

Tolkien essay, pre-publication history

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 04 Jan 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2884>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 04 Jan 2002, 22:14

We are told that Gene Wolfe's Tolkien essay was written for that book of essays on Tolkien, but it was not published there after all, and was published in "Interzone."

Following these facts, there has been some speculation as to how or why the book editors may have rejected the essay on aesthetic grounds. In addition to all the Religion & Politics stuff.

I know the pre-publication history of a number of Wolfe stories--yes, it is true, however shocking/comforting it might be, that Gene Wolfe stories are sometimes rejected by genre magazines, even in the last ten years. So rejection is naturally not impossible.

But with regard to this essay, since I doubt very much that any "rejection speculation" is based on second-hand evidence, I'm going to offer some incidental second-hand evidence.

In June of last year I received a letter from Gene Wolfe. Mostly it was about many other things, but in the end he did mention that he was having difficulty with the company that was supposed to publish his Tolkien essay. They wanted him to secure written permissions for =every= quote, including the personal letter from Tolkien to Gene Wolfe and the poem by Noyes (who died in 1958). (Those of us who have read the essay also would add Robert E. Howard, at least. There are a lot of quotes!) This seemed insane to Gene Wolfe, in the modern day where Harlan Ellison is trying so hard to stop people from web-publishing entire sf stories without permission from the sf author.

(Well those of us who have followed such things in US publishing can say, "Thank you, J.D. Salinger.")

In any event, Gene Wolfe wrote pretty unambiguously in the letter that the project was dead from his point of view. Non-compliance on his part.

And lo, the essay did not appear in the US book; but it did appear in a UK magazine.

So it seems to me that if there was any "rejection" involved with the Tolkien book, it was Gene Wolfe's rejection of the terms and subsequent withdrawal of the essay.

=mantis=

Sirius Fiction

booklets on Gene Wolfe, John Crowley

<http://www.siriusfiction.com/>

Andy Robertson — 04 Jan 2002, 22:35 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Gene Wolfe wrote to me, when questioned on this very point:

<quote>

I would say "rejected." If you prefer "refused" or "withdrawn" I will not object. </quote>

Me, I think Haber understood the political implications of Wolfe's essay and wanted to squelch it.

Andy Robertson

----- Original Message -----

From: "Michael Andre-Driussi" <mantis at siriusfiction.com>

To: <urth at lists1.ba.best.com>

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=mantis=

Michael Andre-Driussi — 05 Jan 2002, 04:07 · follows Andy Robertson

Andy Robertson wrote:

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Me, I think Haber understood the political implications of Wolfe's essay and wanted to squelch it.

Touche'! Well that certainly trumps =mine=! (Teach me to open my mouth <g>).

So Big Cheers for "Interzone" for daring to Publish that which was Squelched! And the land of Tolkien and Chesterton (the essay makes me think of THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL)!

To Nutria, thanks for the support, especially since we've just been trumped.

But with regard to publishers, before we get off into another tangent, no, (as I understand it) in this day and age it really is quite ordinary in the US for publishers to put the burden on the authors in cases like this (which can be rationalized as being because the publisher will have to pay if it goes to court). The essay is greatly enriched by all the quotes, but if getting permission is too great a burden, then the author can always paraphrase, describe ("poem x by author y, lines z to a"), etc.

Which obviously would water-down the essay. Or make it look like it had been through a prison-grade censor.

=mantis=

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James Jordan — 05 Jan 2002, 02:30 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis,

This sounds very credible to me. I don't know about the Tolkein people, but I can tell you that in theological circles it is regarded as risky to quote C. S. Lewis without permission, which used to require paying money sometimes, and may still do so. Of course, the Lewis estate is notorious, as is the whole post-Lewis history of Lewis's works.

It does seem to me, though, that it is the editor's/publisher's job to get such permissions in a multi-author work which is perforce all about Tolkein. Why should Wolfe have to get his own special permission?

At any rate, in the absence of a statement from Wolfe or someone in the know, your speculation makes a lot of sense.

Nutria

At 02:14 PM 1/4/2002 -0800, you wrote:

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