

Wolfe in decline?

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 14 Apr 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5408>

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Kieran Mullen — 14 Apr 2009, 17:06

Sorry to omit previous discussions....

I don't think Wolfe jumped the shark with *Pirate Freedom*. I thought that it was an interesting story as well as an exploration of good and evil in a much more violent world. The narrator is unreliable, of course as most are in Wolfe. It seems silly to state that involving time travel immediately implies a poorly written story. I even liked the *Wizard-Knight* series. I found "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" to be unenjoyable - the story too thin and the narrative layers too complex.

As for "An Evil Guest," I didn't like it because it wandered all over the genre map, so that it seemed incoherent. The Lovecraftian elements were pulled out in the end without enough foreshadowing, and I could not find a character with whom I could empathize. However, I think I need to reread it based on some insights brought up by this mailing list. It's a bit like seeing "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" without any knowledge of Shakespeare. You can admire parts of it, but it seems a bit incoherent. I am still looking for some key understanding that will make AEG make more sense.

Kieran Mullen

Jonathan Goodwin — 14 Apr 2009, 17:31 · in reply to Kieran Mullen

That would be silly about the time-travel, I agree, so I'm glad not to have suggested it. What I did write was that time-travel aspect of PF seemed a particularly 'Wolfean' addition to the book, one conditioned by the expectations of his earlier work and not integral to the narrative. In particular, I wrote in my post that it seems to introduce (lazily) potential ambiguities for readers inclined to spot them that would thereby increase the apparent moral and narrative complexity of an undeveloped work.

I also mentioned in my post the nagging suspicion I had that the entire pirate story was a fantasy transformation of a youth spent in more prosaic and chronologically suitable crime. Did anyone else see it this way? I also then thought that I would never even have considered such a baroque interpretation in a work by another writer (and would have indeed set the book down long before finishing it). That kind of reaction, if shared by anyone here at all, is what I'm particularly interested in hearing about.

On Tue, Apr 14, 2009 at 12:06 PM, Kieran Mullen <kieran at nhn.ou.edu> wrote:

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Mo Holkar / UKG — 15 Apr 2009, 11:53 · in reply to Jonathan Goodwin

At 18:31 14/04/2009, Jonathan Goodwin wrote:
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That kind of reaction, if shared by anyone here at all, is what I'm particularly interested in hearing about.

I had this reaction with AEG: the feeling "But this is Wolfe! Surely there must be more to it than this!" Particularly as it had been billed on Lovecraftian-horror elements which didn't really appear to be present in any significant way.

There are quite a few of the earlier works that I didn't fully 'get' at the first time of reading, so that bred in me the suspicion that if I didn't make much of a work, there probably was something clever going on that I hadn't picked up on. But those are recognizable by the "ah, of course" sensation when you do eventually spot it, or see it explained by someone else. I have had no such sensation yet with AEG.

best wishes,

Mo

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WolfeWiki:
<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

brunians at brunians.org — 15 Apr 2009, 12:22 · in reply to Mo Holkar / UKG

Although I question it sometimes, I am mostly still going with the theory that Gene has deliberately written a book which appears on the surface to be a bad pulp story but has more going on beneath the surface.

In the beginning of Chapter Seven, Gideon is soliliquizing about how much he loves Cassie and how important she is to him, and how he will always love her. This is all, in the light of how he behaves later, total bullshit.

So what is going on here? Gideon is doing magick: he is programming himself to believe certain things which he does not actually believe, but which he must appear to believe to that the daemon that he has evoked so that that daemon will behave in the ways he wants her to behave.

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brunians at brunians.org — 15 Apr 2009, 12:26 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

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s/to believe to that the/to believe to the/

a bit of overediting, sorry.

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