

(no subject)

The Urth list — 61 messages, 12 voices, 15 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5821>

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Lee Berman — 15 Dec 2010, 02:07

Jeff Wilson: There is a possibility that the Green Man is meant to suggest this happens in the distant future of Ushas. If his people are fed internally by their symbiotic algae and no longer must rely on the yearly success of crops or catch, they no longer must sacrifice to the four gods, and may live directly from the light of the Sun, with likewise no intercessors between themselves and God.

Son o' Witz- Yes, I agree that is is essentially what The Green Man symbolizes. He says nearly as much quite plainly. They are a humanity of non-torturers.

I lean in this interpretive direction also. But The Green Man is a significant alternate name for the pagan horned god, Great God Pan, etc. Is Wolfe suggesting this is the ultimate and true, unified god of Briah? Or of all universes, including ours?

If the latter it might cause the Pope an uncomfortable turn or two at night....should I start my "Wolfe as Heretic" thread again?

David Stockhoff — 15 Dec 2010, 02:27 · in reply to Lee Berman

I think that, for a universe apparently without a Christ, Pan is as close to the true religion as one can get.

Since the Pope is lucky enough to live in OUR universe, he can sleep soundly.

On 12/14/2010 9:07 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Heretic" thread again?

Matthew Weber — 15 Dec 2010, 03:52 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Tue, Dec 14, 2010 at 6:07 PM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

I lean in this interpretive direction also. But The Green Man is a significant alternate name for the pagan horned god, Great God Pan, etc. Is Wolfe suggesting this is the ultimate and true, unified god of Briah? Or of all universes, including ours?

I really can't see how the text is suggesting such a thing any more than it's suggesting that Jonas is the ultimate and true, unified god of Briah.
Happy to reconsider if I'm missing something, of course.

Matt +

The contact with manners then is education; and this Thucydides appears to assert when he says history is philosophy learned from examples.
Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 54-c. 7 B.C.), *Ars Rhetorica*, XI, 2

Jeff Wilson — 15 Dec 2010, 08:27 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 12/14/2010 8:07 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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I lean in this interpretive direction also. But The Green Man is a significant alternate name for the pagan horned god, Great God Pan, etc. Is Wolfe suggesting this is the ultimate and true, unified god of Briah?

No. Or at least, only in the sense that that is as far as pagans have gotten to the true godhead, at least in Wolfe's opinion. I'm sorry that I slipped up and capitalized him, I usually leave the green man lower case to emphasize that he's not a unique being, just the only one of his kind that appears in the story. There are many green men in the Ushas future, perhaps even everyone at some point is green.

This pagan-y future rapprochement with the godhead may also suggest that Wolfe believes that Catholicism itself can usefully evolve toward greater conformity with God's wishes in ways that celtic pagantry has already. What those ways might be, I couldn't guess atm.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Gerry Quinn — 15 Dec 2010, 18:17 · in reply to David Stockhoff

From: "David Stockhoff" <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

I think that, for a universe apparently without a Christ, Pan is as close to the true religion as one can get.

Since the Pope is lucky enough to live in OUR universe, he can sleep soundly.

I don't think there's any special reason to think Severian's universe is without a Christ. There is substantial evidence that it's history is similar to ours. In BotLS there are notable religious references, including some to Christ.

One **can** argue that these references somehow come from another universe, but it seems a bit of a stretch.

As for the green man, I think he needs no more symbolic overloading than the two obvious meanings: the most significant being that he comes from a future with lots of sunshine, and a possible second is that in this ideal future Man may not need to kill, or till the ground, to eat. Which is good, I suppose, although I'm not sure to what extent. I guess it depends what you get up to in the time saved, and how you feel about carnivory.

- Gerry Quinn

Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 19:33 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On Dec 15, 2010, at 10:17 AM, "Gerry Quinn" <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

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Come on already!

This all goes away if you understand Jesus of Nazareth as an instantiation of Christ which theologians name Logos, and you avoid understanding the logos only through the lens of Jesus. Severian seems, to me, an instantiation of the Logos in BotNS.

But even without going that far, the only way you can deny Christ in Briah is if you deny that the Outsider is a real diety. I don't remember anything that bursts the idea that the Outsider is a real god. He is clearly meant to be Logos, and clearly Jesus of Nazareth stories have been attributed to him.

~witz

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 15 Dec 2010, 19:41 · in reply to Son of Witz

On Wed, Dec 15, 2010 at 11:33 AM, Son of Witz

<Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

Come on already!

This all goes away if you understand Jesus of Nazareth as an instantiation of Christ which theologians name Logos, and you avoid understanding the logos only through the lens of Jesus.

This is extremely poor (Catholic) theology. The Person named Jesus, the Christ, is and must be unique across all Universes. The birth of Jesus is the origin-point of the eternal Logos, the Theanthropos and son of the Theotokos.

Severian seems, to me, an instantiation of the Logos in BotNS.

