

What is your favorite quote of any work of Wolfe?

The Urth list — 9 messages, 9 voices, 06 Apr 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3912>

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Matt DeLuca — 06 Apr 2003, 15:21

My pen halts, though I do not. Reader you will walk no more with me. It is time we both take up our lives.

-Severian

Citadel of the Autarch

<http://wotmania.com> feed your wot addiction

Brandon Mason — 07 Apr 2003, 15:46 · follows Matt DeLuca

"I'm a bad man trying to be a good one."

Severian in Urth of the New Sun

Phoebe Davis — 07 Apr 2003, 21:29 · follows Brandon Mason

Desperately hard to pick a favorite - this is certainly in the running:

Just as I despaired -- she was there, filling me as a melody fills a cottage. I was with her, running beside the Acis when we were a child. I knew the ancient villa moated by a dark lake, the view through the dusty windows of the belvedere, and the secret space in the odd angle between two rooms where we sat at noon to read by candlelight. I knew the life of the Autarch's court, where poison waited in a diamond cup. I learned what it was for one who had never seen a cell or felt a whip to be a prisoner of the torturers, what dying meant, and death.

I learned that I had been more to her than I had ever guessed, and at last fell into a sleep in which my dreams were all of her. Not memories merely - memories I had possessed in plenty before. I held her poor, cold hands in mine, and I no longer wore the rags of an apprentice, nor the fuligin of a journeyman. We were one, naked and happy and clean, and we knew that she was no more and that I still lived, and we struggled against neither of these things, but with woven hair read from a single book and talked and sang of other matters.

The Claw of the Conciliator

Phoebe

--- Brandon Mason <suck_at_life at yahoo.com> wrote:

"I'm a bad man trying to be a good one."

Severian in Urth of the New Sun

Do you Yahoo!?

--

Andy Robertson — 07 Apr 2003, 21:31 · follows Phoebe Davis

The one about The Mile Long Space Ship, in the library in TFHOC

hartshorn

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

From: "Phoebe Davis" <meezer_gal at yahoo.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Joshuaafalchion — 11 Apr 2003, 03:17 · follows Andy Robertson

I can't say this is my favorite quote, but it always tugs my heart whenever I read the Book of the New Sun. It comes from Shadow, chapter XII, and Thecla is the speaker: "I ought to hate you ... But I don't. Not for your sake ... if I hate my last friend, what would be left?" Not the wisest or most insightful quote, perhaps, but it resonates with me on a very deep level.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 11 Apr 2003, 05:01 · follows Joshuaafalchion

This is a great topic.

I have three especial favorites. They're all from tBotNS, and they're all (I'm afraid) rather long.

1. I think Wolfe isn't generally so much a writer of memorable lines but of gorgeously constructed sequences that build up, at times, to climaxes of astonishing power, lines that are memorable because of what has come before them. This comes from SHADOW, chapter XXIV:

[Dorcas said] "...Your face was full of beauty, of a kind of nobility. When the world is horrible, then thoughts are high, full of grace and greatness."

I looked at her, thinking she was mocking me, but she was not.

"The world is filled half with evil and half with good. We can tilt it forward so that more good runs into our minds, or back, so that more runs into this." A movement of her eyes took in all the lake. "But the quantities are the same, we change only their proportion here or there."

"I would tilt it as far back as I can, until at last the evil runs out altogether," I said.

"It might be the good that would run out. But I am like you; I would bend time backward if I could."

"Nor do I believe that beautiful thoughts - or wise ones
- are engendered by external troubles."

"I did not say beautiful thoughts, but thoughts of grace and greatness, though I suppose that is a kind of beauty. Let me show you." She lifted my hand and slipping it inside her rags pressed it to her right breast. I could feel the nipple, as firm as a cherry, and the warmth of the gentle mound beneath it, delicate, feather-soft and alive with racing blood. "Now," she said, "what are your thoughts? If I have made the external world sweet to you, aren't they less than they were?"

"Where did you learn all this?" I asked. Her face was drained of its wisdom, which condensed in crystal drops at the corners of her eyes.

2. My second example is just an amazing illustration of what science fiction can do that no other

kind of writing can. In *SWORD*, chapter XIII. Severian tries to sleep "in the lee of a naked rock" in the mountains, and mostly fails. The passage is actually quite long, and all excellent; but I excerpt here my favorite part of it:

... I spent the remainder of the night staring at the stars; it was the first time I had ever really experienced the majesty of the constellations, of which Master Malrubius had taught us when I was the smallest of the apprentices. How strange it is that the sky, which by day is a stationary ground on which the clouds are seen to move, by night becomes the backdrop for Urth's own motion, so that we feel her rolling beneath us as a sailor feels the running of the tide. That night the sense of this slow turning was so strong that I was almost giddy with its long, continued sweep.

Strong too was the feeling that the sky was a bottomless pit into which the universe might drop forever. I had heard people say that when they looked at the stars too long they grew terrified by the sensation of being drawn away. My own fear - and I felt fear - was not centered on the remote suns, but rather on the yawning void; and at times I grew so frightened that I gripped the rock with my freezing fingers, for it seemed to me that I must fall off Urth. No doubt everybody feels some touch of this, since it is said that there exists no climate so mild that people will consent to sleep in unroofed houses.

