in the first 10 inches of text, closely embedded
around his first and one of his more elaborate claims of perfect memory.
The intent seems to be to make a mockery of Severian's claim. You detail
the conditions of all of Severian's forgetting episodes, but everything
we know about the events surrounding Severian's life comes solely from
himself. Yes this carries the Unreliable Narrator to an absurd level.
That seems to have been Wolfe's point.

The Roche-Eata mismatch is flaw in his memory, but not a grossly
obvious one. The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a
false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective
methodology.

Severian-the-narrator also tends to immerse himself in his past persona as he writes, and at this
point Severian-the-protagonist may never have had to confront the flaws in his memory,
leading Sev-the-narrator to write the nonsense about his memory losing nothing in the end,
similar to the way he shifts from Sev to Thecla in the middle of a childhood reminisce later on.

There is also confirmation bias in that the admittedly few occasions when his memory lacks
fidelity don't stand out as much as his more frequent impressive and successful feats of
memory, similar to the way a psychic prediction that comes true is more memorable to some
than the piles of failed ones.

Jeff Wilson — 25 Jul 2009, 01:05 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Craig Brewer wrote:

I also find it strange that he loses his way in the Corridors of Time. It happens so early that it seems like another flag that even his memory of immediate events is far from perfect.

I'd have to give him the benefit of the doubt there, as the corridors extend back through time and dimension, so that three lefts may not make a right.

Severian further admits he doesn't remember what he does not perceive on the first page of chapter 27 in SWORD. "[...]I have forgotten much of that, because I was so exhausted that I moved as though in sleep." In his first encounter with higher dimensions, he may not have seen everything about his surrounding, he may not have been able to correctly interpret his proprioceptor sense as put on foot in direction gamma from the other, and it may have even made him a bit ill and internally distracted.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

James Wynn — 26 Jul 2009, 02:09 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget." which is based (presumably) on a specific unsupported premise: "I would know if I had forgotten something." This is the logical flaw defined as Begging The Question.

John Watkins — 26 Jul 2009, 12:49 · in reply to James Wynn

Well, it's definitely an unstated and unsupported premise. I'm not sure that it counts as question-begging. Many people do know that they forget things.

On Sat, Jul 25, 2009 at 10:09 PM, James Wynn <crushtv@gmail.com> wrote:

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget." which is based (presumably) on a specific unsupported premise: "I would know if I had forgotten something." This is the logical flaw defined as Begging The Question.

Jeff Wilson — 26 Jul 2009, 20:10 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical

flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget."

This is a single proposition. A logical argument has the form of two or more propositions.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 29 Jul 2009, 07:54 · in reply to James Wynn

James Wynn wrote:

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget." which is based (presumably) on a specific unsupported premise: "I would know if I had forgotten something." This is the logical flaw defined as Begging The Question.

Can you point to where he actually says something like this, please?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

James Wynn — 29 Jul 2009, 15:43 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget." which is based (presumably) on a specific unsupported premise: "I would know if I had forgotten something." This is the logical flaw defined as Begging The Question.

Can you point to where he actually says something like this, please?

You mean where Severian says he doesn't forget anything? I'm not trying to be dense. I just want verification before I proceed. Surely that is the most universally recognized opinion that Severian has about himself.

J

James B. Jordan — 29 Jul 2009, 16:43 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

At 03:10 PM 7/23/2009, you wrote:
Speaking of pet peeves, that article hit one of mine.
Lowth's grammar book never mentions split infinitives.
Yes, I read the whole book looking for that. Everything
I know about split infinitives (and some things other
people know) is at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split_infinitive

I was taught that the rule against split infinitives comes from the oppression of Latin grammar imposed on English. Latin infinitives are one word; hence English infinitives must be treated as one word.

JBJordan

James B. Jordan
Director, Biblical Horizons
Box 1096
Niceville, FL 32588
<http://www.biblicalhorizons.com>

Gwern Branwen — 29 Jul 2009, 16:57 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Wed, Jul 29, 2009 at 3:54 AM, Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com> wrote:
James Wynn wrote:

The narrator seeks to recall the incident and does so, but the effort produces a false positive that is duly recorded. This isn't a logical flaw, but one of woefully subjective methodology.

The logical flaw is his argument "I do not forget." which is based (presumably) on a specific unsupported premise: "I would know if I had forgotten something." This is the logical flaw defined as Begging The Question.

Can you point to where he actually says something like this, please?

