

Gene Wolfe (1931 - 2019)

The Usenet list — 12 messages, 10 voices, 15 Apr 2019

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/usenet/73>

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James Nicoll — 15 Apr 2019, 17:55

Tor reports the death of Gene Wolfe:

<https://www.tor.com/2019/04/15/gene-wolfe-in-memorial-1931-2019/>

My reviews can be found at <http://jamesdavisnicoll.com/>

My tor pieces at <https://www.tor.com/author/james-davis-nicoll/>

My Dreamwidth at <https://james-davis-nicoll.dreamwidth.org/>

My patreon is at <https://www.patreon.com/jamesdnicoll>

Ahasuerus — 15 Apr 2019, 18:31 · in reply to James Nicoll

On Monday, April 15, 2019 at 1:55:53 PM UTC-4, James Nicoll wrote:

Tor reports the death of Gene Wolfe:

<https://www.tor.com/2019/04/15/gene-wolfe-in-memorial-1931-2019/>

His stories weren't always my cup of tea, but many were very well crafted. Good job.

He also wrote a number of interesting and occasionally funny essays. For example, here is a snippet from "Lone Wolfe: A Self-Conducted Interview with Gene Wolfe" (1983):

lenona321 — 16 Apr 2019, 18:28 · in reply to James Nicoll

https://www.google.com/search?source=hp&ei=FB62XLu-KMfH_QaMtqnIBw&q=gene+wolfe+87&btnK=Google+Search&oq=gene+wolfe+87&gs_l=psy-ab.3...629.3062..3248...0.0..0.133.1078.13j1....2..0....1..gws-wiz.....0..0j0i10j33i160.52pqXcxzfi8

(more obits, including one from The Guardian)

[https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/rec.arts.books.childrens/gene\\$20wolfe%7Csort:date/rec.arts.books.childrens/RYbVyR0tBCs/82mktSC3coJ](https://groups.google.com/forum/#!searchin/rec.arts.books.childrens/gene$20wolfe%7Csort:date/rec.arts.books.childrens/RYbVyR0tBCs/82mktSC3coJ)

(birthday post from 2011, with links to interviews, book covers, and video)

Ahasuerus — 16 Apr 2019, 19:47 · in reply to lenona321

On Tuesday, April 16, 2019 at 2:28:05 PM UTC-4, leno... at yahoo.com wrote: [snip]

From Wikipedia:

When asked the "Most overrated" and "Most underrated" authors, Thomas Disch identified Isaac Asimov and Gene Wolfe, respectively [snip]

Disch calling Asimov overrated is a bit like a fillet knife calling an axe overrated. Where is the finesse?

Gene Wirchenko — 17 Apr 2019, 02:31 · in reply to Ahasuerus

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus

[snip]

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Since starting to read Asimov, I have always liked Asimov's work. I really liked his very readable science writing.

I never cared much for Wolfe's work. What I tried was opaque to me, and thereafter, I avoided it. Since we are on a RIP thread, could someone please point me and others to Wolfe works that we might like along with some whys?

Sincerely,

Gene Wirchenko

Titus G — 17 Apr 2019, 04:14 · in reply to Gene Wirchenko

On 17/04/19 2:31 PM, Gene Wirchenko wrote:

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus
<ahasuerus at email.com> wrote:

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My experience was similar. I began The Book of the New Sun once but did not finish the second and remember nothing about it so will echo your request with the added query; which authors is he similar to?

Ted Nolan — 17 Apr 2019, 04:32 · in reply to Titus G

In article <q9698u\$21i\$1 at dont-email.me>, Titus G <noone at nowhere.com> wrote:

On 17/04/19 2:31 PM, Gene Wirchenko wrote:

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus
<ahasuerus at email.com> wrote:

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Me too. I remember when his *Fifth Head Of Cerebus* came out I read the initial "Orbit" novella and the book version and just had the feeling I had totally missed the point. Opaque or maybe oblique indeed. I read *The Shadow of the Torturer*, felt the same way and more or less wrote off Wolfe.

As to who is he similar to: There were definitely echoes of Vance in *The Shadow of the Torturer*. Maybe John M. Ford? I say that because I had a similar "I must have missed something" feeling about his *The Dragon Waiting*.

columbiaclosings.com
What's not in Columbia anymore..

frank.scrooby — 17 Apr 2019, 06:40 · in reply to Ted Nolan

Hi all,

Sadly I have never been able to get my hands on a single Gene Wolfe story or book. He is relatively unknown in South Africa. Asimov, Clarke and Heinlein are pretty much the only SF writers you'd find on library shelves. Even they are getting scarce.

