

These Are the Jokes I Don't Get

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 22 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3195>

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Adam Stephanides — 22 Apr 2002, 14:14

On the subject of laughing...

I was rereading "These Are the Jokes" (in CASTLE OF DAYS) the other day, and was reminded that I don't get two of the jokes. In Thecla's joke, what does the punch line mean? Are we to infer that the Autarch has actually asked to go under the chatelaine's bed and been refused? If so, what is this supposed to signify? If not, again, what's the point? And Jonas's joke seems to be just a weak pun on "wound up." Is that really it?

--Adam

Mark Millman — 23 Apr 2002, 17:50 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam,

Forgive me, but I believe that you may be over-thinking these jokes. Don't forget Wolfe's several references to his sense of humor; when he says that it can make women cry and strong men faint (I paraphrase, but I'm not far off), he ought to be taken seriously.

In Thecla's joke, the Autarch is upset by the fact that he's never been -invited- to get under the chatelaine's bed, unlike all her other lovers, though she protests that he has been accorded every privilege she can grant. One presumes that if Abaia, for example, were to arrive, he might get his wish, but as the Autarch outranks everyone else in the Commonwealth, she has never needed to ask him to hide when a more powerful lover shows up. Do note that either (a) the chatelaine is not married, or (b) that the Autarch's sexual access to her is guaranteed regardless of her marital status, since otherwise one could expect that she might have had to have hidden him from her husband on some occasion.

[Before I finished with this post, Marc Aramini sent his reply to you. I'm pleased, and no doubt he will be as well, to see that we agree.]

Jonas' joke is a better and less funny one. To begin with, all three sailors are _robotniki_ (if I've pluralized incorrectly, please excuse the error), but only the first two are robots in our sense. The woman's use of the term is imprecise but not inaccurate, especially as her speech is influenced by Czech. Her delivery of the punch line indicates that she has recognized what is most important in life, which the first two sailors have not yet done--and, being robots, presumably never will do. She then acts on her recognition of the importance of love. I think that "wound up" in this joke serves literally as no more than a synonym for "ended", but because of the robot theme of the joke, it is also a grace note, with its reference to wind-up toys (a common childhood experience of robots for people of Wolfe's generation).

I hope this is helpful.

Mark Millman

(Nacre)

On Mon, 22 Apr 2002, Adam Stephanides wrote:
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