

Rape in Wolfe

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 21 Apr 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3959>

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James Jordan — 21 Apr 2003, 14:31

Rant mode turned on:

Hey, look, get a grip.

Wolfe is dealing with human depravity, almost all the time.

He has some really bad women.

He has some really bad men.

Guess what really bad men, and even men who are not so bad, have been doing to helpless women for thousands of years? Right. You got it.

Wolfe knows history. Rape is relatively rare in modern warfare, IF the army is American or British or Israeli or Western European. It's par for the course in all the rest of human history. Like in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s.

A friend of mine visited Pakistan a few years ago. He said you see virtually no women in public.

Why? because any unaccompanied woman is "fair game" for rape.

Wolfe's rapes are offensive. They're supposed to be. You're supposed to feel like vomiting.

But they are NOT gratuitous.

Now, rant mode turned off.

Nutria

Chris — 21 Apr 2003, 16:46 · follows James Jordan

This was some time ago, and I realize you may not be responding directly to me, but I feel it's necessary to revisit the comment I originally made which spawned the conversation, if for no other reason than to put rant mode in perspective:

This reminds me (in a way only loosely connected with what you've said) of something that I find a little disturbing in Wolfe's novels- the frequency of rape committed by his protagonists or major characters. Which is NOT, I must stress, to say that I think it's some kind of wish fulfillment or fetish on his part, it's not presented that way at all... it's not gratuitous, and when it does appear it tends to be a major thematic element, etc.

I guess what I'm saying is that the frequency with which the "Rape and Forgiveness" theme comes up makes me a little morbidly uncomfortable.

I can only speak for myself, but I don't think anyone else was displaying the attitude you're referring to, and I took pains to explicitly say that I was *not*.

I'm fully aware of exactly what you're talking about. However, I'm not talking about any single event in his stories and I'm not just howling "RAPE IS BAD" (duh). Nonetheless, the frequency of the theme (rather than any particular instance of it) has made me uncomfortable, whether

that's right or wrong - I can't really help that, though perhaps discussing it may make a difference.

Given that, taking a look at what you've said I would say that it does **not** appear to be used as a matter of historical flavor or general depiction of the barbaric lands his stories take place in, because these are not just committed by random ruffians or side characters. Sometimes (often, I think) the characters involved are ones that we're sympathetic to. It seems to be more making a point about the savagery present in every individual mind, even those which are seemingly "nice", rather than placing the danger out there in the world at large. This is not exactly an unprecedented thought either, when it comes down to it.

If I break down my discomfort based on this, I get two general, related questions. First, is this negative aspect of the human soul (independent of its truth - I don't really disagree with the truth of it) necessarily central to most of Wolfe's longer stories? I'm not really sure. Second, if this negative aspect **is** a necessary point to bring out in the story he's trying to tell, for what reasons can we infer that he's expressing it in the **particular** form of sexual violence. Archetypal, perhaps? Again, I don't know.

This isn't really an essential thread, though I don't think it's necessarily an unworthy one. I don't mind if this discussion continues or is dropped, but if it is continued I would just like it to not be continued in the terms of the rant mode. Respectfully,

Chris

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Nutria

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James Jordan — 21 Apr 2003, 17:18 · follows Chris

At 11:46 AM 4/21/2003, you wrote:

This was some time ago, and I realize you may not be responding directly to me, but I feel it's necessary to revisit the comment I originally made which spawned the conversation, if for no other reason than to put rant mode in perspective:

Naw, it was just a general rant. And I meant it semi-humorously, not intending to distress you or anyone else. My apologies to whomever I may have offended.

You wrote: It seems to be more making a point about the savagery present in every individual mind, even those which are seemingly "nice", rather than placing the danger out there in the world at large. This is not exactly an unprecedented thought either, when it comes down to it.

If I break down my discomfort based on this, I get two general, related questions. First, is this negative aspect of the human soul (independent of its truth - I don't really disagree with the truth of it) necessarily central to most of Wolfe's longer stories? I'm not really sure. Second, if this negative aspect *is* a necessary point to bring out in the story he's trying to tell, for what reasons can we infer that he's expressing it in the *particular* form of sexual violence. Archetypal, perhaps? Again, I don't know.

I reply:

I think it is somewhat archetypal. After all, rape combines several aspects of sin: exploitation, predation, violence, sexual disfunction, etc. It relates to Wolfean themes about religion and government, especially protection, and to his interest in man-woman relationships.

Also, in terms of "centrality," we've commented before here that Wolfe points to "salvation" off the page, so to speak. God is the only True Lover, and human being ought to be like God (images of God) in how they treat one another. But they aren't.

It might be interesting to list and analyze all the rapes in Wolfe, starting with the abuse of the female slave in *5th Head*.

Nutria

James Wynn — 21 Apr 2003, 18:43 · follows James Jordan

More preemptive shots

I just remembered Io in SotM. But that wasn't really a rape "scene" was it? It is vaguely alluded to (which is probably why I keep forgetting about it).

And in reading the posts from this weekend I see someone has noted a rape in tBotSS. I haven't finished that yet so I'll have to give it to you. But, neither of the two I know about are dealt with favorably IMO and neither made me as uncomfortable as say the rape scene in Donaldson's "Lord Foul's Bane" (to pick a quite mainstream example) which was surely not the most shocking but dealt with rather sympathetically from the POV of the protagonist.

Any others from Wolfe?

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

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at hotpop.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Monday, April 21, 2003 1:01 PM

Subject: (urth) Rape and Misogyny in Wolfe

I feeling pretty dense right now since I can think of only one rape in my reading of Wolfe right now: the infamous act by Severian on the semi-conscious Jolenta. I'm tracing my memory for any others and I just can't come up with any others -- I recently re-read tFHoC and I don't recall

a rape of a female slave.

I for one would appreciate a listing of the rapes -- particularly any

"Rape
as Salvation" events (the Jolenta one does not apply IMO).

Also, it has been frequently reference that Wolfe exhibits misogyny. I've yet to encounter it (and notice it -- which may be revealing about me).

I'm

curious what other readers have read in Wolfe that they consider to be misogynistic. Possibly it is in works I've yet to read.

As a premtive shot, I don't consider the Trivigaunti to an example of misogyny. Trivigaunte does not seem to be anymore distopian than Viron which is quite machismotic -- and we are constantly reminded that men aren't treated any worse there than women are in Viron.

--- Crush

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