

Lit Crit

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 15 Oct 1998

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Michael Straight — 15 Oct 1998, 15:42

John Regehr wrote:

Has the lit crit community come to any meaningful conclusions about what it means when the author offers an interpretation or an explanation about a book? Didn't Tolkien explicitly say that in TLoTR an orc is just an orc, and don't some people still insist that the war of the ring is a metaphor for one of the world wars? Although I wish Mr. Wolfe nothing but the best of health in the future, it seems like things are more tractable academically when an author is no longer able to offer new interpretations, or to contradict existing ones.

I think the lit crit community says yes, no, yes, yes, no, yes, no, no, maybe, fish, power.

I say listen to the author and other people's criticism if it interests you and if it doesn't, ignore it. In the introduction to one of his anthologies, Wolfe pretty much comes out and says what the story "Westwind" is about. I think the story is better with the ambiguity unresolved, and therefore try to ignore what Wolfe had to say.

I guess my position is that one's choice about whether to use external materials or not, or to spend a lot of time analyzing subtle points or not, should be made in order to maximize one's enjoyment of the work.

I guess it depends on why you're reading. If you're trying to learn physics or virtue from an author, paying attention to external helps is probably a good idea. If you want to understand what an author is trying to say, what he writes about his work is probably of interest. If you're reading for fun, I'd go with your criteria.

-Rostrum