

urth Digest, Vol 26, Issue 12

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 16 Oct 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4732>

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Kieran Mullen — 16 Oct 2006, 19:25

Message: 9

Date: Mon, 16 Oct 2006 13:00:27 -0400

From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Subject: Re: (urth) The Death of Doctor Island Movie

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Message-ID: <200610161300.28204.ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

On Monday 16 October 2006 12:55, David DiGiacomo wrote:

I always thought that the trio of IDD, DrOfDI, and DofDrI was the most accessible and visual of GWs works and would make an fascinating triptych of short films. Hopefully this will not be awful and they'll make two more.

I agree that The Death of Doctor Island is accessible in terms of understanding the plot, but I also find it to be one of Wolfe's most disturbing and offensive stories. I can't imagine what a mass audience would make of it.

Care to expound on why you find it offensive?

I am not David, but I can write why I find the story disturbing: an innocent young girl is brutally murdered in order to salvage one mentally disturbed adult male, drive an innocent boy catatonic, and manifest the more useful subdominant personality in the boy. This is all based on some utilitarian calculus: the low probability that the girl will be cured, the preference for the subdominant personality in the boy, the chance that the man will be cured. It's the cold sacrifice of one life to improve another's life. But I think that's the type of death offered by Doctor Island, and this is the point of the story.

What if the Island is wrong in its prognosis? Is that much worse than its being right?

I'm not sure I'd call that offensive, but it is disturbing to me.

Kieran Mullen

P.S. It's been a while since I read the story.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 16 Oct 2006, 19:38 · in reply to Kieran Mullen

I'll add: I think it's significant that the sacrificial victim was a girl -- innocent or otherwise. There's a strong violence-against-women quotient in Wolfe's work, and over time it's begun to disturb me a bit. In this particular case, it's pretty egregious.

--Dan'l

On 10/16/06, Kieran Mullen <kieran at ou.edu> wrote:

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Yves Meynard — 17 Oct 2006, 02:21 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

From: Kieran Mullen <kieran at ou.edu>

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But aren't we meant to find this "therapy" profoundly abhorrent? The story is shocking, disturbing, because as SF readers we have a built-in expectation that wondrous future technology will embody progress and good. Wolfe gives us a situation where this is not at all true in final analysis (no pun intended). I would have to re-read the story, but I seem to remember Dr. Island mentions that Freudianism applies equally well to machines--which I think is in fact the author's condemnation of any school of psychology that treats people as if they were machines.

I'm not sure I'd call that offensive, but it is disturbing to me.

It is indeed offensive, if you think Wolfe agrees with Dr Island; I personally doubt that he does.

Yves Meynard

Daniel D Jones — 17 Oct 2006, 02:50 · in reply to Kieran Mullen

On Monday 16 October 2006 15:25, Kieran Mullen wrote:

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No question that the story is disturbing. If the story doesn't disturb you, then you have serious problems. But there's a great deal of difference between calling a story disturbing and calling it offensive. The story is meant to disturb. That's its whole point and purpose. And it succeeds masterfully. But I disagree that that makes the story offensive. If a story doesn't move you in some way, is it worth investing the time to read?

I first read the story many years ago while in high school. It was the first thing I'd ever read by Wolfe, although I didn't realize that until recently. I only recently picked up a copy of *LoDD*. When I started reading *DoDI*, I literally jumped out of bed and shook the book in my wife's face. "This is it! This is it!" I then had to explain that I'd read the story some 25 years

ago but had had no idea who'd written it. I couldn't remember the details of the events but it was one of the most powerful, most disturbing stories I'd ever read and I couldn't wait to read it again. It did not disappoint on the second reading.

It's not often that a book or story literally gives me cold chills but this story did. Both times. It's incredibly disturbing and incredibly powerful. But that doesn't make it offensive. Quite the opposite.