

Spring blooms on Planet Wolfe

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Feb 2003

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James Wynn — 20 Feb 2003, 22:54

Adam Stephanides takes on Crush's list of Wolfean lovers:

I haven't read the Soldier books in a long time, and my memory of them is dim, so you may well be right about Latro. But V.R.T. is searching for the truth about himself, not for his mother, at least as I read it.

As for the other three, I did originally say "protagonists." Especially in Wolfe's books, it's the viewpoint character who dominates the reader's experience. The effect on the reader of being tied to the consciousness of a man unable to love won't be dispelled by observing from afar other characters who love.

Having said this, I must confess with embarrassment that I'd forgotten when I wrote my original post about Severian's relationship with Thecla. (Interesting that nobody brought this up in reply.) Though I haven't reread TBOTNS in a while either, I'd be willing to concede this as a counterexample to my original claim. But note how gingerly Wolfe handles the Severian-Thecla relationship: not until long after Thecla's death do we learn there was any sexual component to it, and even then we only learn of this in brief allusions. And Severian's final judgment on Thecla is rather clinical, iirc.

Crush considers his analysis:

Yes, I see that stipulation now. However, I contend that Auk's love for Chenille still qualifies as a protagonist's love since many chapters of the Long Sun are told from his point of view. Same goes for Mint who is being seduced by death. V.R.T says he came to St. Croix looking for his mother, but I think you meant romantic love so I withdraw it.

I guess I was most motivated by the statement "Wolfe is a great writer, but his emotional range is limited."

Even if "neither Green nor Silk really knows the woman he 'loves'" does that mean he doesn't love them or that the portrayal isn't valid? How realistic is it to say anyone really 'knows' the one they love. How better to show love than love that is difficult or love for someone whose behavior doesn't merit it? What is love if it is only merited? And while I love my wife more than life, sometimes loving her is difficult and she definitely would say the same of me.

By the way. On the issue of Severian's "clinical" analysis of Thecla. It doesn't seem clinical to me but only one would expect since Thecla had actually "become" Severian at his writing. Severian is as much writing about himself. Imagine trying to write about a love affair in which **out of love** you simultaneously killed and were killed by your lover. Consider also, that Severian/Thecla knows that her feelings toward Severian-as-her-torturer were ambivalent.

To me, that Wolfe handles this as delicately as he does (including his eating of Thecla's body) shows impressive emotional sensitivity.

My point is that Green, Silk, Latro, and, as you point out, even cold Severian fall in love. They love enough to suffer over it. And how else can you prove "real love"?

And see how well Wolfe has shown love in totally different people and situations. Green's love of a man with more heart than intellect. Severian's and Latro's (and Horn's) love in men who are barely sane. Silk's public and embarrassing love of an intelligent man for a complicated woman whom he can barely understand and whom it would be better for him not to try.

-- Crush