

Retroactive Futures

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 May 1998

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Michael Straight — 04 May 1998, 13:45

On Sat, 2 May 1998 m.driussi at genie.geis.com wrote:

This "effect of the future upon the present," while a paradoxical mirroring of the effect of the past upon the present, is a point that Wolfe brings up about the Urth Cycle in the text itself as well as in many interviews and articles. Time and again he says that Earth may have received wonders from Urth; not in the sense that Urth is located in our past, thus restoring the "natural" cause/effect sense of "the past shaping the present," but in this paradoxical sense of seemingly going against the timeflow. (The shadow of Baldanders has caused Mary Shelley to write FRANKENSTEIN rather than Shelley's FRANKENSTEIN inspiring/causing Baldanders to recreate himself as a giant monster; etc.)

Here, to put it in another way, prosaic and mundane: let's say that what Wolfe is talking about, the future altering the present, is really just this--people get the future they have in mind, the goal they are working toward. Just to crank this idea up and give enough contrast to make it clear, I'll cast it into a starkly religious mode that Wolfe never uses: If people have God in hearts and mind, then they are heading towards the future of rebirth by the timeline warping behavior they exhibit; If people do not have God in hearts and mind, then they are heading towards the future of final death via the timeline shifting behavior they exhibit (killing Dodos, raping the Earth, etc.).

This sounds very much like how C.S. Lewis describes the situation in The Great Divorce. He claims that the redeemed in Heaven will look back on their earthly life and see that they have always been in Heaven (or at least since baptism), that the joys of life were actual tastes of Heaven and that the pains were merely purgatorial purification. Whereas the damned will look back and see that their pains were the first tortures of Hell and their pleasures unheeded invitations to abandon self for God.

-Rostrum