Severian says often that he never forgets, although he eventually modifies this to he usually doesn't forget and implies he knows those periods of forgetting:

"It is my nature, my joy and my curse, to forget nothing. Every rattling chain and whistling wind, every sight, smell, and taste, remains changeless in my mind, and though I know it is not so with everyone, I cannot imagine what it can mean to be otherwise, as if one had slept when in fact an experience is merely remote."

"How I reached my bed I have no notion. Those who drink much have told me that they sometimes forget all that befell them in the latter part of the night, and perhaps it was so with me. But I think it more likely that I (who never forget anything, who, if I may for once confess the truth, though I seem to boast, do not truly understand what others mean when they say forget, for it seems to me that all experience becomes a part of my being) only slept and was carried there."

"I never forget a voice," I told him, "or anything else." And then in my eagerness, I impulsively added what was perhaps the worst thing I could have said: "You tried to brain me with your shovel." His face became masklike at once, and he stepped back into his boat and rowed out onto the brown water."

" "Liege," I said, "my head is swimming." (Then, lying,) "I cannot remember those words truly, I have forgotten them already. Did I hear you say that Dorcas and the others will be in the House Absolute?"

"THE FLOATING BOAT would not obey me, for I had not the word for it. (I have often thought that its word may have been among the things Piaton had tried to tell me, as he had told me to take his life; and I wish I had come to heed him sooner.) In the end, I was forced to climb from the right eye? the worst climb of my life. In this overlong account of my adventures, I have said often that I forget nothing; but I have forgotten much of that, because I was so exhausted that I moved as though in sleep. When I staggered at last into the silent, sealed town that stood among the feet of the cataracts, it must have been nearly night, and I lay down beside a wall that gave me shelter from the wind."

"At one moment they were nearly invisible; at the next they were

upon me like a torrent. I cannot say who the riders were or on what beasts they rode; not because I have forgotten (for I forget nothing) but because I saw nothing clearly. There was no question of fighting, only of seeking in some way to live. I parried a blow from a twisted weapon that was neither sword nor ax; the piebald reared, and I saw an arrow protruding from his chest like a horn of fire. A rider crashed against us, and we fell into the dark."

"I have forgotten! Do you remember when we flew over the armies? For a time I forgot it! I know now what it is to forget." There was pale laughter in his voice. "Which you will now remember always." "I hope so, but it fades even as we speak. It vanishes like mist, which must itself be a forgetting. What was that weapon that brought us down?"

'Triskele laid his scarred head against my knee, the ambassador of all crippled things, of the Autarch who had carried a tray in the House Absolute and lain paralyzed in the palanquin waiting to pass to me the humming voices in his skull, of Thecla writhing under the Revolutionary, and of the woman even I, who had boasted I could forget nothing, had nearly forgotten, bleeding and dying beneath our tower. Perhaps after all it was my discovery of Triskele, which I have said changed nothing, that in the end changed everything. I did not have to answer this time; Master Malrubius saw my answer in my face.'

"There will be long, slow days on the ship. I will read. I still have so much to learn. I will sleep, dozing in my berth, listening to the centuries wash against the hull. This manuscript I shall send to Master Ultan; but while I am on the ship, when I cannot sleep and have tired of reading, I shall write it out again? I who forget nothing? every word, just as I have written it here."

"

One of the advantages of such a memory as mine, which stores everything and forgets nothing, is that it is as good as paper at such times. (Indeed, that may be its only advantage.) On this occasion, however, it did me no more good than it had when I had tried to follow the directions of that lochage of the peltasts whom I met upon the bridge of Gyoll. No doubt Idas had assumed I knew more of the ship than I did, and that I would not count doors and look for turnings with exactness."

"These Hierogrammates who ruled the universe and what lay beyond had not merely mistaken another for me, but now sought to remind me, who could forget nothing, of the scenes of my life; and did so (so it seemed to me) less skillfully than my own memories could have."

"You have undergone trials," she said. "If you wish, I can give you that which will make you forget them all. Though only by instinct, you will still bring a young sun to your world." I shook my head. "I don't want to forget, Tzadkiel. I've boasted too often that I forget nothing, and forgetting which I have known once or twice seems to me a kind of death."

"Burgundofara went to look at the cabin while I sat trying to wipe the image of Zama's face from my eyes and watching the crew make ready to cast off. One of the sun-browned rivermen seemed familiar; but I, who can forget nothing, sometimes have difficulty in bringing the quarry to bay in a memory that grows ever more vast."

