

There are Doors

The Whorl list — 5 messages, 3 voices, 11 Mar 1997

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Doug Eigsti — 11 Mar 1997, 09:11

***** SPOILER ALERT *****

***** Information concerning THERE ARE DOORS follows *****

I, too, am a fan of THERE ARE DOORS. I liked the way Wolfe used the doors as literal passageways into alternate realities. Whenever a character went through a door I found myself anticipating the clues that would tell me if he had made a reality jump or if it were just a mundane transit. The mystery of the situation, putting the character through a labyrinth of shifting realities without a flash of light or earth shaking indicators to tell the reader that a shift had been made, was expertly handled. It put a surreal slant on everyday events, reminding me of Philip K. Dick. The reader is forced to question the 'reality' of each situation. It is representative of Wolfe's usual techniques for disorienting the reader to the same degree as the protagonist. It is on my list of books to read again, along with PEACE. Outside of the NEW SUN and LONG SUN series it is a book I would use to introduce a friend to Wolfe.

=Talon=

Questions or problems to whorl-owner at lists.best.com

Patri10629 — 11 Mar 1997, 21:31 · follows Doug Eigsti

JBjordan,

Patrick O'Leary wrote (and you quoted me) "I had met him(Wolfe) earlier and had mentioned Hating THERE ARE DOORS. "

JBjordan wrote:

"Briefly, why? I'll admit I did not understand why the Catholic Church (Italian Restaurant) would want to hook up the main character with an idol goddess, but Gene's explanation to me is that the Catholic Church does incorporate pre-Christian religions, though in a purified and transformed way. On the whole, however, I found it a delightful and thought-provoking book. So, what did you not like about it? Instruct us....I hope this is not "off topic." I think understanding "Long Sun" will involve understanding Wolfe as a whole, especially his religious views."

I, too, hope this is not too off-topic. And I doubt it is very instructive. But this is one reader's reaction to one of the few Wolfe novels I didn't care for.

Rather than try to recollect I'll quote my reaction at the time...regarding my "Hating THERE ARE DOORS"

(Quoting myself) Patrick O'Leary wrote:

I must say it was one of the most unique reading experiences I've had. I found it strangely unsettling and riveting, yet not at all enjoyable. I couldn't fault the writing--it was fine. But it satisfied none of the appetites I bring to fiction--even the desire to be surprised--it was all drudgingly surprising or not in a rather ephemeral way. Then I realized how much the book had fumigated my consciousness (believe me, I tried to find a better verb). I lived for days in a daze--cloudy, befuddled--my thoughts full of ellipses. Then, I understood that he had not simply written the portrait of a man lost between two realities...Wolfe had actually, accurately recreated the morose consciousness of dreams (our closest proximity to reality hopping). He got it all--the tantalizing innuendoes of desire that are never quite consummated, the dead ends, and frustrating returns, the incomplete sentences, the physical detail trembling with meaning yet maddeningly obscure, the sudden friendships and allegiances that require no foreplay or proof. I could go on--dreams are one of my favorite obsessions.

BUT--and this is crucial--I DID NOT ENJOY IT. Now, how does one accomplish that? So while I'm saluting his amazing creative powers, a truly rare ability to create an altered consciousness--not simply sub-create an alternate reality--I'm thinking, what good is all of it if doesn't move me? What does it say for a novel whose only living character is a doll? Wolfe goes way beyond the postmodern hi-jinks of defeating expectations (which is really just returning the reader to self- or reader-consciousness) he actually recreates the hero's continual resuspension of belief. It occurs to me how odd all this must sound if you've never read the book!! My bottom line is I think Wolfe has really accomplished something--a Tour de force, in fact--but I doubt it's something I have any use for! I wonder if I'm alone in this feeling."

That sort of sums it up. It's very probable that I didn't "Get" it. But, as I told Gene, "THERE ARE DOORS nearly prevented me from experiencing the exquisite pleasures of THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN."

Interestingly, recently in an online interview, when Wolfe was asked the pick his favorite of his own novels, he chose THERE ARE DOORS.

Aw, what does he know, anyway?:)

By the way, JB, I enjoyed the interview with Wolfe you did.

best

Patrick O'Leary

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Wesley Parsons (7065) — 12 Mar 1997, 11:32 · follows Patri10629

PMJI, but I've always been a big fan of There Are Doors. The creativity behind the premise of the alternate universe should not be overlooked. In our world, the primary burden of sex and childbearing is on women. They run the risk of being tied down by pregnancy and child care; the man is (mostly) free to hang around and help or not. Considerable cultural energy goes into keeping men in the picture to assist women in child rearing. You could point to much of our cultural baggage (family, marriage, e.g.) as arising from this biology.

Wolfe changes this fact so that men bear a burden from sex and child bearing as well -- they die shortly after sexual intercourse. Women have a long-term but bearable burden; men have a very short-term and almost unbearable burden. How does this change society?

Wolfe suggest some things: worship of females (the idol); males as an oppressed class; substitutes for real women (the doll); some retardation of technology; massively enhanced significance to the sex act by both sexes. I recall Wolfe says at one point in the book there should be even more differences, but he keeps the alternate society sufficiently similar to ours to make his points meaningful.

Wes Parsons

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Doug Eigsti — 14 Mar 1997, 15:09 · follows Wesley Parsons (7065)

Patrick O'Leary, (and all 'befuddled' by THERE ARE DOORS);

When I read the description below I find that it approximates my own feelings, except that, somehow, I liked the experience. I repeat the comment for clarity:

(Quoting myself) Patrick O'Leary wrote:

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This seems, to me, to be a review by a reader deeply effected by the book. I think the feelings THERE ARE DOORS evoked were, perhaps, just those Wolfe had intended. Such strong emotions are not easily provoked from a work of fiction and would be a challenge for any writer. Wolfe has struck a chord with this work. I feel the same way about Spielberg's SHINDLER'S LIST. Watching it is agonizing, but the emotions are true. Constant contentment is unsettling.

I think Master Ultan said it best:

I began, as most young people do, by reading the books I enjoyed, but I found that narrowed my pleasure...

(THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER, p. 44.5 paperback)

=Talon=

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Patri10629 — 14 Mar 1997, 21:54 · follows Doug Eigsti

Dear Talon,

That was very naughty.

Very polite. And wonderful. And true.

I will not attempt to top it:)

best

Patrick O'Leary

PS: Yer mother wears army boots.

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