

Uncollected Wolfe

The Urth list — 7 messages, 4 voices, 18 Mar 2002

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Michael Straight — 18 Mar 2002, 15:00

Perhaps my least favorite bit from Mr. Gevers's excellent interview with Wolfe was when he said he didn't see a new short story collection on the horizon (although perhaps that's just Wolfe's usual modesty - note his claim that Wizard Knight might not sell--as if!).

There's an awful lot of uncollected short stories out there, so I was wondering if those of you who have tracked them down might suggest which are the most worth chasing. What are some of the best Wolfe stories not found in the common anthologies (e.g., the ones I have):

Endangered Species

Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories Strange Travelers Stories from the Old Hotel Castle of Days

and where can they be found?

-Rostrum

Michael Andre-Driussi — 18 Mar 2002, 16:38 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum wrote:

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Hey, wait a second! Jonathan Laidlow had a nice list of uncollected Wolfe fiction at Ultan's Library back before it moved, but today I looked and I couldn't find the list. Was it removed for some important reason (if it was in deference to a new edition of URTHMAN EXTRAORDINARY, the =essential= [and =inexpensive=] Gene Wolfe bibliography, then I say we start agitating for the release of a new edition!) or just lost in the shuffle? (IIRC it was not annotated with regard to story content, but this itself could be an interesting new project!)

And speaking of Ultan's List, the Borski response to Wright's 5HC essay has been promised in the next few hours for a month now . . . shades of time dilation, as Jonathan edges closer to the speed of light! <g>

Finally, a tidbit on "It's Very Clean": this story has allusions to Disneyland, and as such it falls in with those other Wolfe stories, big and small.

=mantis=

Michael Straight — 21 Mar 2002, 16:46 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

On Mon, 18 Mar 2002, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

Hey, wait a second! Jonathan Laidlow had a nice list of uncollected Wolfe

fiction at Ultan's Library back before it moved, but today I looked and I couldn't find the list.

Aw, c'mon, mantis. Surely you don't need a list to recommend a few of Wolfe's better uncollected short works that are worth tracking down?

-Rostrum

Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Mar 2002, 17:45 · follows Michael Straight

As I was posting my Rostrum's pitchfork list, what did I find already there:

Aw, c'mon, mantis. Surely you don't need a list to recommend a few of Wolfe's better uncollected short works that are worth tracking down?

Huh. Hmm. My ranking, you say. <Sigh.> I'll see what I can do. But don't expect anything today, I'm already waaay over time-budget here!

=mantis=

Robert Borski — 28 Apr 2002, 18:52 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

More mini-reviews of some of Wolfe's uncollected short fiction, or as I've taken to calling them, lupets.

"Eleventh City." The fourth of Wolfe's Sam Cooper stories, featuring an interesting play on a Biblical incident (Matthew's casting of demons from the swine herd) and neat title. But are we to believe that Wendell Zane--who asks to be called Dell--is the Devil or his surrogate?

"The Fat Magician." The third Sam Cooper story, also told in epistolary style like the above. Much about this one I still do not understand. Why has Fat Ernst--a stage magician and safehouse operator for Jews and transvestites during WWII--been demonized by the local populace? What is the nature of the information Gertrun is keeping for "next time"? (Apparently, it has something to do with the removal of Ernst's body from the crematorium???) And those of you who have started to think of GW as a cranky old man may be less than pleased by the sermonette at the end. ("In the century we are just now closing out, we ordinary men and women have been in much greater danger from our own governments than from all the criminals in the world.") Still, I liked it for the most part, and enjoyed the tip to Avram Davidson's Boss in the Wall.

"A Fish Story." Is the key to understanding this short short to be found in the name "Rob Salmon"? (Or something like that--can't find my F&SF with the story at the moment) I.e., do ghosts return to the place they're "born" too?

"The Friendship Light." Modern-day Loki vs. Thor, with guest appearance by not-so-modern Harpies. Would have worked better if Wolfe could have found some other way of revealing what happens to Jack other than the clunky, less-than-believable, tape-recorded-oral-diary-method.

