

revelatory message/converting dislike

The Urth list — 10 messages, 7 voices, 26 May 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3279>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 26 May 2002, 14:07

In writing once again (no doubt seen for the first time by many) about his disappointment in TBOSS, William Ansley writes:

Of course, someone on this list could post a revelatory message that makes me see the light, but I haven't been convinced by any attempts so far.

Ah! I will steer clear of the more irritating aspects of this and focus on the more intriguing root of it. It applies to William, since he wrote it, but it may very well apply to others.

My question to William and anyone else who cares to answer is this: Have you ever received a revelatory message about a disliked Wolfe fiction that made you "see the light" and revise your dislike of it? More than once? What were the fictions, what were the revelations, to what degree did it change your dislike (how many levels did it rise up--did you actually come to like it?), and how long ago was it?

I suspect it has never happened, like countless urban legends that have "really happened" to a friend of a friend but never to the informant. If this is true, then pining after such a conversion through revelation is like chasing after mirages; chasing after mirages is frustrating in itself and causes its own negative energy feedback loop, perhaps.

But still, here we put it to the test. If there is a mass of testimonial evidence to show that such things have happened with relative frequency, then I will have to adjust my reality-map accordingly.

=mantis=

Andy Robertson — 26 May 2002, 15:04 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

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

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

But still, here we put it to the test. If there is a mass of testimonial evidence to show that such things have happened with relative frequency, then I will have to adjust my reality-map accordingly.

It happened to me. On my first reading of 5HC as a young twentysomething I thought if a fine bit of writing but rather confused, fragmentary plotwise. The depths bypassed me entirely. It was not until I met other readers that the book was opened up for me.

Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa: but it was Wolfe taught me that SF books *could* be like that. Scratch that, it was Wolfe who taught me *books* could be like that.

hartshorn.

William Ansley — 28 May 2002, 15:10 · follows Andy Robertson

At 7:07 AM -0700 5/26/02, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

In writing once again (no doubt seen for the first time by many) about his disappointment in TBOSS, William Ansley writes:

Of course, someone on this list could post a revelatory message that makes me see the light, but I haven't been convinced by any attempts so far.

Ah! I will steer clear of the more irritating aspects of this and focus on the more intriguing root of it. It applies to William, since he wrote it, but it may very well apply to others.

I'm sorry that I irritated you, Michael, but I'm not sure how. Is it just that I don't like the Short Sun books or that I say so or that I am incapable of clearly articulating why?

My question to William and anyone else who cares to answer is this: Have you ever received a revelatory message about a disliked Wolfe fiction that made you "see the light" and revise your dislike of it?

You have misread my intent in the passage you quoted, above. I am not "pining for conversion through revelation." In fact, I doubt that any revelation about the Short Sun books could "convert" me. It was my way of saying, "Since so many people on this mailing list, who seem to know so much more about literature, religion and Gene Wolfe himself than I do, like the books and I don't, maybe my opinion isn't valid."

Having put it that way, perhaps I can see the source of your irritation. If I doubt the validity of my own opinion, I shouldn't have bothered everyone on this list with it.

My apologies.

William Ansley

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Michael Straight — 28 May 2002, 15:50 · follows William Ansley

On Sun, 26 May 2002, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

My question to William and anyone else who cares to answer is this: Have you ever received a revelatory message about a disliked Wolfe fiction that made you "see the light" and revise your dislike of it? More than once?

What were the fictions, what were the revelations, to what degree did it change your dislike (how many levels did it rise up--did you actually come to like it?), and how long ago was it?

This has happened to me several times, not just with Wolfe. I guess I'm just particularly dense.

Urth of the New Sun - I disliked this because I had too many wrong interpretations about the New Sun Quartet and it went totally against them. After spending some time reading this list and going back through the whole series again I enjoyed all of them more, and the difference was probably greatest for this book.

I think the most important insight I had was simply to let Wolfe take me where he wanted to go and show me what he wanted, and enjoy the ride. Once I got over not having the plot do what I thought it should do and not getting to see the scenes I thought I wanted to see, I really enjoyed what was actually there.

I didn't much like 5HC the first time I read it either, but after getting some hints from this group on how it all fit together, I went back and enjoyed it quite a bit. (Still my least favorite Wolfe, but

I did enjoy it the second time through).

