

The Wolfe Library

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 25 Jan 1999

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Fantasma — 25 Jan 1999, 21:52

Not to rudely change subject, but since we're in the constructive mood, a question.

I'm new to the list, and though I've reviewed the archives I don't think that this question has been raised, which frankly stuns me. To wit:

What is the Essential Gene Wolfe Library?

I realize that this is as much about authors (and readers, Wolfe is quick to note) as books, but I'm interested in what people think about this and what level of authority is possible. From my limited experience and perception, and straight from Wolfe's own mouth (or letter-writing pen), I could think of five essentials, including other influential books by the same author--

The Book of Imaginary Beings, Jorge Luis Borges (Ficciones, The Aleph and Other Stories) The Dying Earth, Jack Vance The Everlasting Man, G. K. Chesterton (The Man Who Was Friday, Autobiography, Father Brown et al) Pale Fire, Vladimir Nabokov Michaelmas, Algis Budrys (Rogue Moon, Who?)

This is all in addition to the reference section of our Library. The Compact OED, principally, which has been repeatedly substituted for the minds and careers of the people on this list (just playin', guys, just playin'). A good encyclopedia (my favorite is the rare 11th edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, 1910-1911). A good "Lives of the Saints" (the Penguin dictionary is probably the most accurate). Mrs. Byrne's dictionary. *The New York Times' Guide to Misspelled, etc*. I'm sure that people could supplement this with resources outside of language, which is the only thing I am fairly familiar with.

If people really think this is as interesting to establish as I do, then there should be an illustrious, enigmatic approval committee, in which case I hesitantly nominate myself as Chairman. No, really, you're too kind.

-A Slightly Apprehensive Fantasma

CRCulver — 26 Jan 1999, 03:53 · follows Fantasma

Phantasma said:

<Pale Fire, Vladimir Nabokov>

A ha! I've been waiting for someone to mention PF, as I've always thought it similar to Borges who is similar to Wolfe. (Note: it may have been discussed before, but so far back that I had not yet read the book and ignored it all, let me check the archives).

As for the library, I think what you have suffices, though _The Collected Fictions of J.L.B._ could be added to the BoIB, because there are parts of Peace and the Book of the New Sun which are

influed by _Ficciones_ and _The Aleph and Other Stories_, not just the BoIB.

For the more esoteric and nutty of us, myself included, you could throw in Gershom Scholem's book "The Kaballah," to see from where the two+ universe structure comes.

Cheers,

Christopher R. Culver <crculver at aol.com>

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m.driussi — 26 Jan 1999, 05:49 · follows CRCulver

Lest we forget, PALE FIRE contains a haunting (near-death?) vision of a white fountain . . . and when the artist at last meets another person who has had this vision, he warms up with wonder that another human being has seen it, the fountain is somehow a real thing, and then she murmurs that it is like Mont Blanc, which seems like a non sequitur, until she says ah, the white mountain! And within him the ediface of a shared mystical experience comes crashing down.

IIRC.

If I'd read PALE FIRE before I'd written the Lexicon, I probably wouldn't have written the Lexicon at all--the horrible humor of seeing something beautiful (in that case it was poetry) butchered by a highly-inventive-yet-obviously-wrong reading. Well! Ignorance is Strength.

Re: the Essential Wolfe Library. Hard to say--boiled down to five or six titles sounds more like the "quintessential" Wolfe Library! Have to include the Bible, clearly. Here's another application where what would come in handy would be a list of every book he has ever mentioned in interviews (so often they ask him about influential authors and books!) and in articles. (I've got the start of such a list somewhere around, which is why I keep bringing it up, I suppose. Half-started lists, like a splinter in a hand.)

That Vance entry looks to be dead-on: in talking to him and corresponding with him I get the impression that Gene Wolfe has read a lot of Vance, and what we know of his reading habits (re: Chesterton, for example) we can assume he read everything at one point, but the only title he has ever mentioned in public is that one: THE DYING EARTH.

=mantis=

Alex David Groce — 26 Jan 1999, 11:09 · follows m.driussi

On Jan 26, 5:49am, m.driussi at genie.com wrote:

Subject: (urth) The Wolfe Library

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Also, although I doubt it influenced PEACE (since Wolfe has said he came to read Nabokov only later), I think of PEACE and PALE FIRE as two sides of one coin--Weer turns his story into a story that is about everyone else, while Kinbote turns another man's story into his own.

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Other titles for the library:

Crowley's LITTLE, BIG (I've never seen Wolfe mention the AEGYPT or LOVE & SLEEP, but he called LITTLE, BIG "an education in modern fantasy") Le Guin's THE BEGINNING PLACE (and definitely not THE DISPOSSESSED, which Wolfe disliked--especially as I share his opinion...) Kipling's THE JUNGLE BOOK (1&2), COLLECTED POETRY Poe's short stories Robert Grave's I, CLAUDIUS and CLAUDIUS THE GOD (highly important, given all the obvious influences on BOTNS)

Perhaps also some representative Nero Wolfe mystery, as Wolfe has said those are his favorite detective stories.

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"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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