

torturing readers

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 18 Jun 1998

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Paul C Duggan — 18 Jun 1998, 08:12

Somewhere in TBotNS there is a passage where Severian compares the relationship between torturers and their clients to that of men to women and authors to their readers. (Maybe I am combining two separate passages.)

I won't touch the men vs. women thing (though I don't buy it totally; just call me naive) but I don't think that, in general, the author vs. reader thing holds up. A good many authors, at least among those who write for a living, must be very anxious to please their readers, so they will keep on buying their books. Perhaps the ones with "artistic integrity" don't care if anyone reads them, but I don't think they are trying to drive people away, in most cases. (Of course I realize that torture may attract as well as repel, at least for the sake of argument.)

I also realize that just because Wolfe has Severian say something, it doesn't mean Wolfe himself holds it as a truth. (He has elsewhere referred to readers as masters to the authors' slaves.) But in the case of author vs. reader I do think it is true (or much more true than usual) in the case of Wolfe vs. us. As evidence, just look at this list.

Whether Wolfe wants to torture us or not, Severian the writer IS a torturer and if he thinks that that is the kind of relationship an author has with his reader it's not surprising that he messes with our minds in such a fashion.

And after his passing the test on Yesod, he becomes much more forthcoming.

hmmm..

paul

William H. Ansley — 19 Jun 1998, 00:41 · follows Paul C Duggan

Whether Wolfe wants to torture us or not, Severian the writer IS a torturer and if he thinks that that is the kind of relationship an author has with his reader it's not surprising that he messes with our minds in such a fashion.

You can't just blame it on Severian. Most, if not all, of Wolfe's fiction is torturous in the same way and, in a few cases, possibly to a greater degree.

His nonfiction tends to be pretty straightforward, though.

William Ansley