I can't say how much these differences are from insights from the list and how much is just from giving the works a second read, but I think both were involved.

As for the Short Sun books, I loved them the first time and the second time. Yes they have problems, and leave some of my desires unsatisfied (I'm not sure Wolfe's has a satisfying and coherent idea about what the "Secret" is, and I'm not wild about the ending), but what is there is wonderful.

-Rostrum

Andy Robertson — 28 May 2002, 17:38 · follows Michael Straight

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

From: "William Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net>

Having put it that way, perhaps I can see the source of your irritation. If I doubt the validity of my own opinion, I shouldn't have bothered everyone on this list with it.

Why on Urth not? Doubts and uncertainties are hardly alien to the Lupverse.

hartshorn

Michael Andre-Driussi — 28 May 2002, 17:51 · follows Andy Robertson

William Ansley quoted and wrote:

Of course, someone on this list could post a revelatory message that makes me see the light, but I haven't been convinced by any attempts so far.

Ah! I will steer clear of the more irritating aspects of this and focus on the more intriguing root of it. It applies to William, since he wrote it, but it may very well apply to others.

I'm sorry that I irritated you, Michael, but I'm not sure how. Is it just that I don't like the Short Suns books or that I say so or that I am incapable of clearly articulating why?

William, the sentence I quoted seems rather loaded to me: "revelatory message," "makes me see the light," "any attempts so far." It practically throws down a gauntlet. All together it paints you as being something like a fairytale magistrate, having established a contest with a prize to anyone who can prove to you that the world is flat, and after listening to a long sequence of sages and lunatics you are getting understandably weary of the whole thing.

I find it irksome to be told that I (as a member of the class of people who post on this list and like TBOTSS) have failed in a contest, when I was not aware of said contest and in fact I would not knowingly participate in such a contest (blind-man's bluff/battle royale). OT1H I'm deeply sorry to have "let you down," yet OTOH since I didn't enter the race and I didn't even hear the starting gun, then am I to feel sorry for not running a race that I would never chose to run? Instead I am irked. Aside from all that, I wondered what result you were seeking, using such terms as you were using.

My question to William and anyone else who cares to answer is this: Have you ever received a revelatory message about a disliked Wolfe fiction that made you "see the light" and revise your dislike of it?

You have misread my intent in the passage you quoted, above. I am not "pining for conversion through revelation." In fact, I doubt that any revelation about the Short Sun books could "convert" me. It was my way of saying, "Since so many people on this mailing list, who seem to know so much more about literature, religion and Gene Wolfe himself than I do, like the books and I don't, maybe my opinion isn't valid."

Having put it that way, perhaps I can see the source of your irritation. If I doubt the validity of my own opinion, I shouldn't have bothered everyone on this list with it.

I don't understand how your opinion can be anything other than valid.

I guess I can understand a desire to have one's opinion "validated" by being shared by x-number of people, if that is part of what you are saying, but I think it is valid even if nobody else has the same opinion.

If you are seeking validity, then just like in WWOZ, you had it all along. But that is not likely to be the right answer.

=mantis=

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 28 May 2002, 18:28 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

William wrote:

Having put it that way, perhaps I can see the source of your irritation. If I doubt the validity of my own opinion, I shouldn't have bothered everyone on this list with it.

And Mantis replied:

I don't understand how your opinion can be anything other than valid.

Easily; a misinformed or ill-informed opinion is not valid. (Harlan's law: everyone is not entitled to an opinion; they are entitled to an informed opinion.) However, since William's opinion in this case was about his own likes and dislikes, he could hardly be other than informed.

Jerry Friedman — 28 May 2002, 20:19 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

--- Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu> wrote:

On Sun, 26 May 2002, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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Have

you ever received a revelatory message about a disliked Wolfe fiction that made you "see the light" and revise your dislike of it? More than once?

What were the fictions, what were the revelations, to what degree did it change your dislike (how many levels did it rise up--did you actually come to like it?), and how long ago was it?

This has happened to me several times, not just with Wolfe. I guess I'm just particularly dense.

Urth of the New Sun - I disliked this because I had too many wrong interpretations about the New Sun Quartet and it went totally against them.