Wolfe is very firm that this is NOT the case.

From the James Jordan interview

(<http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfebj.html>): "I don't think of Severian as being a Christ figure; I think of Severian as being a Christian figure. He is a man who has been born into a very perverse background, who is gradually trying to become better."

But even without going that far, the only way you can deny Christ in Briah is if you deny that the Outsider is a real deity. I don't remember anything that bursts the idea that the Outsider is a real god. He is clearly meant to be Logos, and clearly Jesus of Nazareth stories have been attributed to him.

The Outsider is the Christian God, to be sure, and the stories analogous to those of Jesus are attributed to "a fortunate man whom the Outsider had both enlightened and possessed" -- an Jesus-analogue in the Briahitic Universe.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Lee Berman — 15 Dec 2010, 19:52 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Son o' Witz: But even without going that far, the only way you can deny Christ in Briah is if you deny that the Outsider is a real deity.

Sorry, I'm not knowledgeable enough to discuss the Logos stuff. Maybe I can later.

But in saying we must deny The Outsider as a real deity it would seem you are saying that we must deny Dionysus as a real deity. I'm not sure Gene Wolfe does.

What do you think regarding this?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Dec 2010, 19:55 · in reply to Lee Berman

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But in saying we must deny The Outsider as a real deity it would seem you are saying that we must deny Dionysus as a real deity. I'm not sure Gene Wolfe does.

What do you think regarding this?

I think Wolfe would say that Dionysus was real, but not a "deity" in the sense that God is a Deity.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 15 Dec 2010, 20:07 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

I admit I can't make up my mind about "which" universe Severian lives in. Sometimes I think it's ours, but often I think it's the future of a very close parallel---so close that the term "parallel universe" doesn't quite cover it.
But we've been through all this before.

--- On Wed, 12/15/10, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

From: Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie>
Subject: Re: (urth) (no subject)
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Wednesday, December 15, 2010, 1:17 PM
From: "David Stockhoff" <dstockhoff at verizon.net>
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Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 21:05 · in reply to Lee Berman

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What do you think regarding this?

No, no.

I think that if you say there is no Christ in Briah, then you deny that the Outsider is a real deity, which I think is a mistake.

Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 21:10 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

On Dec 15, 2010, at 12:07 PM, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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I don't think it matters.

Earth is in the future or past of this creation, or even perhaps in a previous or succeeding instance of this cyclical repeating universe. Meaning, our Eath is subject to the same cosmic realities as Urth. These realities take different names, such as Jesus or the Outsider, but they are the same underlying reality. If there is a Logos that stands beyond our realm, there is a logos outside Severian and Silk's realm. It's really not that confusing.

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 15 Dec 2010, 21:19 · in reply to Son of Witz

What's the point in creating a parallel universe that is fundamentally identical to our own?

--- On Wed, 12/15/10, Son of Witz <Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

From: Son of Witz <Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org>

Subject: Re: (urth) (no subject)

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

Date: Wednesday, December 15, 2010, 4:10 PM

On Dec 15, 2010, at 12:07 PM, DAVID STOCKHOFF <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 21:33 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

Which universe are you calling "parallel"?

What should we call our universe in this discussion?

If you mean ours and Briah are parallel, they are not. Our universe and Briah are cyclical iterations of the same creation that keeps playing out in more or less the same pattern. The text, and Wolfe interviews are clear about this.

(There were several matrixes before Neo, there are Christs beyond Jesus.)

If you mean Yesod is parallel to Briah, then I would say that Yessod is clearly a metaphor for the realm of enlightened beings who have graduated Samsara and exist outside the Wheel of Time. These beings who come back and help those in samsara are bodhisattvas, and the heirodules play this role.

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DAVID STOCKHOFF — 15 Dec 2010, 21:46 · in reply to Son of Witz

I mean "similar," i.e., identical except for key differences. That is, in the usual sci-fi sense that most people understand.

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 15 Dec 2010, 21:50 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

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H'mmm. Well, I would have said that the usual science-fictional sense of "parallel universes" includes the idea that they are in some sense moving along in time next to ours. The "mirror universe" in Star Trek is a classic example.

Also, please refrain (note that I am asking politely) from using the term "sci-fi." Some find it very offensive.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 22:28 · in reply to DAVID STOCKHOFF

Well, the point seems to be that things are endlessly cyclical.

It is a major point of the books cosmology though, and one of the other huge themes is a cyclicity of creation, the future of which affects the past as much as it's past affects it's future.

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Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 22:31 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Why is Sci-Fi offensive?

Is this like, If you were Straight-Edge playing in a Melvins or Black Sabbath cover band and you insisted that your genre be referred to as "Doom-Metal" rather than "Stoner-Rock"?

On Dec 15, 2010, at 1:50 PM, "Dan'I Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

Also, please refrain (note that I am asking politely) from using the term "sci-fi." Some find it very offensive

Matthew Weber — 15 Dec 2010, 22:36 · in reply to Son of Witz

It's more how nobody who actually lives in San Francisco calls it "Frisco".