I have already described how I woke thinking that Hethor's face (I suppose because Hethor had been much in my mind since I talked to Dorcas) was staring into mine, yet discovered when I opened my eyes that the face retained no detail except the two bright stars that had been its own. So it was with me at first when I tried to pick out the constellations, whose names I had often read, though I had only the most imperfect idea of the part of the sky in which each might be found. At first all the stars seemed a featureless mass of lights, however beautiful, like the sparks that fly upward from a fire. Soon, of course, I began to see that some were brighter than others, and that their colors were by no means uniform. Then, quite unexpectedly, when I had been staring at them for a long time, the shape of a peryton seemed to spring out as distinctly as if the bird's whole body had been powdered with the dust ground from diamonds. In a moment it was gone again, but soon returned, and with it other shapes, some corresponding to constellations of which I had heard, others that were, I am afraid, entirely of my own imagining. An amphisbaena, or snake with a head at either end, was particularly distinct.

When these celestial animals burst into view, I was awed by their beauty. But when they became so strongly evident (as they quickly did) that I could no longer dismiss them by an act of will, I began to feel as frightened of them as I was of falling into that midnight abyss over which they writhed; yet this was not a simple physical and instinctive fear like the other, but rather a sort of philosophical horror of the thought of a cosmos in which rude pictures of beasts and monsters had been painted with flaming suns.

3. Finally, as if to prove that Wolfe can run down an epiphany as well as the next post-Joycean, this bit from *CITADEL*, chapter XXXI. Severian, having just told of his discovery that the Claw is the thorn of the rosebush, considers:

At that time I did not think of it, being filled with wonder - but may it not be that we were guided to the unfinished Sand Garden? I carried the Claw even then, though I did not know it; Agia had already slipped it under the closure of my sabretache. Might it not be that we came to the unfinished garden so that the Claw, flying as it were against the wind of Time, might make its farewell? The idea is absurd. But then, all ideas are absurd.

What struck me on the beach - and it struck me indeed, so that I staggered as at a blow - was that if the Eternal Principle had rested in that curved thorn I had carried about my neck across so many leagues, and if it now rested in the new thorn (perhaps the same thorn) I had only now put there, then it might rest in anything, and in fact probably did rest in everything, in every

thorn on every bush, in every drop of water in the sea. The thorn was a sacred Claw because all thorns were sacred Claws; the sand in my boots was sacred sand because it came from a beach of sacred sand. The cenobites treasured up the relics of the sannnyasins because the sannnyasins had approached the Pancreator. But everything had approached and even touched the Pancreator, because everything had dropped from his hand. Everything was a relic. All the world was a relic. I drew off my boots, that had traveled with me so far, and threw them into the waves that I might not walk shod on holy ground.

Next?

John Barach — 11 Apr 2003, 06:12 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Here's one of my favourites:

We believe that we invent symbols. The truth is that invent us; we are their creatures, shaped by their hard, defining edges. When soldiers take their oath they are given coin, an asimi stamped with the profile of the Autarch. Their acceptance of that coin is their acceptance of the special duties and burdens of military life -- they are soldiers from that moment, though they may know nothing of the management of arms. I did not know that then, but it is a profound mistake to believe that we must know of such things to be influenced by them, and in fact to believe so is to believe in the most debased and superstitious kind of magic. The would-be sorcerer alone has faith in the efficacy of pure knowledge; rational people know that things act of themselves or not at all (Shadow and Claw, p. 14).

John

<http://katajohn.blogspot.com>

James Jordan — 11 Apr 2003, 10:59 · follows John Barach

At 12:01 AM 4/11/2003, Blattid cited:

What struck me on the beach - and it struck me indeed, so that I staggered as at a blow - was that if the Eternal Principle had rested in that curved thorn I had carried about my neck across so many leagues, and if it now rested in the new thorn (perhaps the same thorn) I had only now put there, then it might rest in anything, and in fact probably did rest in everything, in every thorn on every bush, in every drop of water in the sea. The thorn was a sacred Claw because all thorns were sacred Claws; the sand in my boots was sacred sand because it came from a beach of sacred sand. The cenobites treasured up the relics of the sannnyasins because the sannnyasins had approached the Pancreator. But everything had approached and even touched the Pancreator, because everything had dropped from his hand. Everything was a relic. All the world was a relic.

Though different, this reminds me of *The Little Prince* -- the fox's explanation of why the Prince prizes his rose above all others, even though it is on the other hand just one rose among many. We can be sure that Wolfe has read *The Little Prince* (who hasn't), though I doubt if his

selection of a rose-thorn was directly inspired by it (for the imagery is ancient and pervasive). The beloved rose is, of course, the Church, when God is the lover. And the Prince is a semi-Christ-figure, seeking sheep, caring for the rose, dying so as to make the starry heaven "real" to the narrator. Wolfe is surely trading on such traditional imagery with his rose, fountain, and ship -- the fountain associated with the Spirit of God, and both rose and ship with the Church. No accident that (female) Perelines hold the rose-thorn in trust.
FWIW.

Nutria

Nutria

Spectacled Bear — 11 Apr 2003, 10:41 · follows James Jordan

At 07:12 2003-04-11, John Barach wrote:
Here's one of my favourites:

We believe that we invent symbols....

When I came to read these books again after a gap of many years, I found that this passage had been stamped on my memory like the pattern on a metal coin; it was as perfectly familiar as if I had committed it to memory. Yet I had not done so deliberately; it had worked on me by itself, just as Severian says.

Spectacled Bear.