

Doors and Suns

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Mar 1997

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CoxRathvon — 14 Mar 1997, 23:11

I have long thought that Wolfe's labyrinthine stories would make great cinema--in the hands of a suitably Lupine director. I don't know who such a director might be, but I will confess that I often visualize parts of Wolfe's stories in my head; and in this cinematic respect, one of my favorite tales is "There Are Doors," which is also Wolfe's most generally accessible novel, I think. Wolfe has said that the "Doors" protagonist Green is not very bright. Frankly, I've fancied that Green reacts to his dreamlike predicament much as I would in his place--which either means that I'm not too bright by Wolfe's standards or that Green is merely mortal--i.e., not gifted as Severian, Latro, and Silk are in their various ways.

The Lupine sensation of wandering in a labyrinth is dizzying indeed, and I sympathize with the reader who complained that Wolfe indulges in obscurantism.

I admit, parts of the "New Sun" books, the Latro books, and "Castlevision" are more than I can wrap my poor mind around. Trying to follow the thread of the timeline in "Free Live Free" just about makes me sick with vertigo. But it seems to me that Wolfe eases up a bit in "There Are Doors" and in the "Long Sun" books (especially "Nightside"). There are pauses in the breathless pace that allow me to relax and savor some careful prose. In "There Are Doors," I love the gradual, deliberate opening of the desk-containing crate, to which nearly a chapter is devoted. And in "Nightside," I love the description of the Viron marketplace, Silk's fried-tomato breakfast, and the stealthy advance on Blood's villa. It's as though Wolfe allows a little more air into the labyrinth here and there, and it helps me settle into the tale.

I do like puzzles--even ones I can't completely solve. But I love a great story more, and I maintain that Wolfe is not only a tricky puzzle-setter, he's also a robust tale-teller. The Chesterton influence has done him no harm at all. He has rather a grand style, in fact. As I've said in a previous post, I do on some level count Wolfe as a postmodernist whose techniques can be discussed along with those of Borges or Nabokov; but his sentence-by-sentence prose is actually quite traditional and lucid, sometimes even smacking saltily of a sailor's kind of yarn. That's part of the magic, I think--that he's so conventional on one level and then so devilishly ambiguous in other ways, making you lose your bearings just when you thought you knew where you stood.

I know that very little of this post has dealt directly with the Whorl books, but I side with those who enjoy moderate digressions into Wolfe's other books. It helps orient me, I find.

Cheers, all

--Henry R

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