On Wed, Dec 15, 2010 at 2:31 PM, Son of Witz <Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 15 Dec 2010, 22:37 · in reply to Son of Witz

"Sci-Fi" is the sound of two crickets screwing.

More seriously: "Sci-Fi" is a term made up by a publicity hack, in analogy with the then-popular "Hi-Fi" for "high fidelity" stereo equipment. It referred, and in many SF fans' minds still refers, to movies about giant insects devouring Cleveland and suchlike. "Sci-fi" is, in short, bad science fiction.

Okay, it isn't like "Nigger," "Wop," "Chink," etc., but it's offensive.

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Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 22:57 · in reply to Matthew Weber

Unfortunately, too many San Franciscan's DO call it Frisco, though I find they tend to be over 50, so they'll go away sooner or later.

On Dec 15, 2010, at 2:36 PM, Matthew Weber <palaeologos at gmail.com> wrote:

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Urth Mailing List

Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 23:04 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

I feel you.

It's sorta how many cartoonists won't call themselves "cartoonists", or their output as "comics", instead calling them "comix" or "graphic novels" or "Bande Dessin?e" because so many comics are peurile trash.

I had this discussion with a famous cartoonist who said the problem was resolved with "Bande Dessin?e", and then I showed her my comic book TROG which was made with stop motion puppets and photography, but no drawings. Doesn't quite fit, it's a comic book, pure and simple.

I wonder if anyone on this list ever bumped into my very obscure self published comic book, "TROG, In the Bacta-Tank Botch-Up". A weird little gem of toilet reading, if I do say so myself.

~witz

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 15 Dec 2010, 23:05 · in reply to Son of Witz

Not to mention "graphic novel" and "serial art."

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David Stockhoff — 15 Dec 2010, 23:23 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Yes, exactly. I meant "sci-fi," with the scare quotes.

Do you prefer "sf"?

The question is the same. Why create a "cyclical iterations of the same creation that keeps playing out in more or less the same pattern" fictional universe if it's fundamentally the same as ours?

On 12/15/2010 4:50 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

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<dstockhoff at verizon.net <mailto:dstockhoff at verizon.net>> wrote:

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Ryan Dunn — 15 Dec 2010, 23:31 · in reply to Son of Witz

I lived there for 2 years and never called it -- or heard it called -- 'Frisco.

San Fran was more often heard if anything. Or just Ess Eff.

...ryan

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Ryan Dunn — 15 Dec 2010, 23:33 · in reply to Matthew Weber

Scifi works as a film genre, but SF is more PC as Science Fantasy falls under the umbrella.

Or do I have it all bass ackwards?

...ryan

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Is this like, If you were Straight-Edge playing in a Melvins or Black Sabbath cover band and you insisted that your genre be referred to as "Doom-Metal" rather than "Stoner-Rock"?

On Dec 15, 2010, at 1:50 PM, "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

Also, please refrain (note that I am asking politely) from using the term "sci-fi." Some find it very offensive

Jeff Wilson — 15 Dec 2010, 23:34 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

"Sci-Fi" is the sound of two crickets screwing.

More seriously: "Sci-Fi" is a term made up by a publicity hack, in analogy with the then-popular "Hi-Fi" for "high fidelity" stereo equipment.

Forry Ackerman might have been a publicity hack and a schlockmeister, but that hardly sets him apart from early fandom, not to mention authordom. Sci-Fi was and remains a popular self-adpoted term for fans of fantastic non-book media. It's offense is more in the sense of not-Americans calling Americans "yanks" or yankees, which aggravates southerners but is proudly owned by plenty in the north.

James Wynn — 15 Dec 2010, 23:34 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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More seriously: "Sci-Fi" is a term made up by a publicity hack, in analogy with the then-popular "Hi-Fi" for "high fidelity" stereo equipment. It referred, and in many SF fans' minds still refers, to movies about giant insects devouring Cleveland and suchlike. "Sci-fi" is, in short, _bad_ science fiction.

Okay, it isn't like "Nigger," "Wop," "Chink," etc., but it's offensive.

I wish I didn't know this about the term "sci-fi". Knowing someone might be very, very offended at the use of the word "sci-fi", it will be very hard for me to avoid using the term "sci-fi".

u+16b9

Son of Witz — 15 Dec 2010, 23:44 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Why create a fictional universe if it is fundamentally the same as our own?

Well, are you sure that our universe is cyclically recreated in the same pattern again and again? Are you sure that we shaped a race of beings that in turn shapes us? I'm not sure, but I think it's probably true.

Anyway, I don't have the quote, but somewhere Wolfe said something to the idea that he wrote New Sun to explore the ramifications of his beliefs.

