

Postmodernism (was Re: Wolfe a conservative writer?)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Dec 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 08 Dec 2000, 17:25

Alex David Groce wrote:

Adam wrote:

And for this very reason, that prototypical postmodernist John Barth has also adopted the *_Thousand Nights and a Night_* as a model. Not to mention the postmodernist tour de force *THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE* by Robert Irwin (whose book on *_The Thousand Nights and a Night_*, entitled something like *THE ARABIAN NIGHTS: A COMPANION*, I highly recommend).

Hmmm... This seems to bring us back to the whole question of how to know postmodernism (and without the aid of a SF oracle like Damon Knight's finger). Barth I will agree is postmodernist. But notice that Wolfe, while he write about stories being told, telling themselves, etc., never (AFAIK) does the kind of metafictional introduction of himself that Barth does (in *_Chimera_*, for example).

Well, there was that one in *STOREYS* (iirc) about the author writing his perfect story a word at a time; but I take your point. But I wasn't arguing that Wolfe is a postmodernist; I was arguing against the claim that he is a "very conservative" writer, and the paragraph you quote was merely an incidental point. I really don't know if Wolfe is a postmodernist or not, especially since I have no definition of postmodernism, and the lines between postmodernism and modernism are very fuzzy (which is *ULYSSES*?).

Use of the *1001 Nights* does not a postmodernist make--Proust and R. A. Lafferty are both frequent travelers to that territory, and Proust is a modernist and Lafferty is whatever on earth Lafferty is.

For what it's worth, I would say Lafferty is a postmodernist, among other things. I also don't think the *1001 Nights* is that much of an influence on him, aside from *THE THIRTEENTH VOYAGE OF SINBAD* and the short story about the genie (and maybe a couple of others I've forgotten). I think he owes a lot more to American tall-tale traditions, though he draws upon all sorts of legends.

I'll agree that *THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE* and *PEACE* have a *_lot_* in common (though aiming at rather opposite visions, I think).

That actually hadn't occurred to me at all. But now I'll have to think about it.

What makes *THE ARABIAN NIGHTMARE* postmodernist rather than modernist?

It's actually a while since I read it, and while I'm sure I instinctively pegged it as postmodernist, I would have to reread it to tell you why I thought so. Why do you think it's modernist?

--Adam