

Gene Wolfe flames and reviews

The SF-Lovers list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Feb 1986

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/sflovers/54>

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David desJardins — 14 Feb 1986, 11:11

benn at sphinx.UChicago.UUCP (T Cox)

writes [in reply to my reply to a reply to a query about the Book of the New Sun, in which I criticized the one who replied for insulting those who didn't consider it the best SF novel ever written (best I can do; if you missed the original posting just give up...)]:

Flame on.

You total bozos. I really cannot understand such gross stupidity in people who would otherwise strike me as bright: readers of SF/Fantasy stories. You amaze me.

You can swallow spiders on Mars. You can read the future history of the Earth a million years hence without blinking. You can handle the twisting and writhing of every physical law of the universe. And then, then you fall flat on your collective faces when someone uses strong rhetoric. This is too much.

We are talking about two different things here. One is suspension of disbelief when reading fiction. All of us clearly accept this or we would not read SF. But this has nothing to do with the case we are discussing. The original poster noted that he had not particularly enjoyed the first two volumes of BONS, and asked what other people saw in it. The reply said nothing about what was good about the book, just that everyone should think that it is the best SF ever written and insulted those who didn't (clearly including the original poster, since he had already stated that he didn't particularly appreciate the book).

The original poster, whose article has long since vanished from my site, said things like "there never has been, nor ever could be, an author as gifted as this one."

The actual quote which you are paraphrasing was:

krantz at csd2.UUCP (Michaelntz) writes:

"Gene Wolfe is, quite simply, the best novelist ever to write in the science fiction genre. His prose, his ideas - all of it. The best. Hands down."

Do you think he was serious? Of course not! Great horned toads of Jupiter! This is called, now read slowly here, exaggeration.

Everyone catch that? He was overstating the case for dramatic effect. Something any author can do through the mouth of a character without surprising any one of you. But let someone make a sweeping generalization on the net, and everyone jumps down his throat. Stupid, stupid, stupid.

Your paraphrase is clearly an exaggeration. The original quote is not. It and the rest of the reply can all be taken as meaning exactly what they say: heaped praise on BONS and insults for those who do not appreciate it. Frankly, I consider it the responsibility of the poster to tell us if he doesn't mean what he says, or better yet not to post at all. If for some reason you are not willing to say what you mean, I think most people would prefer that you just keep your mouth shut instead of making a fool of yourself.

Now we're going to have a little test here. I am going to write something that will be an exaggeration. I will do it for dramatic effect. Ready? Take your time. Don't get excited; it's only exaggeration. It's just a rhetorical device. Now brace yourselves.

Not one of you is worthy of posting to sf-lovers, you narrow-minded, gullible GITS! How literal-minded and dense can a human being be?!? You are not worthy of even READING this newsgroup! I banish you all forthwith to the purgatory of net.philosophy, net.religion.christian, net.women, and net.cooks! Begone!

There, that wasn't so bad, was it? A little warm, but hardly threatening to the discriminating reader.

The OED defines rhetoric as "The art of using language to persuade or influence others...." The above does neither; it only insults. If you wrote the above in a context in which it could be taken seriously I *would* take it seriously, which means that, as its author, I would cease to take *you* seriously.

Flame off. May the elementals of fire be appeased.

Please, fellow readers, next time someone uses strong language the way the original poster did, to make an obviously silly sweeping generalization, remember that there are people in the world who use that kind of phrasing all the time, in normal conversation. Just because you don't, that doesn't mean others cannot. And if it gets under your skin, that is not the other guy's fault. If the original poster had been a green-tentacled alien from, say, Planet 10, you'd not have reacted that way. Shame on you all.

I say what I mean. Each person has the right, and the responsibility, to say whatever he wants. If he chooses to say something other than what he means, is it our responsibility to decide what he "really" meant?

And, no matter how the original reply was meant (which I maintain it is not my responsibility to decipher), my objection remains. To reply to a posting which says, "I didn't like X much, but I would like to hear why other people liked it," with statements insulting those who dislike X instead of describing what you like about X (as others have done in this case) is completely unacceptable to me.

David desJardins