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Craig Brewer — 16 Dec 2010, 00:03 · in reply to Son of Witz

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From: Son of Witz <Sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org>

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

Sent: Wed, December 15, 2010 5:44:19 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) (no subject)

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Urth Mailing List

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Craig Brewer — 16 Dec 2010, 00:30 · in reply to Son of Witz

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Ryan Dunn — 16 Dec 2010, 00:35 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

SF

Science Fiction
Speculative Fiction
Science Fantasy
San Francisco

...ryan

On Dec 15, 2010, at 6:33 PM, Ryan Dunn <[ryan at liftingfaces.com](mailto:ryan@liftingfaces.com)> wrote:
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Son of Witz — 16 Dec 2010, 01:09 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Yes Craig, but wouldn't you agree that any cosmology can be called "speculative fiction?" It seems appropriate to me, even though I don't want to demean anyone's revelation.

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David Stockhoff — 16 Dec 2010, 01:26 · in reply to Ryan Dunn

SF has also been tried on as "speculative fiction." But all it is is an alternative---or the original---to "sci-fi," which is a marketing creation more or less synonymous with "bad." As Dan'I says.

However, I'm uncertain as to how to use the term without offending, since it has a real meaning. Good sf and bad sf share the same technologies and ideas, after all. Thus, I should have used quotes when referring to commercial sf.

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David Stockhoff — 16 Dec 2010, 01:31 · in reply to Son of Witz

Interesting. While those possibilities are not disprovable, I think they are false.

As to your answer---none of those are disprovable either. There is no answer to those questions and therefore they are useless distinctions. We need an OBSERVABLE difference, don't we? I propose that we got Christ, and they didn't.

I'm with Lee: Briah is a fallen world with a Serpent but without a Christ. That's what Wolfe was exploring.

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You know, just because someone has beliefs does not mean that the fictional worlds they create need to be in line with those beliefs. Fundamentally, The Book of the New Sun is fantasy literature. The setting and history Silmarillion does not align with the Bible either. I'm sure there are plenty of materialist atheists who write stories about elves and giants.

u+16b9

Son of Witz — 16 Dec 2010, 15:26 · in reply to James Wynn

On Dec 16, 2010, at 3:19 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Son of Witz-

Why create a fictional universe if it is fundamentally the same as our own?

Well, are you sure that our universe is cyclically recreated in the same pattern again and again?

Are you sure that we shaped a race of beings that in turn shapes us?

I'm not sure, but I think it's probably true. Anyway, I don't have the quote, but somewhere Wolfe said something to the idea that he wrote New Sun to explore the ramifications of his beliefs.

You know, just because someone has beliefs does not mean that the fictional worlds they create need to be in line with those beliefs. Fundamentally, The Book of the New Sun is fantasy literature. The setting and history Silmarillion does not align with the Bible either. I'm sure there are plenty of materialist atheists who write stories about elves and giants.

u+16b9

This is soooooo obvious it does not need pointing out.

I think BotNS explores many deeply felt philosophical ideas of ideas of it's author.

If you don't, make of it what you will. There are some neat action scenes and weird characters to be found amidst all the endless philosophical and theological musings if you don't think that stuff matters.

~witz

Craig Brewer — 16 Dec 2010, 15:58 · in reply to Son of Witz

I think BotNS explores many deeply felt philosophical ideas of ideas of it's author.

If you don't, make of it what you will. There are some neat action scenes and weird characters to be found amidst all the endless philosophical and theological musings if you don't think that stuff matters.

I don't think anyone really doubts that angle. There may be plenty of doubt about WHICH philosophical ideas he's working with, but we all like the books because of that depth, I'd imagine.

I think there's an important distinction, though, between recognizing that the books explore philosophical aspects of ideas that Wolfe is heavily invested in and the idea that all of his works have to straightforwardly reflect his actual beliefs.

So, for example: what if New Sun is Wolfe exploring a world where there never was a Christ, as was suggested by one of the interview quotes that came up yesterday? Such a possibility might well be compatible with the "atheist" reading of New Sun that was bandied about when we were talking about Peter Wright's book awhile back. Then you'd have Wolfe writing a "what-if" book where the overt cosmology was opposed to what he actually believed at some level, even if it was also informed by his actual beliefs about how fallen such a world might actually be. Or Wizard Knight: one way to read that book is to say that it's a book about a kid/guy trying to be good when he doesn't have a strong Christian model to follow. It doesn't, of course, mean that Wolfe actually believes in a cosmology of seven levels without a Christian God behind it all, etc.

