

Whorl post re:Heresy and Wolfe's Audience

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 21 Feb 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/1209>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

James Jordan — 21 Feb 2001, 08:51

At 03:52 PM 2/20/2001 -0600, you wrote:

At 11:34 AM -0500 2/19/01, BMeyer7 at aol.com wrote:

>Has Wolfe crossed the line from not giving all the answers
>to creating texts that must be pored over by talmudic scholars rather
>than actual readers of novels? Is Wolfe writing for a smaller, and
smaller audience of expert Wolfe-interpreters? Discuss.

Wolfe has written this way, often, since his career began. His early short story "The Changeling" is about as confusing as anything he's ever written since. We discussed it at length on the Urth list a couple of years ago, but I'm still confused!

I do think that Wolfe shoots himself in the foot a bit by piling up too many complications. He seems genuinely frustrated when people don't "get" what he's writing about, such as seeing Severian as a kind of antichrist instead of seeing him as a "Christian figure" slowly climbing out of a horrible background. I imagine he'd be frustrated at those of us who don't understand that at the end of BoSS it's All Horn, or All Silk, or Still Both -- whichever it is. But, he's really got no one to blame but himself.

But, hey, it's a fact of the modern era that there is a wide separation between folk art and fine art. In Bach's day, the common man and the educated man could both delight in the same fine art music. But by the 20th century, most people aren't going to groove to the music of Messiaen, Shostakovich, Webern, or Frank Martin. But I do, being a musician and all.

Traditional SF lies on the folk/popular side of things, but not Wolfe. He's definitely on the fine art side.

So, consider how you approach fine art. You don't have to understand everything to enjoy it. You can really enjoy Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, even if you don't realize that every movement uses the same da-da-da-DAAA musical motif, and that virtually every other melody in the whole piece is a transformation one way or another of that motif. You don't have to understand a Bach fugue to enjoy hearing it, for your ear will carry you. Similarly, even with modern art music, if your ear likes the ambience of the music of, say, Messiaen, you can enjoy it at that level without studying out all the complexities.

The same is true of Wolfe. If you enjoy the writing, the characters, etc. -- enjoy the trip as it were -- you don't have to figure out everything. Still in all, however, I do think Wolfe frustrates his readers more than he needs to -- and I say this because, as I wrote above, he himself seems frustrated when they don't "get it."

FWIW.

Patera Nutria

*This is WHORL, for discussion of Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun.