

# Cues (not again!) and yaups

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 Jul 1998

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William H. Ansley — 09 Jul 1998, 23:56

I don't agree much with Robert Borski's potty theory about "Cues", except in one or two minor respects. I do think it is partly a potshot Gene Wolfe is taking at people who (over)analyze his work and come up with results he doesn't like.

I also agree that, whoever or whatever the not-so-young (really) man represents, Wolfe has it in for him in a big way. (I will venture to suggest a term here which may be of modest use to Wolfe scholars. The nsyr man is a \*yaup\* - Yet Another Unnamed Protagonist.)

For one thing, Wolfe suggests the nsyr man is stupid. He knowledge about infinity is implied to be parroting without any real comprehension. And he accepts the bowling ball's (rather silly) paradox about sensory cues without question when it seems to me that it is very easily refuted.

First of all (if we restrict ourselves to the five usual senses and leave out ESP), no sensory cues of any kind but visual can possibly reach us from outside the earth's atmosphere. And we don't have the visual acuity to see the stars as anything but points of light. So we are basically limited to the sun, moon and stars, which most of the time we ignore except as light sources as far as sensory cues beyond the earth's atmosphere go.

[This "cues paradox" (CP) reminds me of another, less trivial, paradox I have come across somewhere. The paradox is: If the universe is infinite, why isn't the night sky a blaze of light? It follows the same structure as the CP. If the universe is infinite, there are an infinite number of stars. If there are an infinite number of stars, then if any fraction of their light falls on the earth, the earth must receive an infinite amount of starlight. I am not sure what the correct refutation of this paradox is (its answer was left open when I read about it). I imagine that it has to do with the fact that the farther away a star is, the less of its light reaches the earth. An infinite series of diminishing values need not have an infinite sum.]

I think it is generally agreed, however, that just within our local field of sight (hearing, smell, taste, touch) we are usually presented with a potentially overwhelming mass of sensory cues. If we couldn't sift through these to pick out the important ones (in any given context), we couldn't function. (IIRC, certain forms of schizophrenia and autism have been theorized to be caused by just this sort of inability to select the proper sensory cues out of the vast number confronting us.)

So the whole "infinite universe" part of the CP explanation is unnecessary. I propose it is a joke on the part of the bowling ball.

While I agree with people who said (long ago) that this story seems to have some aspects of a deal with the devil tale and alga, who said the setting could easily be a sf convention, I think that primarily the story is a joke by Wolfe aimed at people who fail to see when he is joking in his writing. I think Wolfe has a very peculiar sense of humor and is joking more often he is generally given credit for. In the introduction to \_Castle of Days\_ Wolfe is describing the stories

contained in that collection:

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Several are humorous, and I have been told often enough that I have a sense of humor that makes strong men faint and women reach for weapons; I should have known better than to include those, but now it is too late.

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As far as the deal-with-the-devil aspect of "Cues" goes, the bowling ball says, "... and from that time forward we guarantee that where others see duty or ugliness or pathos or even beauty, you will see only humor."

I think we would all hesitate to make such a deal and it even seems likely that the nsyr man's humor must fail at some level or perhaps completely, with these limitations. But then again, some people think Ace Ventura: Private Eye is the highest pinnacle humor can reach.

I also wonder if it would be so bad to be the nsyr man after the deal goes fully into effect. It might be like living in a P. G. Wodehouse novel. Of course you would have to be Bertie Wooster, or one of the even dimmer characters.

Finally, I think there is an alien invasion aspect to "Cues" at the end. (I forget if anyone else suggested this.) The last thing said in the story (by a bowling ball) is "I beg [I am sure bed is a typo] your pardon. We give no quarter." Does anyone else remember a Clifford D. Simak novel about shapeshifting aliens who invade earth that look like bowling balls in their "normal" shape? I think it was They Walk Like Men, but I haven't been able to verify this.

Congratulations if you made it through this whole posting.

William Ansley