I've said this a lot lately, and I'm starting to bore myself, so one last time and then I'll shut up: but I'm skeptical of the perspective that sees Wolfe as creating an intricate cosmology, where buried behind his fictions is his actual outline of how the universe works where the Greek gods line up in a hierarchy with Christian theology and multiple universes co-exist in such and such a way, etc. Instead, I find Wolfe to be using all of these ideas (some of which he might actually believe, some of which he might not) in order to explore philosophical and existential consequences of his beliefs. And, for me, the most interesting and relevant aspect of those ideas have to do with what it means for how his characters live their lives, and less about what Wolfe's particular theological or "supernatural" beliefs might be. For me, it's always a much more interesting question to ask, say, "In what way is Severian like and unlike Christ, and how hard is it for him to be a good man in the situation in which he finds himself?" than it is to spend a lot of mental effort trying to figure out whether he actually is a Christ or whether his universe is related to ours as a parallel or previous universe with or without an actual moment of salvation, etc.

The latter kinds of questions turn Wolfe into an esoteric, if fascinating, myth-maker -- but I don't believe the same myths and, so, ultimately his ideas would simply be curiosities to me. But it also seems to lose a certain human focus for me since the questions start to become more

about what Wolfe himself believes than about what we might learn about the consequences of his ideas. Severian's story has always mattered to me in a very personal and even moral way apart from whatever cosmological puzzles lie behind it. All of the world and cosmology-building is fascinating, but it's not why I've always liked Wolfe.

Mini-rant over. I should go back to semi-lurking. :)

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 16 Dec 2010, 16:55 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 3:19 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
You know, just because someone has beliefs does not mean that the fictional worlds they create need to be in line with those beliefs. Fundamentally, The Book of the New Sun is fantasy literature. The setting and history Silmarillion does not align with the Bible either. I'm sure there are plenty of materialist atheists who write stories about elves and giants.

Actually, Tolkien went out of his way to make the cosmology of the Silm. compatible (though only by some fast dancing) with Christianity. The "gods" are angels, etc.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

David Stockhoff — 16 Dec 2010, 17:03 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

I understood that to be James' point. Tolkien was a Christian writer.

On 12/16/2010 11:55 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 3:19 AM, James Wynn<crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 16 Dec 2010, 17:08 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 9:03 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
I understood that to be James' point. Tolkien was a Christian writer.

I'll let James speak for himself if I'm wrong, but I understood his saying that "Silmarillion does not align with the Bible" as meaning that it was not in line with Tolkien's actual beliefs. My point is that, while I doubt that JRRT actually "believed" the Silmarillion, its cosmology actually does align with the Bible, with the correct dance steps.

--Dan'I

On 12/16/2010 11:55 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:
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David Stockhoff — 16 Dec 2010, 17:20 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Ah, OK. Yes, although Tolkien did not worship the Ainur or Iluvatar, they aren't exactly heretical.

Melkor, of course, is Lucifer/Satan. Tolkien was following in the footsteps of at least one fantasist.

On 12/16/2010 12:08 PM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 9:03 AM, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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James Wynn — 16 Dec 2010, 17:41 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

David Stockhoff-

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--Dan'I

Ehh...The creation story in Silmarillion simply does not jive with Genesis. I don't see how all the hammers and grease in Mordor could wedge it in. While there's nothing hostile to Judeo-Christianity in Middle Earth, I seem to recall that Tolkien said in "Letters" that he deliberately left religion out of the books.

While Wolfe has not been so careful about not touching the high-voltage wire called Religion, I think the same thing applies in that his characters think and talk about religion in different terms than we do. It is essentially the same as in the Soldier books. Wolfe deals with religion from the perspective of his characters, not in the way he would if he were teaching a Sunday School class. The themes and concepts are compatible and sometimes analogous. The characters' sense of their relationship to the Increate is different. Irreconcilably different. And no amount of dancing will bridge the gap. To try to do so is like asking for scientific justification for Galadriel's bowl. Or to question whether a human baby raised by a tribe of chimpanzees would survive, let alone come to lead the troop.

u+16b9

Gerry Quinn — 16 Dec 2010, 17:44 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

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

"Sci-Fi" is the sound of two crickets screwing.

More seriously: "Sci-Fi" is a term made up by a publicity hack, in analogy with the then-popular "Hi-Fi" for "high fidelity" stereo equipment. It referred, and in many SF fans' minds still refers, to movies about giant insects devouring Cleveland and suchlike. "Sci-fi" is, in short, bad science fiction.

Or, more precisely, science fiction as described by those with no idea of what is good or bad science fiction. I think I would have subscribed to that concept in the past, but I feel that the term 'sci-fi' has lost a good deal of its pejorative force over the past couple of decades. So while I would use 'SF', 'Sci-Fi' no longer bothers me much.

- Gerry Quinn

Lane Haygood — 16 Dec 2010, 17:44 · in reply to James Wynn

As I understood it, the cosmology of Arda/Middle Earth was supposed to be a mythical re-telling of the "true" (for Tolkien) cosmology, dressed up in the myths of the Elves, etc. Of course they wouldn't use angels and demons and creation and all of that; they're not humans, and the cosmology we have received as revealed wisdom, etc., is only for Fourth Age peoples.

But a straight 1-for-1 substitution (a la Lewis) would have been distasteful for Tolkien, who loved myths and the changes myths and languages go through as cultures meet and intersect, but hated allegory.

