

BotLS/BotSS Christian themes

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 01 Mar 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1247>

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Endymion9 — 01 Mar 2001, 17:46

First of all let me state that I am a Christian. I was raised in the Baptist church and switched to a Charismatic church later.

I've been reading but avoiding jumping in the Christian themes discussions but wasn't really sure why I had an aversion to thinking of the LS/SS books in this light. On the way to work I felt some thoughts formulate and now feel ready to join in.

The LS/SS books do not work for me as a story that parallels the trinity and the progression of a Christian towards Christlikeness. I can buy Silk being a Christlike figure in LS. He shows great compassion towards his enemies (The Ayuntmiento, the Travagaunti) and encourages people to be the **best** that they can be. He does some questionable things but so did Jesus in some people's minds (Overturning the moneychangers table, eating and drinking with sinners, etc.).

I can buy Horn being a disciple of the Christlike figure. He aspires to be like Silk. He has compassion for his people (New Viron). And in OBW he is a very human person trying to live up to what his "god" desires of him. He has failings but is striving for the **best** life.

In IGJ, Horn has already been "filled with the spirit" of Silk and continues to display more Christlike attitudes. He loves his enemies as Silk did (The inhum, the citizens of Soldo, etc.). He tries to inspire the citizens of Blanko to live the **best** life.

In RttW this all falls apart (for me). If the end of RttW preceded IGJ I could see it. I could see Wolfe telling the story of how it really feels to be possessed with a god or "filled with the spirit" and could see it as the struggles to give up your human failings and allow the "god" to begin to control your life, maybe even with some violent rebellings.

But what kind of Christ/Holy Spirit figure is this we get in the end?

A Christian nightmare. The love of the inhum is gone as Jahlee is kicked to death, inhum are lured into a slaughter. Also Silk/horn writes off the people of Blue/Green as not worth saving and deserts them.

So, I can buy this as a great science fantasy (what the publishers used to label TBotNS when I first bought it), or as a story trying to merge Christianity with Greek Mythology and all other world religions to show that the Christian God is nothing special, just one of many or an ancient astronaut etc. But not as the true Christian story in the Holy Bible. It does not work in that regard for me. The creature we get at the end of the story is less Christlike than either the earlier Silk or Horn IMHO.

Dennis/Endy

<http://home.mindspring.com/~endymion9/index.htm>

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

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 02 Mar 2001, 08:29 · follows Endymion9

Endennis wrote:

... But what kind of Christ/Holy Spirit figure is this we get in the end? A Christian nightmare. The love of the inhumis is gone as Jahlee is kicked to death, inhumis are lured into a slaughter. Also Silk/horn writes off the people of Blue/Green as not worth saving and deserts them.

Let's take a step back for a moment, and see if I can't allay some of your concern. Regarding his most blatant "Christ- figure," Severian, Wolfe has repeatedly insisted that he is not a Christ-figure but a Christian figure. That is, Wolfe insists (and I take him seriously on this) that because Christ was the unique Son of the Father, it is a fundamental error to equate any real person or fictional character with him. (Though I wonder how he would apply this to, say, Aslan.) In regard to his characters, specifically, he comments that Severian -- again, as an example -- is not living out a version of the Christ story but the Christian story ... which, by its nature, involves some imitatio Christi.

This is probably easier for me, as a fellow-Catholic, to "get," for we use symbolic identification far more freely than most Protestant and Evangelical churches*. So it's very easy for me to see events in my life which I can compare to Christ's temptation (as we are so explicitly invited by the event to compare Severian's temptation by Typhon); what is terribly important, then, is for me to see how many times I did not reply as Christ did.

* I'm not quite sure where in this spectrum to place the Charismatic churches. Frankly, they frighten me, not because I think "they're a bunch of snake-handling nutters," but because deep inside I wonder if something is wrong with my own faith when I see the kind of stuff the Charismatic movement produces. OTOH, there's also a strong Charismatic movement within the RCC these days...

Silk, too, is not ultimately a Christ figure but a Christian figure. We can use him in constructing interesting analogies to the Trinity, but in the end he's not a perfect God-Man, but a mortal trying to be better; and as such, we see him sin repeatedly -- as you point out. Nor is Horn a Christ figure, nor is Silkhorn or Passilkhorn, a Christ figure. Each of them is a bad man [or at least a far from perfect man] trying to be better (though Silk, to be honest, starts out pretty darned good, for a bad man).

I suspect that Wolfe realized how many people considered Silk a blatant Christ-figure at the end of LONG, and decided to shove it up our noses that he was still an imperfect sinner.

As to your last specific point ("Also Silk/horn writes off the people of Blue/Green as not worth saving and deserts them"), that's not how I read the ending at all -- rather, I read it thus: he realized that there could never be a home for him on Blue. He realized that he could no longer pretend to be Horn, wife of Nettle. He realized that his presence was a constant temptation to the people of Blue to set him up as a Rajan, a Caldé, or, worst of all, a strego; to view him with the awe properly reserved only for the "Outsider." And all this being the case, he decided that he must leave.

I'm more concerned about the decision of Nettle and Seawrack to accompany him. (Marble/Moly/Rose/Whatever makes sense, and of course Oreb goes wherever "Good Silk!")

goes.)

So, I can buy this as ... a story trying to merge Christianity with Greek Mythology and all other world religions to show that the Christian God is nothing special, just one of many or an ancient astronaut etc.

No; absolutely not. Quite the opposite. It (and likewise the SOLDIER books) begins with the assumption that there might well be powers in the world which are not God, but which we might mistake for gods and worship. It shows how, fooled in this way, the honest devotion due only to God might be spent on beings unworthy of it. Finally, it shows that there is, nonetheless, the one God (whom Silk and those of his world call "the Outsider"), who is far more different from Pas and his ilk than they are from the people of the Whorl; who made Pas and everything else; who is "the only god for me," as Silk says to him; who, as we learn in some detail in SHORT, doesn't desire the guts of animals, but in some mysterious way communicates with us through shared bread and wine; who wills to save all, despite our sinfulness, our foolishness, and our devotion to any number of created things.

That, I think, is what Wolfe is getting at.

So when you say it is not

...the true Christian story in the Holy Bible.

I can agree completely; it isn't intended to be. It is, rather, an application of the Christian world view to an imagined situation.

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