"Our rescuer," Odilo continued, beaming, "is?" "Don't matter," the sailor snapped. "You get down there and trim that mains'l. Jib's fouled, too. You stamp now and stutter, or she'll capsize." It had been ten years and more since I had sailed on the Samru, but I had learned then how a fore-and-aft rig operates, and I do not forget."

"The continents themselves are old as raddled women, long since stripped of beauty and fertility. The New Sun comes, and he will send them crashing into the sea like foundered ships. And from the sea lift new glittering with gold, silver, iron, and copper. With diamonds, rubies, turquoises, lands wallowing in the soil of a million millennia, so long ago washed down to the sea. I, who boast of forgetting nothing, had forgotten that it was the demons who had spoken so."

gwern

Jerry Friedman — 29 Jul 2009, 17:22 · in reply to James B. Jordan

--- On Wed, 7/29/09, James B. Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:
At 03:10 PM 7/23/2009, you wrote:

...

Everything
I know about split infinitives (and some things other
people know) is at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split_infinitive

I was taught that the rule against split infinitives comes
from the
oppression of Latin grammar imposed on English. Latin
infinitives are one
word; hence English infinitives must be treated as one
word.

You put that clearly. However, though many people
have been taught that (including me), I'd like to see some evidence for it. When the rule against
split infinitives was first stated, in the 19th century, did anyone actually justify the rule with
Latin grammar? Is there any reason to think that was anyone's justification?

I'd be interested in any citation earlier than the one
in the Wikipedia article (John Opdycke, 1941). I'm not looking for people claiming without
evidence, "The split infinitive was banned because of an analogy with Latin"-- we have plenty of
those.

Jerry Friedman

James Wynn — 29 Jul 2009, 18:56 · in reply to James B. Jordan

Speaking of pet peeves, that article hit one of mine.
Lowth's grammar book never mentions split infinitives.
Yes, I read the whole book looking for that. Everything
I know about split infinitives (and some things other
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must be treated as one word.

I'd be interested in any citation earlier than the one
in the Wikipedia article (John Opdycke, 1941).

Sorry for maligning Lowth without checking whether it was so. Based on the other works cited in the wiki article, it appears that some 19th cen. stylists believed that it was merely the most common accepted usage and the arguments against splitting infinitives were generally arguments against supposed modernism (Realist literature and the like). It is interesting to me, the number of cited 19th cen authorities who argued for this rule without offering any objective reason at all. So Opdycke is to be commended at least for that.

I wonder whether Opdycke was not on to something though. I can't think of an instance where the infinitive is split in the King James Bible. If one is reading a lot of literature closely translated from Latin or Romance languages, rather than vernacular literature, you might not run into many split infinitives. Think of the wordy feel of the personal letters of 18th-19th centuries. There seems to have been little drive toward the ordinary concisiveness of casual speech (which infinitive splitting affords) until you get to writers like Mark Twain who adopted a folksy tone ("I get paid as much for using the word 'city' as I do 'metropolis'"). Isn't it possible that split the infinitive rule was derived from writing patterns influenced by English works translated from other languages? So, indirectly, Opdycke might have put his finger on the root of the rule.

J.

Milton Jackson — 29 Jul 2009, 23:29 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

When I took grammar in high school, my English teacher told me the reason compound verbs and infinitives shouldn't be split was that large numbers of words between the component parts of the phrase broke the flow of the sentence. How true that is I don't know, but that's what I was taught.

On Wed, Jul 29, 2009 at 1:22 PM, Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com> wrote:

--- On Wed, 7/29/09, James B. Jordan <jbjordan4 at cox.net> wrote:

At 03:10 PM 7/23/2009, you wrote:

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Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 31 Jul 2009, 00:20 · in reply to James Wynn

--- On Wed, 7/29/09, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote: Jerry: > >>> Speaking of pet peeves,

that article hit one of mine.

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Yes, I read the whole book looking for that. Everything

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Sorry for maligning Lowth without checking whether it was so.

You didn't malign him--that article did.

Based on the other works cited in the wiki article, it appears that some 19th cen. stylists believed that it was merely the most common accepted usage and the arguments against splitting infinitives were generally arguments against supposed modernism (Realist literature and the like).

I missed the modernism part.

It is interesting to me, the number of cited 19th cen authorities who argued for this rule without offering any objective reason at all. So Opdycke is to be commended at least for that.