LH

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 11:41 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

David Stockhoff-

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--Dan'l

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u+16b9

Lane Haygood — 16 Dec 2010, 17:46 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Personally, I prefer "words for nerds."

LH

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 11:44 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

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

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- Gerry Quinn

James Wynn — 16 Dec 2010, 17:50 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Lane Haygood-

But a straight 1-for-1 substitution (a la Lewis) would have been distasteful for Tolkien, who loved myths and the changes myths and languages go through as cultures meet and intersect, but hated allegory.

Although Narnia was more tightly allusive than Middle Earth, Lewis emphatically rejected the label "allegory" for it. He compared it to a stew with lots of different familiar flavors.

u+16b9

Lane Haygood — 16 Dec 2010, 17:52 · in reply to James Wynn

Case in point for why we should take author's self-assessment with a grain of salt.

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 11:50 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Lane Haygood-

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u+16b9

Ryan Dunn — 16 Dec 2010, 17:53 · in reply to Lane Haygood

I usually go with "Male Romance Novels".

...ryan

On Dec 16, 2010, at 12:46 PM, Lane Haygood wrote:
Personally, I prefer "words for nerds."

LH

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 11:44 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:
From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com>

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- Gerry Quinn

Son of Witz — 16 Dec 2010, 17:58 · in reply to Craig Brewer

Good post Craig.

I want anyone who is paying attention to what I've written to understand clearly that I don't think Wolfe has rendered a cosmology that actually models his belief system in BotNS, nor do I think he does that in his other works, of which I have only read a small portion.

The discussion is perhaps complicated by the idea that there are "two authors", one translating the other from a different culture. I think it is undeniable that Severian takes all of his philosophical musings with heartfelt seriousness. As a reader and an artist, I just don't feel that an author would invest that many pages in such musings if he didn't hold them somewhat dearly. (of course, an author writing a propaganda piece would, but I don't smell that stink on the Sun Series.)

I merely suggest that Wolfe has his own deeply felt philosophical ideas that have been expertly EXPLORED in the permutations of these twelve novels. I do not think he has made a literal map of his views. That people seem to think this is my view is part of why I feel like I'm banging my head against a wall. I'm talking about METAPHOR. This is why I'm always trying to swat off the "yeah but if Jesus didn't give his sermon in briah" nonsense. It's waaaay too literal take on a Speculative Metaphysical Fantasy, in my opinion. Your mileage may vary.

To that end, I think a few things SEEM fairly undeniable about the real world author of these books philosophical / metaphysical views:

He seems to believe the realm of humanity is a fallen realm that needs regeneration and salvation from powers beyond the stage of Earth.

He seems to believe in the unity of seeming opposites on fundamental aspects of reality like Resurrection & Death, Past & Future, Good & Evil, etc.

He seems to have a heartfelt belief that the soul transcends death.

He seems to have digested the human condition exceedingly well, and is capable of rendering the grandest human notions against the most common human foibles.

He seems to write using many extremely loaded metaphysical symbols because he is deeply concerned about the realities that these symbols represent to the humanity. They work too well and run too deep to be some post-modern monkey-shines.

Does anyone honestly think this small list is off the mark?

~Witz

On Dec 16, 2010, at 7:58 AM, Craig Brewer <cnbrewer at yahoo.com> wrote:

I think BotNS explores many deeply felt philosophical ideas of its author.

If you don't, make of it what you will. There are some neat action scenes and weird characters to be found

amidst all the endless philosophical and theological musings if you don't think that stuff matters.

I don't think anyone really doubts that angle. There may be plenty of doubt about WHICH philosophical ideas he's working with, but we all like the books because of that depth, I'd imagine.

I think there's an important distinction, though, between recognizing that the books explore philosophical aspects of ideas that Wolfe is heavily invested in and the idea that all of his works have to straightforwardly reflect his actual beliefs.

So, for example: what if *New Sun* is Wolfe exploring a world where there never was a Christ, as was suggested by one of the interview quotes that came up yesterday? Such a possibility might well be compatible with the "atheist" reading of *New Sun* that was bandied about when we were talking about Peter Wright's book awhile back. Then you'd have Wolfe writing a "what-if" book where the overt cosmology was opposed to what he actually believed at some level, even if it was also informed by his actual beliefs about how fallen such a world might actually be. Or *Wizard Knight*: one way to read that book is to say that it's a book about a kid/guy trying to be good when he doesn't have a strong Christian model to follow. It doesn't, of course, mean that Wolfe actually believes in a cosmology of seven levels without a Christian God behind it all, etc.

