

Gene Wolfe's style

The SF-Lovers list — 1 messages, 1 voices, undated

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Teri Pettit at Xerox — undated

I think McClure at SRI's assessment of Gene Wolfe as "the sort of writer who's desperately trying to produce SF worthy of literary criticism" is unfair. While he does produce a type of fiction which has much in common with works noticed by literary critics, there is absolutely no reason to suppose that he does it for the purpose of gaining that notice, or that he is particularly desperate about anything.

I imagine Wolfe, like most authors, writes, insofar as he can, in the style he most enjoys reading. For him, this is a highly recursive style in which his creation and the process of creating it is as much its own subject as is the apparent story it tells. All his works are essentially about layers of reality, and shifting between those layers. Those layers usually include that of the purported writer as writer, and Wolfe as writer, as well as the purported writer as protagonist in some events.

Literary critics write essays about writing. Naturally they tend to most enjoy fiction which is in some sense art about writing. But an SF writer is always inviting readers into an alternate reality, and thus SF writers too often enjoy artistic recursion. If Wolfe were desperate for literary acclaim, he'd write stories like Fowles or Preust or Nabakov in which the surface story, which weaves through the story about stories, was set in "our world". He has the talent for it. Instead he sticks to fantasy worlds which, however intrinsically suited to themes of layered realities, are anathema to the world of "serious literature". This to me is sufficient evidence that he writes 'em that way simply because he LIKES 'em that way.

-- Teri