I am saddened to learn of Mr. Wolfe's passing.

Regards
Frank

David Duffy — 17 Apr 2019, 10:43 · in reply to Titus G

Titus G <noone at nowhere.com> wrote:

On 17/04/19 2:31 PM, Gene Wirchenko wrote:

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus
<ahasuerus at email.com> wrote:

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Charles Dickens? G.K. Chesterton? If you have read *The Death of Dr Island*, *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* (SF) or *Peace* (something else) and didn't enjoy them, then there's probably not much point reading other stuff - though maybe *The Wizard Knight* (High Fantasy) might be more approachable. Those who enjoy tricky whodunnits are one audience that would enjoy rereading Wolfe to unpack all the Easter eggs (which are literal in some of cases). I think of him as a Modernist, a la Joyce etc.

I will give away one famous bit of *5th Head*, where our narrator goes up to top of the local library to find if they have any books by his father. At the very top of the spiral ramp (where presumably he expects they would be alphabetically) there are "a misplaced astronautics text, *The Mile-Long Spaceship* by some German [Kate Wilhelm]...leaning against a book about the assassination of Trotsky [Bernard Wolfe, *The Great Prince Died* - *that* Wolfe wrote the SF novel *Limbo*]...and a crumbling volume of Vernor Vinge's short stories that owed its presence there some long dead librarian's mistaking V. Vinge for Winge...". Since *5th Head* is about genetics, the fact that his father is an author at the top of a helix among the SF novelists beginning with W, [and lives in the *Cave Canem*] is either extremely enjoyable or extremely tedious. This is all in one sentence.

Cheers, David Duffy.

Ahasuerus — 17 Apr 2019, 12:34 · in reply to Gene Wirchenko

On Tuesday, April 16, 2019 at 10:31:45 PM UTC-4, Gene Wirchenko wrote:

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus

<ahasuerus at email.com> wrote:

On Tuesday, April 16, 2019 at 2:28:05 PM UTC-4, leno... at yahoo.com wrote:

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If you want "clear and transparent prose", you read Asimov. If you want "opaque and oblique", you read Wolfe. Hence the "axe/fillet knife" comparison -- they have different functions. If you want to fell a tree, a fillet knife is useless. If you want to make a fillet, an axe is useless.

Jack Bohn — 17 Apr 2019, 14:05 · in reply to Gene Wirchenko

Gene Wirchenko wrote:

I never cared much for Wolfe's work. What I tried was opaque to me, and thereafter, I avoided it. Since we are on a RIP thread, could someone please point me and others to Wolfe works that we might like along with some whys?

Well, let me say I found *The Book of the New Sun* and the *Soldier* series understandable, at least as to what was happening and why (on the surface, if there were hidden depths, they remain that way).

Among short stories, if you can find them: ones I found clear and worthwhile, ranked: "War Beneath the Tree", "My Book", "When I Was Ming the Merciless", and "How the Whip Came Back". "How I Lost the Second World War and Helped Turn Back the German Invasion" is plain and amusing, but seemed to go on too long for what was in it; maybe it was playing a different game that was over my head.

-Jack

William Hyde — 17 Apr 2019, 18:23 · in reply to Ted Nolan

On Wednesday, April 17, 2019 at 12:32:04 AM UTC-4, Ted Nolan <tednolan> wrote:
In article <q9698u\$21i\$1 at dont-email.me>, Titus G <noone at nowhere.com> wrote:

On 17/04/19 2:31 PM, Gene Wirchenko wrote:

On Tue, 16 Apr 2019 12:47:26 -0700 (PDT), Ahasuerus
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I missed the point of virtually every Gene Wolfe work I read when I was young. But then I didn't get on with a number of great books until the second try (*Pavane*, *Ulysses*).

"The Shadow of the Torturer", though, grabbed me right at the start and I rushed through it (missing mostly everything, as I discovered on a reread). I gave it a third read a few years ago and it seemed even better. Yes, I think there is more than a little Vance in it.

The "Long Sun" books I thought were excellent, but for some reason I stalled out in the first "Short Sun" book.

I read and liked "Soldier in the Mist", but haven't read the sequels.

He became a favourite author, and I'm sad to hear of his passing. But glad he wrote so much.

If I didn't like a single thing he'd written, I'd still remember him fondly because one of his collections was entitled "The island of Dr Death and other stories and other stories".

William Hyde