"Going to the Beach." Wry commentary on the place and value of writers in a bleak automated future. Liked it when I first read it; still like it now. Reminds me for some reason of the movie Brazil.

"Houston, 1943." One of Wolfe's finer-wrought horror pieces, with many autobiographical elements. Unfortunately, because I discuss the story at length in a forthcoming essay to appear elsewhere, I will refrain from further comment other than to say that the more you know about

the practice and belief system of voodoo, the better you will understand this story.

"It's Very Clean." Another version of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Tin Soldier." (There's also the one in tBotNS.) Miles to the rescue!

"The Night Cough." Almost no one agreed with me that this story supported my early notion that Scylla was riding Oreb and several people nearly self-combusted insisting this could not be so. It will therefore be interesting to see how the story reads now that the Short Sun trilogy has concluded. Wish Wolfe would set more of his stories in any of the Solar milieus, as this one is lily.

"Petting Zoo." Agree with mantis to a point--the story does seem like a Calvin-comes-of-age fable, except that the last paragraph also ominously suggests that mankind no longer rules the Earth, robots do.

"Pocketsfull of Diamonds." If the stories in *_Strange Attraction_* were unattributed, and we had to guess from a list of the book's authors who wrote what, I would have said that this one was written by either Neil Gaiman or Ray Bradbury. Not that it seems atypical Wolfe; it doesn't, especially with the archetypal nature of the sideshow attractions. But the terrain seems more Bradburyese/Gaimanesque, especially with the talking cotton candy and taffy apple.

"The Sailer Who Sailed After the Sun." My least favorite lupet of the bunch. A monkey takes the place of the whaler, then becomes parade lead for Egyptian sun god train. mantis, please explain your thumbs up.

"The Seraph from Its Sepulchre." (Please note the correct title, which no one ever seems to get right.) Wolfe's version of "The Secret Sharer," only instead of taking place at sea, it's on a planet encircling Mirzam, in Canis Major. I note with pleasure how seraph is anagrammatizable from Sephora (the ship in "Secret Sharer") and how Father Joseph Krska, despite bearing a Czech name, is more likely a tribute to Conrad himself, whose real name was Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski (the prefixes -ski and -ska being synonymous in Polish). Further onomastics: while common enough in Czechoslovakia, Krska itself--properly, there should be a ~ over the 's'--has no meaning in Czech and is therefore thought to have been Slovakized by newly arrived immigrants long ago. Speculation is that it may originally have been Russian for krishka (lid) or kroshka (crumb), but I prefer to think, given how I read the story's ending, that it's from kroshka, meaning infant. Surprised some of the list's more ardent religiosos haven't discussed this one in depth and look forward to their analysis of such Wolfian neologisms as "sohner" (sonar + sohn, German for 'the Son') in the context of the story.

"The Tree Is My Hat." A man afflicted with Hansen's disease is cured by the Polynesian version of the AntiChrist as the Millennium turns. Hey, what did you expect from an anthology entitled *_999_*? Rather liked this one, but the story is marred in my opinion by Wolfe's heavy-handed character names: Baden, the leper, is married to Mary Christmas, and their children's names are Mark and Adam. Sheesh!

"The Wafer." Wolfe mentions this in an interview as one of his better stories and how chagrined he is that no one seems to have read it. Could this be because *_Lamps of the Mouth_*, the anthology which contains it, has a whopping list price of \$125.00?

"The Walking Sticks." Dave Hartwell, despite being kind enough to mention me in the intro, gives away a plot element I would have preferred learning in the story itself. Otherwise agree with Dr. Nick, in that it's rather unoutstanding. Again, perhaps mantis could enlighten us as to his favorable review?

Final summation: if all of the above were collected into a single anthology, and then compared to the contents of Strange Travelers, I would have to say the new collection is stronger. So it appears we all have something to look forward to if this ever comes to pass.