I've said this a lot lately, and I'm starting to bore myself, so one last time and then I'll shut up: but I'm skeptical of the perspective that sees Wolfe as creating an intricate cosmology, where buried behind his fictions is his actual outline of how the universe works where the Greek gods line up in a hierarchy with Christian theology and multiple universes co-exist in such and such a way, etc. Instead, I find Wolfe to be using all of these ideas (some of which he might actually believe, some of which he might not) in order to explore philosophical and existential consequences of his beliefs. And, for me, the most interesting and relevant aspect of those ideas have to do with what it means for how his characters live their lives, and less about what Wolfe's particular theological or "supernatural" beliefs might be. For me, it's always a much more interesting question to ask, say, "In what way is Severian like and unlike Christ, and how hard is it for him to be a good man in the situation in which he finds himself?" than it is to spend a lot of mental effort trying to figure out whether he actually is a Christ or whether his universe is related to ours as a parallel or previous universe with or without an actual moment of salvation, etc.

The latter kinds of questions turn Wolfe into an esoteric, if fascinating, myth-maker -- but I don't believe the same myths and, so, ultimately his ideas would simply be curiosities to me. But it also seems to lose a certain human focus for me since the questions start to become more about what Wolfe himself believes than about what we might learn about the consequences of his ideas. Severian's story has always mattered to me in a very personal and even moral way apart from whatever cosmological puzzles lie behind it. All of the world and cosmology-building is fascinating, but it's not why I've always liked Wolfe.

Mini-rant over. I should go back to semi-lurking. :)

David Stockhoff — 16 Dec 2010, 17:58 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Yeah, Aslan kind of dominates the flavor, doesn't he?

More cilantro!

On 12/16/2010 12:52 PM, Lane Haygood wrote:

Case in point for why we should take author's self-assessment with a grain of salt.

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 11:50 AM, James Wynn<crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Lane Haygood-

But a straight 1-for-1 substitution (a la Lewis) would have been distasteful for Tolkien, who loved myths and the changes myths and languages go through as cultures meet and intersect, but hated allegory.

Although Narnia was more tightly allusive than Middle Earth, Lewis emphatically rejected the label "allegory" for it. He compared it to a stew with lots of different familiar flavors.

u+16b9

Urth Mailing List

Son of Witz — 16 Dec 2010, 18:03 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On Dec 16, 2010, at 9:44 AM, "Gerry Quinn" <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

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

"Sci-Fi" is the sound of two crickets screwing.

More seriously: "Sci-Fi" is a term made up by a publicity hack, in analogy with the then-popular "Hi-Fi" for "high fidelity" stereo equipment. It referred, and in many SF fans' minds still refers, to movies about giant insects devouring Cleveland and suchlike. "Sci-fi" is, in short, _bad_ science fiction.

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- Gerry Quinn

I agree Gerry.

I love me some Heavy Metal.

Bands in the nineties that played what they, today, would be proud to call "Metal" had to call it "Grunge" in order to not be lumped in with all that 80's Hair Metal.

Every realm is mostly crap, even and especially in the most high brow stuff. Fine art has more turds per dozen than literature, I'd wager.

Just stick to your tropes and who fucking cares about the ever changing winds of popular opinion known as Fashion!

~witz

Matthew Weber — 16 Dec 2010, 18:05 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 9:41 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Ehh...The creation story in Silmarillion simply does not jive with Genesis. I don't see how all the hammers and grease in Mordor could wedge it in. While there's nothing _hostile_ to Judeo-Christianity in Middle Earth, I seem to recall that Tolkien said in "Letters" that he deliberately left religion out of the books.

Except for the Elves' quasi-Marian devotion to Elbereth, of course. And Tom Bombadil as a genius loci (there's your Green Man, folks).

Matt +

Let each man pass his days in that wherein his skill is greatest.
Sextus Propertius (54 B.C.-A.D. 2), Elegies, II, i, 46

James Wynn — 16 Dec 2010, 18:07 · in reply to Lane Haygood

Lane Haygood-

But a straight 1-for-1 substitution (a la Lewis) would have been distasteful for Tolkien, who loved myths and the changes myths and languages go through as cultures meet and intersect, but hated allegory.

James Wynn-

Although Narnia was more tightly allusive than Middle Earth, Lewis emphatically rejected the label "allegory" for it. He compared it to a stew with lots of different familiar flavors.

Lane Haygood-

Case in point for why we should take author's self-assessment with a grain of salt.

I think the Cambridge lit professor had a point. IIRC he said that an allegory is a story with a series of locks, each with a key. He used Pilgrim's Progress as an example and Pilgrim's Regress surely applies as well. Now, the gods of the Whorl are closely analogous to the gods of Olympus and in many cases perform their deeds. I've argued emphatically that the plot of the novel is mapped over Robert Graves' telling of the deeds of Aristaeus with nods to references in Pindar, Herodotus, and Plutarch. But I wouldn't call tBotLS an allegory of Greek myth or even an allegory of the life of Aristaeus.

u+16b9

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 16 Dec 2010, 18:19 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 9:41 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

Ehh...The creation story in Silmarillion simply does not jive with Genesis. I don't see how all the hammers and grease in Mordor could wedge it in.

