

Gene Wolfe

The SF-Lovers list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 05 Apr 1992

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/sflovers/96>

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.

Sara Beck — 05 Apr 1992, 06:14

I admire Wolfe's style, but his books definitely put me off. I think I know why and I wonder if other people have thought the same or if it's only me.

Here follows an attempt to discuss an inherently loaded question thoughtfully and without either using or exciting flames. For my next trick I will check the gas tank with a lit match.

Anyway, I think that Wolfe's (or his characters) consistently have a weird attitude towards women. Women in Wolfe's books seem to be a somewhat alien species. They are assumed to have their own agenda which is completely hidden from men, and to be more or less dangerous to men. "There are Doors" is exhibit A, of course. Also check out the references to sexual activity in the Torturer books (honesty compells me to admit I only read the first 2); the atmosphere is like a soldier reporting on an encounter with the enemy. Yes he has a right to feel that way, yes it may be part of his character's psyches, and yes it is infinitely preferable to the violent misogyny of so much modern writing (have I deflected all the incoming flames?), but it puts me off.

S. Beck

millerrl — 06 Apr 1992, 21:42 · follows Sara Beck

BECKS at TAUNIVM.TAU.AC.IL (Sara Beck) writes:

Anyway, I think that Wolfe's (or his characters) consistently have a weird attitude towards women. Women in Wolfe's books seem to be a somewhat alien species. They are assumed to have their own agenda which is completely hidden from men, and to be more or less dangerous to men. "There are Doors" is exhibit A, of course. Also check out the references to sexual activity in the Torturer books (honesty compells me to admit I only read the first 2); the atmosphere is like a soldier reporting on an encounter with the enemy. Yes he

I think that Severian's misogyny (if indeed he was misogynous; he did give up his guild for a woman whom he didn't really know, and he risked his life to save a stranger woman from a stranger man, almost getting himself killed in the avern duel) is a part of his character, and not traceable to Wolfe. If you read Wolfe's short stories, or the Soldier novels, you will find what I believe to be to be a deep understanding of female psychology (but then, what do I know? I'm a bloke).

Severian was a character in over his head from the beginning, as is revealed in the rest of the torturer books. That's why he was suspicious of all the women who tried to use him (after the first one), and that's why he was also suspicious of the men who tried to use him.

I haven't read There are Doors yet, so I can't address your rather cryptic comment regarding that book.

Loren Miller

K R Maxson — 07 Apr 1992, 00:41 · follows millerl

BECKS at TAUNIVM.TAU.AC.IL (Sara Beck) writes:

Anyway, I think that Wolfe's (or his characters) consistently have a weird attitude towards women. Women in Wolfe's books seem to be a somewhat alien species. They are assumed to have their own agenda which is completely hidden from men, and to be more or less dangerous to men.

"There are Doors" is exhibit A, of course. Also check out the references to sexual activity in the Torturer books (honesty compells me to admit I only read the first 2); the atmosphere is like a soldier reporting on an encounter with the enemy. Yes he

I think you are mistaking Wolfe's fascination with "The Other" for his perception of women. You are right that in *There Are Doors* women are alien, but I don't think that is representative. Rather, in most of Gene Wolfe's stories, there is a shadowy, elusive-but-familiar alien presence: the abos of *Fifth Head*, the doctor in *The Death of Doctor Island*. Wolfe writes a great deal about identity, and makes many ordinary things appear uncertain, illusory, deceptive; or even dangerous, malevolent.

Klaus Ole Kristiansen — 08 Apr 1992, 08:09 · follows K R Maxson

I have read these books by Wolfe: *The Book of the New Sun*, *The Urth (sp?) of the New Sun*, *Endangered Species*.

Wolfe is a great language wizard. I love the language of *TBOTNS*. It gives the fantasy world a unique, alien feel.

The stories in *ES* are very different (from each other). They are not all to my liking, but they are all well written. Three are really great stories. Those three are also very, very different.

Klaus O K

PS. I bought *ES* because someone said on the net that it contains 3 really great stories. I agree, but I wonder if we agree on which they are. For me it's *War beneath the Tree*, *When I Was Ming the Merciless*, and *In the House of Gingerbread*.

Dieter Britz — 14 Apr 1992, 06:51 · follows Klaus Ole Kristiansen

To me, Gene Wolfe is one of those writers (among them Ursula Le Guin and Anthony Burgess), whom I read in large part because of their marvelous language. With other writers, contents are the thing; content is certainly not lacking with Wolfe, but his dignified and thought-provoking phrasing is, for me, unbeaten by other sf writers. I am baffled at the diversity of opinions about Gene Wolfe, on this net.

Another thing he is good at, and obviously has his heart in, is his portrayal of children. This comes across strongly in the collection *"Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories and Other Stories"*, especially in the one about the blind boy (I forget the title). There is a short episode in one of the Torturer books, again with a smallish boy, lovingly written. Wolfe then does kill him, but instantly and presumably painlessly.

One of the qualities that "make" some sf is a sense of mystery; I read all those computer-comes-alive stories of Van Vogt as a boy, and although I never quite understood what was going on, I had this fascinating sense of mystery, and was sure there was a lot more to

know, if only I could find out. Wolfe has this in just about every sentence. He is one of the great writers of the present, and I wait for his next book.

Dieter Britz

britz at kemi.aau.dk