Robert Borski

Adam Stephanides — 01 May 2002, 14:13 · follows Robert Borski

on 4/28/02 1:52 PM, Robert Borski at rborski at charter.net wrote:
And those of you who have started to think of GW as a cranky old man may be less than pleased by the sermonette at the end. ("In the century we are just now closing out, we ordinary men and women have been in much greater danger from our own governments than from all the criminals in the world.")

I'm one of "those," but I have to admit Wolfe has a point here, at least if you consider only death. The number of people in the 20th century killed by their own governments, or as a result of bad policies (i.e. famines) would certainly be in the tens of millions, which might very well be greater than the number of people killed by "ordinary criminals," though I have no idea what the actual figure would be.

"A Fish Story." Is the key to understanding this short short to be found in the name "Rob Salmon"? (Or something like that--can't find my F&SF with the story at the moment) I.e., do ghosts return to the place they're "born" too?

I found this one pretty impenetrable myself.

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I didn't read this one until after Oreb's possession by Scylla had been revealed, so I don't recall the arguments; but it seemed to me that the story made it clear that **something** was "riding" Oreb. Knowing that it was Scylla didn't add anything to the story for me; but then I've never been much taken by the possession stuff.

"Petting Zoo." Agree with mantis to a point--the story does seem like a Calvin-comes-of-age fable, except that the last paragraph also ominously suggests that mankind no longer rules the Earth, robots do.

I only read this once, and not closely, but I took the last paragraph as meaning that the Earth is now ruled by the nanny-state, which has tamed free and "wild" men like the protagonist had been as a child. (I'm speaking from Wolfe's perspective, not my own.)

"The Walking Sticks." Dave Hartwell, despite being kind enough to mention me in the intro, gives away a plot element I would have preferred learning in the story itself.

Not that you don't see it coming a mile away.

Otherwise agree with Dr. Nick, in that it's rather unoutstanding.

"Unoutstanding" is putting it mildly.

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 01 May 2002, 16:18 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides quoted Robert Borski and wrote:

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I could see these two elements (with thematic links back to "Eyebem"--I've been reading ORBIT anthos in memory of Knight's passing) and also, since this is the sort of Wolfe ending that "makes grown men weep and quiet women reach for their shooting irons," I could see a third element, too. That is, the "nanny" of nanny-bot and nanny-state.

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I read Nick's review first. IIRC, Nick felt that it is flawed in a categorical sense: a mode or type, a narrative voice used in a group of stories that Nick finds fake/grating/distracting. Then later on I actually read the story, and I thought it wasn't as bad as Nick had made out. I thought it was rather like "Redbeard," and I like that one okay. Forgive me! There's no accounting for taste. I probably like "The Walking Sticks" better than, say, "Hour of Trust," but it will likely take years to tell.

I was surprised by the ending, actually--I didn't see it coming and still don't see it as something from the original source text. Nor do I see it as a cop-out or a cheat (as the end of "Hour of Trust" sometimes seems to me: at the very least, a bad splice), rather I saw it as an unexpected angle, like how the end of "Bluesberry Jam" took a familiar story and put a perfect twist on it. Then again, it has been many years since I read the source book, and the most recent thing about it that I read was Sutherland's essay on the physique/physiology of Mr. H (I couldn't even say what the possible answers were, too fuzzy--especially with the inclusion of movie versions), so it may be that it all springs from there (the source text). (But it seems to me to be much more like M.R. James--oh yes, another book which fell into my path in the last few months, GHOST STORIES OF AN ANTIQUARY. James and his architecture! So strong that it might even push John Crowley entirely out of "The Haunted Boardinghouse"--it was M.R. James again! And all that architecture in "Hour of Trust"?)

I might even like "The Walking Sticks" better than "Eleventh City" and "A Traveler in Desert Lands." In fact yes, I do--go figure!

But I don't like any of them as much as "Petting Zoo."

=mantis=

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