

The shadow of the Torturer

The Usenet list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 03 Jun 1983

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Arturo Perez — 03 Jun 1983, 10:37

I'm sorry folks but I have to agree with Mclure on the Gene Wolfe novel. I tend to read to the end anything I pick up but I could not finish Torturer. I think the writing style was very bad and the story didn't seem to be headed anywhere. It was a waste of my time..

tim — 05 Jun 1983, 06:02 · follows Arturo Perez

Gene Wolfe is one of the brightest new talents in speculative fiction. His best work is the four-volume "Book of the New Sun", consisting of The Shadow of the Torturer, The Claw of the Conciliator, The Sword of the Lictor, and The Citadel of the Autarch. The second volume won the Nebula Award, and the third and fourth are likely candidates for the same award.

The protagonist of the series is Severian, a young and quietly insane journeyman of the despised Torturer's Guild (the Guild of Seekers of Truth and Penitence). The setting is a time so far in the future that today is less than a memory, with even our legends forgotten. Mankind has flourished and fallen over the millions of years. The setting is surrealistic medieval. The influence of Vance's excellent The Dying Earth is clear, but it would be a mistake to label Wolfe as in any way derivative.

This is probably not a work for people who only read science fiction or fantasy. The literary and mythological allusions are thick, though never really annoyingly so, and the style is far from the usual matter-of-fact description of sf, full of ambiguity and unusual metaphor. If the books seem to drag, you're probably not paying enough attention -- there is more on many pages than in entire chapters of most fantasies.

I can't see how to give a useful plot synopsis without spoiling it for you, so I can only recommend it highly.

Tim Maroney

cfv — 08 Jun 1983, 17:25 · follows tim

I wouldn't exactly call Wolfe a 'new' talent. I was reading him in high school a long time ago... He has just never made (or wanted) the spotlight before New Sun came out.

Calling his work 'SF' or 'Fantasy' is invalid. He has written a major work of literature that happens to use some of the settings of the genres. It is in my mind the most important piece of literature I have seen published since Tolkien, and I think that it is better than Tolkien (heresy?)

chuck

tim — 11 Jun 1983, 19:12 · follows cfv

When I said that Wolfe was a new talent, I was not considering the novella "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" or any of his fine earlier work, but the new stuff really makes the old look sick. Like you, I read "Cerberus" in high school.

Wolfe seems far better than Tolkien to me. I think Tolkien is vastly overrated.

Tim Maroney