

Vancean influence on Wolfe

The Urth list — 12 messages, 7 voices, 20 May 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3267>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 May 2002, 17:57

Blattid wrote:

And that, really, is the See Below. For me, at least, the stories in TDE are very much individual stories. There are links, characters from one appear in another, but they are, I think, less unified than (say) Leiber's yarns of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser. Episodes from a single and singular future world, but not, to me, producing anything larger as a group than the sum of the parts.

I would not argue too strenuously with you. If you want to see Gene Wolfe's take on TDE, see his essay "The Living Earth" in JACK VANCE: CRITICAL APPRECIATIONS AND A BIBLIOGRAPHY.

So for the more dedicated Vanceans on the list, I suppose the obvious question would be whether I, as a rather casual reader, am missing anything here? This book is the one most often cited when recommending Vance to a Wolfe fan; other than the gross-scale influence on New Sun, the fundamental idea (which, actually, wasn't entirely new here either) of this incredibly ancient Earth, is there something deeper?

What Andy Robertson said. In addition, I think it is important to isolate TDE from the other Vancean "Dying Earth" novels: TDE has an "earnest" quality, maybe something like sombre-mode Dunsany, that is burlesqued in the other novels in a way closer to that of joking-mode Clark Ashton Smith (as opposed to decadent-mode, which is the voice CAS used in most of his Zothique stories).

The isolation of TDE could be extended further, to separate it from nearly all of Vance's work--it really is different. But I've read nearly 100% of Vance's fiction (I haven't read a few of the mysteries because I cannot afford them--oh yes, Vance wrote mysteries, too. Even won an award.) and I may be forgetting more than that.

=mantis=

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 20 May 2002, 18:11 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

In addition, I think it is important to isolate TDE from the other Vancean "Dying Earth" novels: TDE has an "earnest" quality, maybe something like sombre-mode Dunsany,

Bingbingbingbingbing! I found myself thinking "Dunsanean" (or, occasionally, less flattering: "Bad imitation Dunsany") over and over again while going through TDE -- especially the Dunsany of "The Castle of the Gnolls" and the story of "Chu-Bu and Sheemish."

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(I really need to read those sometime...)

So are the other Dying Earth novels, uh, better? Or to put it differently: do they have more of the gentle irony I tend to associate with Vance?

The isolation of TDE could be extended further, to separate it from nearly all of Vance's work--it really is different. But I've read nearly 100% of Vance's fiction (I haven't read a few of the mysteries because I cannot afford them--oh yes, Vance wrote mysteries, too.

I seem to recall he's also one of the various SF writers who stepped in pseudonymously during "Ellery Queen"'s long blocked period. I know for certain that Ted Sturgeon and Avram Davidson did.

James Jordan — 20 May 2002, 18:27 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Mantis wrote:

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quality, maybe something like sombre-mode Dunsany, that is burlesqued in the other novels in a way closer to that of joking-mode Clark Ashton Smith (as opposed to decadent-mode, which is the voice CAS used in most of his Zothique stories).

Well put. Vance in general is a Mozart to Wolfe's Bach, stylistically; but TDE's somber, almost tragic, ambience may have had a bit of influence on Severian's own style.

Nut-ria

Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 May 2002, 18:21 · follows James Jordan

Blattid wrote:

So are the other Dying Earth novels, uh, better? Or to put it differently: do they have more of the gentle irony I tend to associate with Vance?

Hmmm. I'm sticking on that "gentle" bit . . . :)

Seriously, Cugel the Clever is a ribald rogue of the picaresque school, and Rhialto's mages are . . . words escape me. The other books are fun reads, but if TDE is like LOTR, then the other novels are rather pythonesque in comparison.

I seem to recall he's also one of the various SF writers who stepped in pseudonymously during "Ellery Queen"'s long blocked period.

Yes indeed: three, iirc. One of them is very good; one is screamingly good until it completely blows out (alas!); the other one is okay, but still better imho than one of the ones published under his own name.

=mantis=

SIRIUS FICTION

booklets on Gene Wolfe, John Crowley

Lexicon Urthus out of print!

<http://www.siriusfiction.com/>

Jason Voegele — 20 May 2002, 18:30 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Nutria wrote:

Vance in general is a Mozart to Wolfe's Bach, stylistically;

Care to expand on that? It rings true to me, but I'm not sure why. :) Perhaps just because Wolfe's writing is quite fugal in nature? Is there a quality judgement in that statement?

Thanks,
Jason Voegele

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 May 2002, 18:35 · follows Jason Voegele

In response to my question...

do they have more of the gentle irony I tend to
associate with Vance?

Mantis commented:

Hmmm. I'm sticking on that "gentle" bit . . . :)

Ah. Well, that's a matter of degree, I suppose ... Vancean irony, at least in what I've read, is in fact often quite strong, but I don't recall ever thinking of it as vicious the way, say, Malzberg's or Vonnegut's so often is. Or Twain's, for that matter.

if TDE is like LOTR, then the other novels are rather
pythonesque in comparison.

It would never in a godzillion years have occurred to me to compare TDE to LOTR. But the word "pythonesque" will certainly have me looking for these in the foreseeable future. Thanks.

Andy Robertson — 20 May 2002, 18:46 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

In addition, I think it is important to isolate TDE from
the other Vancean "Dying Earth" novels: TDE has an
"earnest" quality, maybe something like sombre-mode Dunsany,

Bingbingbingbing! I found myself thinking "Dunsanean" (or,
occasionally, less flattering: "Bad imitation Dunsany") over
and over again while going through TDE

Yes, but - TDE really is one of those original, once-of-a-kind, novels. It seems imitative now only because it has been imitated so often.

For example, there is the matter of Role Playing Games.

The entire treatment of magic in RPGs derives from THE DYING EARTH - the basic idea that a magician may compress just so many spells into his mind, and no more. This was worked out in the original Dungeons & Dragons games and its influence *since* then has spread everywhere, to fantasy films, to horror, and of course back into writing.

RPGs are low, of course, but they can be fun :-)

hartshorn

James Jordan — 20 May 2002, 19:37 · follows Andy Robertson

I seem to recall he's also one of the various SF writers who stepped in pseudonymously during "Ellery Queen"'s long blocked period.

The Four Johns
The Madman Theory
A Room to Die In

- Nutria

Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 May 2002, 19:18 · follows James Jordan

Blattid quoted and wrote:

Hmmm. I'm sticking on that "gentle" bit . . . :)

Ah. Well, that's a matter of degree, I suppose ... Vancean irony, at least in what I've read, is in fact often quite strong, but I don't recall ever thinking of it as vicious the way, say, Malzberg's or Vonnegut's so often is. Or Twain's, for that matter.

Oh, gentle vs. vicious. Right--"gentle"! (I was thinking gentle as subtle, underplayed, etc. All of which is also part of Vance's range . . . but the novels in question are a tad more broad and farce-ful.) I can't think of an example of Vancean irony getting vicious.

CAS and Dunsany also have their joking sides.

Anyway, to be clear--what you are looking for is:

1. THE EYES OF THE OVERWORLD (Cugal's first appearance)
2. CUGAL'S SAGA
3. RHIALTO THE MARVELLOUS [sic]

=mantis=

James Jordan — 20 May 2002, 19:43 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

At 02:30 PM 5/20/2002 -0400, you wrote:

Nutria wrote:

Vance in general is a Mozart to Wolfe's Bach, stylistically;

Care to expand on that? It rings true to me, but I'm not sure why. :)

Perhaps just because Wolfe's writing is quite fugal in nature? Is there a quality judgement in that statement?

Thanks,
Jason Voegele

'Twas just a thought. Mozart is transparent compared with Bach's density. Mozart is more sunny; Bach more serious. Mozart more straightforward; Bach more complex.

The comparison works for me and you; maybe not for everyone here.

Not a quality judgment. Two different geniuses. I love Vance. I'm a subscriber to the Compleat Vance.

Nutria

Jerry Friedman — 20 May 2002, 20:39 · follows James Jordan

--- Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <ddanehy at siebel.com> wrote:

In addition, I think it is important to isolate TDE from the other Vancean "Dying Earth" novels: TDE has an "earnest" quality, maybe something like sombre-mode Dunsany,

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that is burlesqued in the other novels in a way closer to that of joking-mode Clark Ashton Smith (as opposed to decadent-mode, which is the voice CAS used in most of his Zothique stories).

(I really need to read those sometime...)

So are the other Dying Earth novels, uh, better? Or to put it differently: do they have more of the gentle irony I tend to associate with Vance?

I feel about them the way people who dislike BotNS feel about *it*: a thoroughly unsympathetic character goes through one pointless episode after another. There was enough invention (I certainly can't criticize Vance on that score!), and of course the questions of whether Cugel and Rhialto would ultimately succeed, to keep me reading.

It's sort of like BotNS without the aspects I like, or Pratchett's Rincewind novels without the jokes (though I think admirers of Vance find the later three Dying Earth novels funny).

Jerry Friedman

Adam Stephanides — 21 May 2002, 02:03 · follows Jerry Friedman

on 5/20/02 1:21 PM, Michael Andre-Driussi at mantis at siriusfiction.com wrote:
I seem to recall he's also one of the various SF writers who stepped in pseudonymously during "Ellery Queen"'s long blocked period.

Yes indeed: three, iirc. One of them is very good; one is screamingly good until it completely blows out (alas!); the other one is okay, but still better imho than one of the ones published under his own name.

And Nutria wrote:
The Four Johns
The Madman Theory
A Room to Die In

iirc, these are all from the series of paperback tough-guy mysteries published under Queen's name, but without Ellery as the detective.

http://www.hycyber.com/MYST/queen_ellery.html lists FACE TO FACE, which iirc is a "regular" Ellery Queen novel, as "ghostwritten by Jack Vance?", though if you follow the link to "Novels Ghostwritten by Others," the attribution is repeated without the question mark.

In any case, mantis, which of your evaluations correspond to which books?

--Adam