

Short Story collections

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 14 Apr 2003

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Terry Lago — 14 Apr 2003, 13:43

Hi all,

Can any of you enlighten me about the various short story collections of Wolfe? How would you rank them and which ones have overlap in content? I was looking for _Castle of Days_ recently and stumbled upon _Endangered Species_, and I imagine I should have just picked it up, but didn't know what would be inside (of course that's part of the pleasure of a Wolfe book I guess, right?)

Can any of you enlighten me?

(I guess the reason I'm wary is because I generally don't like short stories. I usually prefer novels and there are only a handful of authors whose short fiction I enjoy...though I would be surprised if Wolfe didn't also turn out to be one of these. Still...I always hum and ha before picking up a short story collection.)

Thanks,

T.

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Adam Stephanides — 19 Apr 2003, 13:51 · follows Terry Lago

Going back to Terry's original question, on 4/14/03 8:43 AM, Terry Lago at

tlago at chass.utoronto.ca wrote:

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Confining myself to the five major-publisher collections, which are _The Island of Dr. Death..._, _Castle of Days_, _Endangered Species_, _Storeys from the Old Hotel_, and _Strange Travellers_ (_Gene Wolfe's Book of Days_ is completely reprinted in _Castle_), I'd say the first of these has several essential stories, the second has one essential story ("Forlesen") and a great deal of filler, and the others don't have any essential stories, though there's certainly a lot of

enjoyment to be gained from them. I'd definitely start with Island, which every Wolfe fan should have read (it's the material collected here, along with 5HC, that originally brought Wolfe to prominence). After that it doesn't much matter, although Strange Travellers is probably the most solid of the remaining collections, in the sense of having the fewest throwaway stories. And none of these five overlap at all, iirc.

Several small-press collections have appeared, though I don't know if any are still in print. The only one of these I've seen is Bibliomania, which is fun, but lightweight, and should definitely come after the five collections above.

Hope this helps,

Adam

Fernando Q. Gouvea — 19 Apr 2003, 18:24 · follows Adam Stephanides

I've been following this discussion with some interest, because I do like many of Wolfe's short stories. They are a very diverse bunch of stories, of course, with the novellas at one end of the spectrum and stories that are little more than jeux d'esprit at the other. Still, here's my take on the various collections:

The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories includes several essential stories and several others that are fun but light. The best, I think are the title story, "The Death of Doctor Island", "The Eyeflash Miracles", "Tracking Song", and "Seven American Nights". In addition, I have a soft spot for "La Befana". Finally, there's "The Toy Theater", which I think is just brilliant, an elegantly cut gem that ends up making a significant point about whether it's worthwhile to sacrifice one's life for one's craft.

Castle of Days includes the short stories that originally appeared in Gene Wolfe's Book of Days. As several people have pointed out, "Forlesen" is an amazing story. I also like "Beautyland" (which has since lost some of its power because it was too correct), "How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion" (this one seems not to get much respect, but I still think it's great fun), and "The War Beneath the Tree". Castle of Days also includes "The Castle of the Otter", a collection of secondary pieces about the Book of the New Sun, of which the best, I think, is "These Are the Jokes" (which is brilliant).

Endangered Species includes several stories that stand out for me, including "The Cabin on the Coast", "In the House of Gingerbread", "When I Was Ming the Merciless", and "The Detective of Dreams". Several others are at least interesting: "The Last Thrilling Wonder Story", and the two "The Woman Who Loved" stories. Pound for pound, this is probably the weakest of the collections.

Storeys From the Old Hotel, though meant as a kind of collection of less significant stories, actually contains several that I think are among his best: "Westwind", "Parkroads", "A Solar Labyrinth", "Cherry Jubilee", and (I'm sure choosing this one will annoy people) "In Looking-Glass Castle".

In Strange Travelers, there are several strange stories that I haven't completely processed yet. Still, "No Planets Strike" seems very fine to me, "And When They Appear" is disturbing but well done, "Ziggurat" is again disturbing but packs a punch, and "Counting Cats on Zanzibar" is very good. "Bed and Breakfast" is fun but minor. Some of the others I'm not sure what to do with yet.

That's quite a good bunch of stories, I think, of many different types and styles. Perhaps not as good as the very best sf short story writers, but pretty close.

Fernando

Fernando Q. Gouvea
Department of Mathematics Editor, FOCUS and MAA Online
Colby College Mathematical Association of America
Waterville, ME 04901 <http://www.maa.org>
fqgouvea@colby.edu

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Genua had once controlled the river mouth and taxed its traffic in a way
that couldn't be called piracy because it was done by the city government.
-- Local-body politics explained
Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

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Josh Geller — 19 Apr 2003, 18:44 · follows Fernando Q. Gouvea

On Sat, 19 Apr 2003, Fernando Q. Gouvea wrote:
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respect, but I still think it's great fun), and "The War Beneath the
Tree".

Amazing no one has mentioned 'Against The Lafayette Escadrille', which is one of my favorite
short stories.

I generally disagree with the various folks who think that GW is a weak short story writer.

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