

Wolfe and the Ancient world

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 03 Nov 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6694>

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Andreas Johansson — 03 Nov 2014, 15:46

Just started reading *Soldier of Sidon*, after a break in my Wolfe consumption. Regarding the foreword - I think it was signed by "G.W." or Gene Wolfe in the *Latro in the Mist* omnibus, but it isn't credited to anyone in Sidon - he makes a couple of seemingly erudite claims about ancient Egypt, or rather the historical study of it. I'm just wondering, how true are these claims? I mean, does it hold up in the light of real life Egyptology/ancient history/archaeology? Especially regarding the armies and weaponry of Egypt and the Nubians.

(a side-note regarding Wolfe's Catholicism: I'm a born and raised Atheist, with increasing Agnostic tendencies. It wasn't until I started following this list that I understood that Wolfe was, indeed, a practicing Catholic, and then I had already read through BotNS at least twice, so no, you can definitely enjoy Wolfe without one inch of faith in Yahve/the Increate or his prophet(s) - however, reading Wolfe, and following your insightful debates & analyses on this list, my understanding of not just Catholic faith but the nature of religious beliefs in general has definitely developed massively, much more than though any church visit or Sunday TV sermon in my adult life. Thus, if I suddenly convert in a couple of years, old Gene is probably to blame.).

yrs,

/Andreas

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 03 Nov 2014, 17:21 · in reply to Andreas Johansson

Andreas,

I agree that you don't need any knowledge of Catholic or Christian faith to understand, well, most Wolfe stories ("The Detective of Dreams" comes to mind as a counter-example). But such knowledge enriches one's reading of many of his stories.

Wolfe definitely played a (small) part in my conversion from generic Christian to Catholicism.

On Mon, Nov 3, 2014 at 7:46 AM, Andreas Johansson <andreas.havok at gmail.com> wrote:

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António Pedro Marques — 04 Nov 2014, 01:35 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

No dia 03/11/2014, às 17:21, "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> escreveu:

Wolfe definitely played a (small) part in my conversion from generic Christian to Catholicism.

I think for many Wolfe - like so many others and other things, but let's say Wolfe since we're talking about Wolfe - may first play the role of intellectual disruptor: he can make people understand that things are not so simple as they had thought.

But many are not stuck at that point. In this list, for instance, Lee has had the opportunity to articulate masterfully some of the things that religious folks usually think only they understand, and yet Lee is not a believer. Because to be a believer one actually has to believe in God, and that doesn't even mean believing in the Bible; it means feeling the presence of God, even if only at times, and then accepting religious belief as an explanation for that feeling. Now, some don't feel God because they've shut their senses, or fight against them, or never developed them in the first place, but none of those states has to be permanent. Art like Wolfe's may contribute to free one from the need to fight God, but it can't do everything. And certainly for some that would be considered a step backwards.

Daniel Otto Jack Petersen — 04 Nov 2014, 13:28 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

Well put, Antonio. Some take Wolfe's open-ended and polyvalent narrations as evidence of either a lack of commitment to any certain set of beliefs on his own part, or lack of a desire for his readers to commit to a particular set of beliefs - or both. But I think the polyvalence is there because it is one of the best ways to open people up to whole new conceptions. It's not there to make them think all conceptions are equal (which really means equally false). I still think a sympathetic reader can see that Wolfe is rooting for the reader to embrace a certain central set of beliefs (just as some of his characters do - or try to do as best they can). I would say that whether I myself were a 'believer' or not. It's just the most astute way to read him.

-DOJP

On Tue, Nov 4, 2014 at 1:35 AM, António Pedro Marques <antonio at gmail.com> wrote:

No dia 03/11/2014, às 17:21, "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> escreveu:

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