I don't know--is an objective reason that makes no sense better than no objective reason?

I wonder whether Opdycke was not on to something though. I can't think of an instance where the infinitive is split in the King James Bible.

You have a good memory. According to /American Heritage Book of English Usage (quoted at the Wikip article), the KJV has no split infinitives.

If one is reading a lot of literature closely translated from Latin or Romance languages, rather than vernacular literature, you might not run into many split infinitives.

Interesting point.

Think of the wordy feel of the personal letters of 18th-19th centuries. There seems to have been little drive toward the ordinary conciseness of casual speech (which infinitive splitting affords) until you get to writers like Mark Twain who adopted a folksy tone ("I get paid as much for using the word 'city' as I do 'metropolis']"). Isn't it possible that split the infinitive rule was derived from writing patterns influenced by English works translated from other languages? So, indirectly, Opdycke might have put his finger on the root of the rule.

Sure, it's possible, and many experts have said so. But I'd like to see some evidence.

To wrench this back on topic, does Mr. Wolfe ever split infinitives? Do his characters? After all the work I've done on the Wikipedia article, you'd think I'd have noticed, but I haven't.

Jerry Friedman

Jerry Friedman — 31 Jul 2009, 00:24 · in reply to Milton Jackson

Interesting. I agree that you usually shouldn't put a lot of words between an auxiliary verb and a main verb, or between "to" and an infinitive. (By the way, I'm told that Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar treats this "to" as an auxiliary verb!) But English speakers *have* always split compound verbs with single words, and we still *do not avoid* it. So this doesn't strike me as an argument against splitting infinitives with single words.

Jerry Friedman

--- On Wed, 7/29/09, Milton Jackson <miltonwjackson at gmail.com> wrote:
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On Wed, Jul 29, 2009 at 1:22 PM,
Jerry Friedman <jerry_friedman at yahoo.com>
wrote:

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You put that clearly. "However, though many people have been taught that (including me), I'd like to see some evidence for it. When the rule against split infinitives was first stated, in the 19th century, did

anyone actually justify the rule with Latin grammar" "Is there any reason to think that was anyone's justification"

I'd be interested in any citation earlier than the one in the Wikipedia article (John Opdycke, 1941). I'm not

looking for people claiming without evidence, "The split infinitive was banned because of an analogy with Latin"--we have plenty of those.

Jerry Friedman

Allan Anderson — 31 Jul 2009, 01:01 · follows Jerry Friedman

I think the functional questions are 1) does using a split infinitive allow more rhetorical oomph, and if so, 2) will the elegance and flash it affords sufficiently dazzle all but the most hardened grammarians?

or,

Will the reader be distracted from your point by the nagging worry that you've violated some possibly valid rule?

On Thu Jul 30 17:24 , Jerry Friedman sent:

Interesting. I agree that you usually shouldn't put a lot of words between an auxiliary verb and a main verb, or between "to" and an infinitive. (By the way, I'm told that Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar treats this "to" as an auxiliary verb!) But English speakers *have always

split* compound verbs with single words, and we still *do not avoid* it. So this doesn't strike me as an argument against splitting infinitives with single words.

Jerry Friedman

--- On Wed, 7/29/09, Milton Jackson [miltonwjackson at gmail.com](mailto:miltonwjackson@gmail.com)> wrote:

When I took grammar in high school, my English teacher told me the reason compound verbs and infinitives shouldn't be split was that large numbers of words between the component parts of the phrase broke the flow of the sentence. How true that is I don't know, but that's what I was taught.

On Wed, Jul 29, 2009 at 1:22 PM,
Jerry Friedman [jerry_friedman at yahoo.com](mailto:jerry_friedman@yahoo.com)>
wrote:

--- On
Wed, 7/29/09, James B. Jordan [jbjordan4 at cox.net](mailto:jbjordan4@cox.net)>
wrote:

At 03:10 PM 7/23/2009, you wrote:

...

Everything
I know about split infinitives (and some things
other
people know) is at

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Split_infinitive

I was taught that the rule against split infinitives
comes
from the
oppression of Latin grammar imposed on English. Latin
infinitives are one
word; hence English infinitives must be treated as
one
word.

