

hello! and a little on religious orthodoxy

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 27 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1241>

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maa32 — 27 Feb 2001, 12:09

I normally only post to the Urth list, but due to the minimal amount of congress there in recent weeks I have decided to subscribe to the whorl list as well. The recent trend in religious discussion is very interesting to me, and as a practicing Catholic I think that Wolfe's creations are more effectively interpreted with an orthodox perspective in mind (I don't buy into the "death of the author" very much, or even the somewhat New Critical concept of a text as something completely independent of the author's intentions). Positing Lombard's quaternity for Quadrifons is, I agree, extremely unlikely from the most precursory examination of the creeds Wolfe must recite incessantly (one in being with the Father, etc). These creeds reaffirm the denial of heresies (homo- vs. hetero- ousious) All of Wolfe's novels play with religious symbolism to a greater or lesser extent (the apples before the fall down the stairs at the beginning of Peace, for example, or the title of the same novel, which I believe comes from the plea: Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world; Lamb of God, grant us peace). I think the most interesting question one can ask is whether or not Wolfe seriously considers the doctrine that at the true resurrection the body and the spirit are reunited in perfection. In this orthodox understanding of the resurection, the body cannot be seen as an evil and flawed temporal construct, but as a necessary component of perfection. How should we consider disembodied "souls" like Horn or even (at times) Mucor? Are they the total being? Is the soul enough? For a fascinating discussion of the relation between the "real" identity of a man and the parts of his body, Ultan's lecture to Severian at the beginning of Shadow is an ideal place to start. (can the smallest finger of a man contains his whole essence, etc). At the end of The Urth of the New Sun, it is very clear that Severian's soul has been hoisted from one body to another. Is he the same Severian in essence without that body, or are they inextricably linked? I think the same kinds of ideas are being thrown around when we consider "Horn" in Silk. Marc Aramini

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 27 Feb 2001, 12:35 · follows maa32

Whoa -- good post, Marc.

Marc wrote:
as a practicing Catholic

Convert or cradle? You've seen my posts; I'm pursuing a theory about Wolfe-readers... Actually, about SF readers in general...

I think that Wolfe's creations are more effectively interpreted with an orthodox perspective in mind (I don't buy into the "death of the author" very much, or even the somewhat New Critical concept of a text as something completely independent of the author's intentions).

"Completely" independent, no, but definitely having some independence. Surely you've had the experience of writing something and having someone else point out to you that it plainly meant something you hadn't intended?

Samuel R. Delany tells the story (somewhere in one of his non-fiction books) of a sentence in his FALL OF THE TOWERS trilogy. It seems that a student had written a paper on this trilogy, which made great use of a sentence that began something like: "The transport carrier, not in ruins...". The non-ruined stated of this carrier was in direct contrast to its surroundings, and the student had made interesting use of it in interpreting the whole trilogy. The problem was that it was a typo; it should have read "...now in ruins..."

That's both an egregious and a simple example: the point is, a writer writes a text and sends it out into the world; no reader can be perfectly aware of his intentions, and attempting to derive intentions from the text is a dangerous pursuit, because the text never perfectly reflects the intent.

(A story of mine, published some while back in REALMS OF FANTASY, drew one interesting note. The individual in question pointed out to me that it was a religious allegory, something of which I was quite unaware, but which I have come to believe was, in fact, my intent at an unconscious level. Unconscious levels are a marvellous thing for writers, allowing them to take credit for things clever readers discover, simultaneously allowing them to deflect criticism of flaws...)

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Dear Lord. I never noticed that. Did anyone point it out during the PEACE-a-thon a few months back...

Very nice.

(Returning to memory/identity:)

I think the most interesting question one can ask is whether or not Wolfe seriously considers the doctrine that at the true resurrection the body and the spirit are reunited in perfection.

I think one answer to some of the problems this raises is to remember Augustine's (I think it was Augustine) response to the person who asked what would happen to a cannibal and his victims at the Resurrection: that God would as necessary recreate the substantia of the body with new materia -- which, come to think of it, is very much in line with the idea that our bodies will be very different after the Resurrection, an idea that American Protestants often refer to by the somewhat clunky term "resurrection bodies".

The point being that having a body is essential to the being of a human; having _this_ body is not necessarily so.

In this orthodox understanding of the resurrection, the body cannot be seen as an evil and flawed temporal construct, but as a necessary component of perfection.

That's so even without the doctrine of the general resurrection; the alternative is Manicheism.

How should we consider disembodied "souls" like Horn or even (at times) Mucor? Are they the total being? Is the soul enough?

Taking a step back from the question, Mucor, at least, is said to send out her spirit, not her soul. A distinction I often have trouble grasping, but which has some theological significance, I gather.

It's clearly Mucor's "I" that travels. (Yet that "I" also remains, in some sense, aware of her body; the Ayuntamiento is apparently able to force her back into her body by torturing it.)

Horn, on the other hand, is completely and permanently(?) disincorporated on Green. His "I" comes to inhabit Silk's body.

[...]

At the end of *The Urth of the New Sun*, it is very clear that Severian's soul has been hoisted from one body to another. Is he the same Severian in essence without that body, or are they inextricably linked?

I think the problem here, and it's a big one, is the question of what "the same" means. Even without having been rebodied, or the need for it, he would have been radically changed by some of his experience -- for example, the inclusion of Thecla and the various autarchs into his memories.

I think the same kinds of ideas are being thrown around when we consider "Horn" in Silk.

Yes. Wolfe is getting at something big on the memory/identity front, viz the alzado, the analeptic alzado, the special case of Sev/Thecla and Sev/Autarchs, the "scanning" of persons into Mainframe, Typhon/Piaton, Passilk and Silkhorn and maybe Passilkhorn, godly possession in general, Mucor...

But Mucor almost doesn't fit; her personality does not seem to merge with those she possesses in any way (perhaps because she is somehow capable of retaining consciousness without any "medium"; perhaps because she remains in her own body even while possessing another; perhaps because her "astral body" is so integral...). Typhon/Pas is equally strange, but then their personalities remain in their own individual skulls.

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