

The Castle & Wolfe's Christianity

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 24 Jun 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/67>

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

Peter Cash — 24 Jun 1997, 12:33

I wrote earlier:

The castle is the Church? That hadn't come into my mind at all. What indications are there in CASTLEVIEW that this is so? I would have thought that the Castle represented the power of imagination and of myth, and served as a reminder that reality is not necessarily as we think it is. What Christian symbolism did you see in the Castle? How can it be the Kingdom of God if it is inhabited by such signally un-Christian personages as Morgana and Thor (leading the Wild Hunt)?

To which Jim "Nutria" Jordan replied:

Sorry. E-mailish briefitudinousness overcame me. The castle clearly varies according to perspective: for some it is a spaceship; just as the wild ride/hunt is perceived differently. I take it as the kind of ideal home, connected to the transcendent, of which the Church is the purest and proper form. But perhaps I should re-read.

Sorry, it's easy to take emailed remarks out of context, or give them an emphasis that distorts their meaning. I think we agree on this--the Castle represents a lot of things.

As I indicated toward the end of my response, there is something to be said for the Castle as the Church (or _a_ church, at any rate). Castles don't usually have gargoyles, but cathedrals do. And how many candles were there in the room into which little Judy blunders? (Sorry, but I don't have the book at work.) As she looks away, they become "singing ladies". If they were three, perhaps they represent the Trinity, seen through a child's eyes. But then again, maybe they were the Norns, or the Fates.

I guess my reaction was partly driven by the fact that people seem to be too quick to find Christian associations for symbols in Wolfe's work, just because they know he's Catholic. I do think that a _lot_ of the symbols have their source in Wolfe's Catholic education (as well as his catholic one), but that doesn't make them Christian. In fact, they often occur in a setting that suggests a conflation of Christianity and paganism. For example, if the Castle has the aspects of a Church, then this is more than a little troubling, for it also has overpoweringly pagan attributes. Is Wolfe saying that Christianity is only one of many ways to perceive the truth? If so, then he's deviated from Catholic doctrine (as well as anything that can be called mainstream Christian theology).

It might be profitable to contrast Wolfe with C. S. Lewis. Lewis wrote what I would call Christian fantasy--his stories take place in a world where the Christian beliefs are demonstrably true, or--in the case of his Narnia books--where Christianity is presented allegorically. Wolfe does neither; I would say that Wolfe does not write about Christianity at all, he writes about Paganism. (There's one exception I can think of to this--"The Detective of Dreams". That's Christian writing.) Wolfe's Christianity manifests itself indirectly, in that he often shows the Pagan world in a dim light.

Ah, I write in haste. Perhaps I can make this clearer at some other time. (First, I'll have to make it clearer to myself.)

Peter

Jim Jordan — 25 Jun 1997, 00:43 · follows Peter Cash

At 12:33 PM 6/24/97 -0500, you wrote:

I guess my reaction was partly driven by the fact that people seem to be too quick to find Christian associations for symbols in Wolfe's work, just because they know he's Catholic. I do think that a lot of the symbols have their source in Wolfe's Catholic education (as well as his catholic one), but that doesn't make them Christian. In fact, they often occur in a setting that suggests a conflation of Christianity and paganism. For example, if the Castle has the aspects of a Church, then this is more than a little troubling, for it also has overpoweringly pagan attributes. Is Wolfe saying that Christianity is only one of many ways to perceive the truth? If so, then he's deviated from Catholic doctrine (as well as anything that can be called mainstream Christian theology).

It might be profitable to contrast Wolfe with C. S. Lewis. Lewis wrote what I would call Christian fantasy--his stories take place in a world where the Christian beliefs are demonstrably true, or--in the case of his Narnia books--where Christianity is presented allegorically. Wolfe does neither; I would say that Wolfe does not write about Christianity at all, he writes about Paganism. (There's one exception I can think of to this--"The Detective of Dreams". That's Christian writing.) Wolfe's Christianity manifests itself indirectly, in that he often shows the Pagan world in a dim light.

Ah, I write in haste. Perhaps I can make this clearer at some other time. (First, I'll have to make it clearer to myself.)

Peter

I think you are largely right. Wolfe tends to write horror stories, and thus writes critically of things he regards as destructive to human life. I think the way to take the conflation of Christianity and paganism in some of his writings is fairly simple: He is attacking idolatry. Idolatry is both false and partial. As false, it offers a simplistic and destructive hope. As partial, it has part of the truth and may open a door to more of it. Christianity, in his view, absorbs the good parts of paganism. Thus, from this kind of perspective, I don't have a problem with a mixed image such as one seems to find in Castleview.

Maybe that helps.

Nutria