

Where Wolfe?

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 15 Feb 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/99>

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.

Doug Eigsti — 15 Feb 1997, 12:22

Lupine devotees unite!

I remember reading THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and liking the mood but feeling clueless. Upon rereading (after NEW SUN) it came to life. I realized Wolfe was cloaking reality from the reader in the same way it is hidden from the characters. It was less about reading about people having adventures on faraway planets, than having the adventure personally.

In times past I read, almost exclusively, what was marketed as Science Fiction. THE SHADOW OF THE TORTURER was sitting on the shelf of a SF/Comics store I used to frequent. I studied the cover, trying to absorb the contents for months before deciding to buy. I was into Niven, still am, and liked the way he frolicked on the "Playgrounds of the Mind"; (Niven's law for writers: It's a sin to bore the reader). SHADOW proved to be remarkable in so many ways. I read each volume as it came out, not rereading the previous book, and so got a disjointed first impression of THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN. Even so I ranked it among my favorites. This amazes me now; that a book can work well on every level (as Fernando Q. Gouvea observed); action-adventure, stylistic quest, and the puzzle/mystery level that so many of us Whorling Dervishes (mantis' term) enjoy. Wolfe makes proper use of playground equipment.

Wolfe elevated my reading to the point where I could revel in feeling disoriented, definitely an acquired taste. Not for everyone. As Master Ultan would say "I found that I was limiting my pleasure by only reading the things I enjoyed". I was reluctant to recommend Wolfe because I know how hard he makes his readers work. But, after raving about his stuff for years, the discussion group I read with decided to sample. I found success with "The Island of Dr. Death, and Other Stories" and with "Seven American Nights". The latter being a good taste of uncertain realities, (with each egg being equally likely as the next as the cause of his bizarre experiences). With the former story I challenged the group to read just the first paragraph then stop and think about what they had learned about Tackman Babcock. After finishing the story see if their feelings were confirmed. They were, in every case. Wolfe can compress more information into a paragraph than the words alone contain. Some of the things he does are so clearly difficult and obscure that one forgets this magic capability he has over the English language whereby he can implant details in one's mind that are later impossible to find direct references to.

I, too, have read about all the Wolfe I could find. I find that in some of his stories he experiments with different forms, not always successfully. But his best are triumphs. He can emulate multiple authorial voices. PANDORA, BY HOLLY HOLLANDER reads like it was written by a, very precocious, 14 year old girl. An amazing book. My other favorites are: PEACE (I need to reread that one), and THERE ARE DOORS (ditto).

I think Wolfe is a puzzle to most of the SF community. He is too unique to be very influential. How can one copy what he does when only magic can explain much of it? He is held in awe by some, myself included.

=Talon=

douge at nti.com

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