

a Wolfe-spectrum, focus on TBOTSS

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 30 May 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 30 May 2002, 17:40

There does not seem to be any objection to the basic notion of "Wolfe-lite," nor to the placing of PANDORA BY HOLLY HOLLANDER as the ultimate example of Wolfe-lite.

The contrast to Wolfe-lite would be Wolfe, or Wolfe-baroque, or Wolfe-heavy, I guess. I think people tend to take TBOTNS as the benchmark, but it isn't really an endpoint for everyone, I don't think. Other Wolfe books will therefore fall within the spectrum between PANDORA and TBOTNS, and some might be placed beyond TBOTNS.

For example, where to place 5HC? While it is physically shorter than TBOTNS, I think it is actually harder. Our spectrum does not account for "difficulty," per se, but we can accomodate it to do so, I think, and put 5HC as the solid step of Wolfe-heavy beyond TBOTNS.

Now then, another personal anecdote that I've probably already used to death around here: iirc, when Gene Wolfe told me, in person, about his plan to do a trilogy called "The Book of the Short Sun," he said specifcly that it would be in the hard-on-the-reader style of 5HC. (In hindsight this is especially dramatic when some readers of TBOTLS were clearly calling it Wolfe-lite, disappointed that it did not match the baroque stylings of the Urth Cycle.)

So he had 5HC as a model in mind. That many readers have seen similarities between 5HC and TBOTSS is therefore a confirmation of authorial intent in this regard being received by readers through the text.

It may well be the case that readers who do not much like 5HC will like TBOTSS even less. In other words, TBOTSS likely trumps 5HC in heaviness, and people who are most comfortable with, say, the spectral segment of the Soldier series and the Urth Cycle, will not like TBOTSS.

We see today arguments over 5HC, a work published decades ago. Many of the same negative things said about 5HC seem to be said about the much more recent/less digested TBOTSS as well. Readers who dislike one or the other or both feel that it is pointlessly complicated; that Wolfe is finally cheating; that things don't add up; that solid, non-fuzzy solutions cannot be sorted out; et cetera. It might be that in general the same root problems between these texts and their grumpy readers are the same.

At the other end of the Wolfe spectrum, it could be that KNIGHT WIZARD will trump PANDORA in liteness.

=mantis=

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 May 2002, 21:40 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Mantis mentioned that Mr Wolfe apparently had 5HC somewhat in mind as a model in writing tBotSS. Aside from the fact that this adds some dubeity to his claims that the twin-worlds thing isn't totally conscious, it adds to something that has been building in my mind for the past while & which I am looking for as I begin rereading the SS books:

Just as with the three novellas of 5HC, I suspect that the narrators of the three books are (at least, in some significant way) three different people. The first bit of evidence is in the cast-of-characters that appears at the beginning of each book. In retrospect, they make it quite clear that the Narr is in some important respect a different person from Horn; but if you look closely you'll see something else which first put me onto thinking they were different persons. (I won't say what to see if anyone else leaps to the same conclusion.)

What do y'all think?

Jerry Friedman — 31 May 2002, 20:08 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

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

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I think you've got a good point, but there's also the Cool Stuff theory of literature, and to me, more cool stuff happens in TBotSS than in 5HC, despite my objections to what Wolfe decides to say and not say.

Jerry Friedman