Same here, although there was only one of my interpretations of TBotNS that it went against: I thought the ending of _Citadel_ was at least hopeful and it turned out to be a disaster. I didn't like that *one bit*. If I let it, _Urth_ would spoil my enjoyment of TBotNS.

The other thing I didn't like about _Urth_ is that, for something like the first half, Wolfe seemed to be writing in his sleep. I couldn't believe this was the same person who had written his earlier books. I may even have worried about his health. Am I the only person who thinks that book was astonishingly poorly written?

After spending some time reading this list and going back through the whole series again I enjoyed all of them more, and the difference was probably greatest for this book.

I think the most important insight I had was simply to let Wolfe take me where he wanted to go and show me what he wanted, and enjoy the ride. Once I got over not having the plot do what I thought it should do and not getting to see the scenes I thought I wanted to see, I really enjoyed what was actually there.

Well, I guess I could try it...

I didn't much like 5HC the first time I read it either, but after getting some hints from this group on how it all fit together, I went back and enjoyed it quite a bit.

Same here. I just read 5HC a couple months ago, and people's comments on the Gene Wolfe's project really helped me enjoy the title novella a lot more.

On the other hand, I enjoyed the New Sun from the moment Severian had a present(i)ment of his future (can't remember which was at the beginning and which was at the end).

(Still my least favorite Wolfe, but I did enjoy it the second time through).

I can't say how much these differences are from insights from the list and how much is just from giving the works a second read, but I think both were involved.

As for the Short Sun books, I loved them the first time and the second time. Yes they have problems, and leave some of my desires unsatisfied (I'm not sure Wolfe's has a satisfying and coherent idea about what the "Secret" is, and I'm not wild about the ending), but what is there is wonderful.

As long as we're criticizing these books, I remember that in his interview with Nick Gevers, Wolfe said that Severian shows up because he was like the gun on the wall that has to be fired (but Wolfe forgot to give credit to Chekhov). Well for heaven's sake! What about the conversation with Sinew on Green? Isn't that a large cannon loaded and pointed at the bullseye? Like Allen Lloyd, I got really tired of Wolfe's leaving things out in this series, and leaving out that scene was the worst.

Jerry Friedman

Adam Stephanides — 30 May 2002, 13:57 · follows Jerry Friedman

on 5/28/02 3:19 PM, Jerry Friedman at jerry_friedman at yahoo.com wrote:
As long as we're criticizing these books, I remember that in his interview with Nick Gevers, Wolfe said that Severian shows up because he was like the gun on the wall that has to be fired (but Wolfe forgot to give credit to Chekhov).

That comment struck me as strange. The idea seemed to be that if two books are set in the same universe and the protagonists can possibly meet, they have to do so (as if Balzac were required to have all the protagonists of his *Comedie Humaine* meet each other). I certainly wouldn't have felt cheated if Severian had never appeared in the *Short Sun* books.

--Adam

Michael Straight — 30 May 2002, 14:17 · follows Adam Stephanides

On Thu, 30 May 2002, Adam Stephanides wrote:
on 5/28/02 3:19 PM, Jerry Friedman at jerry_friedman at yahoo.com wrote:
As long as we're criticizing these books, I remember that in his interview with Nick Gevers, Wolfe said that Severian shows up because he was like the gun on the wall that has to be fired (but Wolfe forgot to give credit to Chekhov).

That comment struck me as strange. The idea seemed to be that if two books are set in the same universe and the protagonists can possibly meet, they have to do so (as if Balzac were required to have all the protagonists of his *Comedie Humaine* meet each other). I certainly wouldn't have felt cheated if Severian had never appeared in the *Short Sun* books.

I agree with you, but I remember before the *SS* series came out, there was quite a bit of speculation on this list about whether Severian would appear in the next book, whether Severian might in some way be identified with the *Outsider*, etc.

And given Severian's abilities to walk the corridors of time it wasn't hard to believe he could somehow show up on *Blue*. I think it's fun that Wolfe turned that presumption on its head.

And also that it creates a sort of circle. One should read the *New Sun* series first, but the bits with Severian at the end of *RTTW* lead right back into the *New Sun* series, and in fact prompted me to give the *New Sun* books a re-read after I'd finished *RTTW*, which I greatly enjoyed.

-Rostrum