How does it not? Eru/Iluvatar/God speaks the world into being (the actual act of creation is his word Ea: let it be), just as in Genesis. If the details vary, well, someone as intelligent as Tolkien cannot have failed to notice that they vary in Genesis, too, where there are two incompatible creation accounts.

?While there's nothing _hostile_ to Judeo-Christianity in Middle Earth, I seem to recall that Tolkien said in "Letters" that he deliberately left religion out of the books.

That was specifically referring to _LotR_, and even there there are hints of religion, as when Faramir and company "say grace" before meals.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

James Wynn — 16 Dec 2010, 18:42 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

James Wynn-

Ehh...The creation story in Silmarillion simply does not jive with Genesis. I don't see how all the hammers and grease in Mordor could wedge it in.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes-

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If the details vary, well, someone as intelligent as Tolkien cannot have failed to notice that they vary in Genesis, too, where there are two incompatible creation accounts.

No Adam and Eve. No Cain & Able. No Garden. No Fall. No world-wide flood. No Babel. No "first born" in Genesis, although one could argue that there are in the Koran. And while the Eldar are reincarnated continuously until then end of the world, humanity escapes the "circle of the world" /but no one knows where they go/. There's room to APPEND the Second Covenant on to it after the fact, but Earth and Middle Earth arrive there from dramatically different places.

While there's nothing _hostile_ to Judeo-Christianity in Middle Earth, I seem to recall that Tolkien said in "Letters" that he deliberately left religion out of the books.

That was specifically referring to _LotR_, and even there there are hints of religion, as when Faramir and company "say grace" before meals.

Eh..as you like. But who they are praying to is problematic given the rest of Tolkien's subcreation. Praying to one of the Valar seems the most likely, but that is problematic in a Judeo-Christian universe.

u+16b9

Matthew Weber — 16 Dec 2010, 18:46 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 10:42 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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u+16b9

The majority of the world's Christians pray to saints and angels to intercede for them in a variety of ways.

Matt +

Let each man pass his days in that wherein his skill is greatest.
Sextus Propertius (54 B.C.-A.D. 2), Elegies, II, i, 46

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 16 Dec 2010, 18:47 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Dec 16, 2010 at 10:42 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
No Adam and Eve. No Cain & Able. No Garden. No Fall. No world-wide flood. No Babel. No "first born" in Genesis, although one could argue that there are in the Koran. And while the Eldar are reincarnated continuously until then end of the world, humanity escapes the "circle of the world" /but no one

knows where they go/. There's room to APPEND the Second Covenant on to it after the fact, but Earth and Middle Earth arrive there from dramatically different places.

Au contraire. The creation and earliest days of humanity take place off stage, so Adam and Eve and the Garden remain a possibility; and when humans show up in the Elvish lands it is clear that they _have_ fallen (there is a "shadow" upon them of which they do not speak). And it doesn't say that "no one" knows where humans go when they die -- it says that _the Elves_ do not know.

Eh..as you like. But who they are praying to is problematic given the rest of Tolkien's subcreation. Praying to one of the Valar seems the most likely, but that is problematic in a Judeo-Christian universe.

They don't actually pray, they just face the West silently.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Adam Thornton — 16 Dec 2010, 18:48 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Dec 16, 2010, at 11:58 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:
Yeah, Aslan kind of dominates the flavor, doesn't he?

More cilantro!

THIS ALZABO TASTES LIKE LION.

Craig Brewer — 16 Dec 2010, 19:03 · in reply to Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Made me crack open my copy of Tolkien's letters. Some relevant stuff in #153 "To Peter Hastings":

"As for 'whose authority decides these things?' the immediate 'authorities' are the Valar (the Powers or Authorities): the 'gods'. But they are only created spirits - of high angelic order we should say, with their attendant lesser angels - reverend, therefore, but not worshipful... [and then adds in a lengthy note]: There are thus no temples or 'churches' or fanes int his 'world' among 'good' peoples. They had little or no religion in the sense of worship. For help they may call on a Vala (as Elbereth), as a Catholic might on a Saint, though no doubt knowing in theory as well as he that the power of the Vala was limited and derivative. But this is a 'primitive age': and these folk may be said to view the Valar as children view their parents or immediate adult superiors, and though they know they are subjects of the King he does not live in their country nor have there any dwelling..."

There's more. But what may be relevant to the discussion of how much Tolkien actually worried about matching up his mythology with actual Christian history is his long discussion in the same letter about the value of "subcreation" and its potential for overstepping the bounds of God's type of Creation. He seems very much at pains to point out that he is doing something very humble and not at all meant to be actually part of "creating theology" or anything like that. He continually reminds the writer who wrote him (a Catholic book store owner) that he was writing fiction and not things meant to be taken as "too true."

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

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

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

Sent: Thu, December 16, 2010 12:47:01 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) (no subject)

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