You put that clearly. "However, though many people
have been taught that (including me), I'd like to see
some evidence for it. ?When the rule against split
infinitives was first stated, in the 19th century, did

anyone actually justify the rule with Latin grammar" "Is
there any reason to think that was anyone's
justification"

I'd be interested in any citation earlier than the one
in the Wikipedia article (John Opdycke, 1941). ?I'm
not

looking for people claiming without evidence, "The
split

infinitive was banned because of an analogy with Latin"--
we have plenty of those.

Jerry Friedman

James Wynn — 31 Jul 2009, 05:43 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

To wrench this back on topic, does Mr. Wolfe ever split infinitives? Do his characters? After all the work I've done on the Wikipedia article, you'd think I'd have noticed, but I haven't.

Interesting. After a quick scan of a variety of his books, I think he does it very rarely if at all. He seems to use far fewer infinitives than I do and seems to avoid the inclination to split them by eschewing adverbs. I expected Severian, at least, to split a lot of them. That's an interesting stylistic signature I hadn't noticed. If someone could do a full search of some of his works for the word "to", we could know whether this really is an emphatic rule that he follows.

...were generally arguments
against supposed modernism
(Realist literature and the like).

I missed the modernism part.

I can't remember the sources but they included references to splitting the infinitive "the way some do nowadays" or something like that. That sounded to me like shaking your fist at "those unruly kids". And now that you've pointed out that list of books in the wiki that split/don't split, I note that the splitters listed are Realists. I'm surprised that Spenser is not a splitter, though.

I don't know--is an objective reason that makes no sense
better than no objective reason?

It makes sense. It's just that his reasons come apart when you pick at them a little. I think my explanation is better, but I have the benefit of his failure.

I wonder whether Opdycke was not on to something though. [reorder]
If one is reading a lot of literature
closely translated from Latin or Romance languages, rather
than vernacular literature, you might not run into many
split infinitives.
I can't think of an instance where the infinitive is split in
the King James Bible.

You have a good memory. According to /American Heritage
Book of English Usage (quoted at the Wikip article), the
KJV has no split infinitives.

I didn't really *remember* it, beyond that there weren't any in the passages I could quote from memory. I thought of the Latin translation connection first and then did a word search for "to" in John, Romans, Ephesians, Proverbs, Psalms and I Samuel--the books I most expected to find splitting if it existed. If I'd examined the full wiki article rather than the poking in the notes section only, I guess I could have saved myself the trouble.

Think of the wordy feel of the personal
letters of 18th-19th centuries. There seems to have been
little drive toward the ordinary conciseness of casual

speech[snip]. Isn't it possible that split the infinitive rule was derived from writing patterns influenced by English works translated from other languages? So, indirectly, Opdycke might have put his finger on the root of the rule.

Sure, it's possible, and many experts have said so. But I'd like to see some evidence.

Has an expert really said exactly that? That the *inclination* not to split in 18th-19th century English was due to reading mostly Great Books that were translated from Latin? The 19th century sources don't seem to give a reason at all beyond common usage. If one of their peers *did*, not many seem to have been aware of it. That's a kind of evidence.

J.

Jeffrey Brent McBeth — 31 Jul 2009, 12:25 · in reply to Allan Anderson

On Thu, Jul 30, 2009 at 06:01:19PM -0700, Allan Anderson wrote:

I think the functional questions are 1) does using a split infinitive allow more rhetorical oomph, and if so, 2) will the elegance and flash it affords sufficiently dazzle all but the most hardened grammarians?

or,

Will the reader be distracted from your point by the nagging worry that you've violated some possibly valid rule?

One of the beautiful things about spoken English is the common practice to insert syllables, words, and phrases in the middle of other words and phrases where the iambic rhythm largely inherent in English allows. I would suggest that splitting infinitives is usually a manifestation of this larger ability (that I've not heard in Spanish speakers, and my German coworkers claimed doesn't exist there either). One more vulgar example is the insertion of swear words into the middle of other words (Ex. abso-.....-lutely)

(On a poetical bent, I personally find heptameter more natural than pentameter, though)

Jeff

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."

-- Mark Twain

Jerry Friedman — 31 Jul 2009, 13:26 · in reply to Jeffrey Brent McBeth

--- On Fri, 7/31/09, Jeffrey Brent McBeth <mcbeth at broggs.org> wrote:

On Thu, Jul 30, 2009 at 06:01:19PM

-0700, Allan Anderson wrote:

I think the functional questions are 1) does using a split infinitive allow more rhetorical oomph, and if so, 2) will the elegance and flash it affords sufficiently dazzle all but the most hardened grammarians?

