

Russian Ark

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 13 Apr 2003

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Russell Wodell — 13 Apr 2003, 18:38

This will seem to many to be off-topic; but I can't resist writing about this film by Aleksandr Sokurov. As you may know, it consists of one unbroken 96-minute take travelling the entire length of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, a stunning technical achievement. What I hadn't anticipated is that the first two-thirds of the film are very much like being inside a Wolfe novel (the last third is like being inside a Tolstoy novel).

Two protagonists, one visible and one invisible (the latter being the narrator, using Sokurov's voice) move from gallery to gallery, all inhabited by Russians from past and present; we slowly figure out they are both dead. Only certain of the other characters can see them unless the visible ghost touches them, after which they can briefly interact physically (dancing together, discussing the art on display). It is never made explicit whether the others characters are also ghosts or whether the protagonists are travelling through time, or both; and the ending is stranger than anything in Solaris.

I can only suggest the haunting quality of the film by saying it is like Peace combined with a Russian Soldier in the Mist. I suspect it is most unlikely that Wolfe and Sokurov know anything of each other's work. but the parallels are very pleasantly surprising. I wonder if anyone could ask Wolfe if he has seen the film, or encourage him to do so.

There is one lovely lupine line of dialogue: "Dead authors weep when their books are reprinted."

Timothy Reilly — 28 Apr 2003, 06:01 · follows Russell Wodell

I can second Russell Wodell's recent recommendation for Russian Ark. It's a stunning film that would appeal to anyone who likes Wolfe.

Tim