To me, split infinitives are sometimes the most natural word order, with no special elegance or flash.

or,

Will the reader be distracted from your point by the nagging worry that you've violated some possibly valid rule?

That would be too bad.

One of the beautiful things about spoken English is the common practice to insert syllables, words, and phrases in the middle of other words and phrases where the iambic rhythm largely inherent in English allows. I would suggest that splitting infinitives is usually a manifestation of this larger ability (that I've not heard in Spanish speakers, and my German coworkers claimed doesn't exist there either). One more vulgar example is the insertion of swear words into the middle of other words (Ex. abso-.....-lutely)

This is called "tmesis". I thought you could only do it with swear words and euphemisms for them.

Speaking of iambs (and I am), a classic example of tmesis is

<http://www.abc.net.au/overnights/stories/s1307296.htm>

(On a poetical bent, I personally find heptameter more natural than pentameter, though)

Lots of nursery rhymes, ballads, and hymns are in heptameter (split up into four and three), and most of us heard or read lots of those before we got to blank verse and sonnets.

I can think of only three Wolfe poems offhand: the "shooting star" one (tetrameter), the "Row, brothers, row" one (trimeter), and the "Sad experience teaches me" one (tetrameter).

Jerry Friedman

Matthew King — 31 Jul 2009, 16:05 · in reply to James Wynn

On Fri, Jul 31, 2009 at 12:43 AM, James Wynn<crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
If someone could do a full search of some of his works for the word "to"

I somehow came by a few of his works in text form. Let's see what regular expressions can do. I'll just search for "to " followed by any word ending in "ly".

\$ ls *.txt

Death of Dr Island by Gene Wolfe.txt

Wolfe, Gene - Exodus From the Long Sun - Book 4.txt

Island of Dr Death by Gene Wolfe.txt

Wolfe, Gene - Nightside The Long Sun.txt

Seven American Nights by Gene Wolfe.txt

Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt

Wolfe, Gene - Book of the New Sun 1 - Shadow of the Torturer.txt Wolfe, Gene - The Urth Of The New Sun.txt Wolfe, Gene - Calde of the Long Sun - Book 3.txt Wolfe, Gene - Urth of the New Sun, The.txt

```
$ egrep -o 'to [[:alnum:]]+ly ' ./*.txt
```

```
./Seven American Nights by Gene Wolfe.txt:to graphically ./Seven American Nights by Gene Wolfe.txt:to fly ./Wolfe, Gene - Nightside The Long Sun.txt:to apply ./Wolfe, Gene - Nightside The Long Sun.txt:to fly ./Wolfe, Gene - Nightside The Long Sun.txt:to fly ./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to rely ./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to fly ./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to ply ./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to fly ./Wolfe, Gene - The Urth Of The New Sun.txt:to fully
```

Results: one instance each of "to graphically" and "to fully"

The documents were obviously OCR'd, so textual corruptions may have put some split infinitives beyond the reach of a simple search.

Jerry Friedman — 31 Jul 2009, 16:25 · in reply to Matthew King

--- On Fri, 7/31/09, Matthew King <automatthew at gmail.com> wrote: ...

If someone could do a full search of some of his works for the word "to"

I somehow came by a few of his works in text form. Let's see what regular expressions can do. I'll just search for "to" followed by any word ending in "ly".

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Wolfe, Gene - Urth of the New Sun, The.txt
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./Wolfe, Gene - Nightside The Long Sun.txt:to fly
./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to rely
./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to fly
./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to ply
./Wolfe, Gene - The Claw of the Conciliator.txt:to fly
./Wolfe, Gene - The Urth Of The New Sun.txt:to fully
```

Results: one instance each of "to graphically" and "to fully"

The documents were obviously OCREd, so textual corruptions may have put some split infinitives beyond the reach of a simple search.

And some adverbs don't end in -ly.

But /The Best of Gene Wolfe/ is on limited preview at Google Books. With your results above, I can find that extremely split infinitive:

"For an instant, the shadow wall used at the beginning of the second act was illuminated again to graphically (or I should say pornographically) present Ellen's desire...."

<http://books.google.com/books?id=ZiSVR-pDf6QC&pg=PA302>

The one from /The Urth of the New Sun/ is a false positive, though.

"Baldanders rose to take it, and I saw that he had grown to fully twice my height."

<http://books.google.com/books?id=748HJZl6dAkC&pg=PA303>

Jerry Friedman