

Satirists of the Commonwealth

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 16 Jul 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3361>

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 16 Jul 2002, 18:53

Alga wrote of the

Ascians, who are satirically presented. And GW has chosen to take the satire further in the next two series: the Trivigaunts are not racially satirized, but in terms of feminism, a cliché of male American humor in fantasy (see -The Land of Oz- 100 years ago). But in the SS series, he does racially satirize societies, specifically Indian and Italian. To me not very successfully--a real ho-hum genre feel here--but feel free to disagree.

I do, I do! But not with the last statement; I think frankly, that, with one exception, and the semi-exception of the Ascians, your premise -- that Wolfe's intent is satirical -- is incorrect. (I say "semi," because there is no clear agreement as to what is being satirized here; I was quite certain, reading the utterances of Loyal to the Group of Seventeen, that Wolfe was pointing his barb at Maoism and the "Little-read Book." Others, I have learned on this list, have been equally certain that Wolfe is satirizing Orwell's "Newspeak," which I find simply implausible.)

The full exception is Trivigaunte.

But I do not find the Trivigaunti culture any kind of "satire" of feminism. Perhaps this is because I myself am male ... but if so, then it's interesting that I completely failed to spot this "cliché of male American humor." (Not that I disagree: satirizing feminism _is_ just that.) I found nothing funny about Trivigaunti culture; I found it an interesting (if less than 100% successful) attempt to create a new human culture by taking an existing culture -- a sort of generic "Islamic culture," to be sure -- and inverting one of its basic donnés, the social and religious hierarchy of male and female.

Nonetheless, I do find Trivigaunte satirical -- but of extreme patriarchalism/male-dominant sexism, not of feminism.

To be specific, I think Trivigaunti culture satirizes the more ludicrous claims of male dominance, which perhaps do not have their full charge of stupidity when put before us because we are accustomed to seeing them put forth seriously, regain that charge when reversed in this way: much the way Swift's Hounyhynms (or however you spell it) satirize the claims for human dominance.

The odd thing is that I am not at all sure that Wolfe intended such a satire.

I don't think, however, that Wolfe intends satire on the other cultures he uses as templates in the Long/Short Sun books. I think he uses Indian and Italian -- and Dutch and Hispanic -- cultures as templates, but does not intend any criticism, satirical or otherwise, of any of these

cultures. One could, perhaps, argue that he was too lazy to create "new" cultures; one could, on the other hand, claim that he was making a point about there being a limited set of cultural "types" into which humans will fall again and again. I don't have an opinion as between the two: but for the claim of "satire" to be sustained, I think you'd have to point out how (say) Wolfe uses satiric tactics in the culture of Gaon to point out the flaws of "real" Indian culture.

In fact, I think that all the cultures depicted on Blue -- Gaonese, Grandecivitan, Dorpish, and New Vironese -- are satirical, in a sense, but not of the human cultures on which they are patterned. Rather, all of them seem, to me, to use the rhetoric of satire, in a non-humorous mode, to point up general issues about the reasons why human societies in general fail to be humane. This is most blatantly obvious in New Viron and Dorp -- which is, perhaps, why you don't mention Dutch and Hispanic culture as targets for satire? -- but the roots of war and unrest in Gaon and the Grandecivitan colony towns are as universal as the corruption of Dorp and the strong-man-ism of New Viron.

Every day a new adventure, every day the same

Alice K. Turner — 17 Jul 2002, 14:37 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

A thoughtful answer to a rather dashed-off statement.

Alga wrote of the

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Blattid replied:

I do, I do! But not with the last statement; I think frankly, that, with one exception, and the semi-exception of the Ascians, your premise -- that Wolfe's intent is satirical -- is incorrect. (I say "semi," because there is no clear agreement as to what is being satirized here; I was quite certain, reading the utterances of Loyal to the Group of Seventeen, that Wolfe was pointing his barb at Maoism and the "Little-read Book." Others, I have learned on this list, have been equally certain that Wolfe is satirizing Orwell's "Newspeak,"

which I find simply implausible.)

The full exception is Trivigaunte.<<

Actually, I agree; I was using "satirical" carelessly.

-snip

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To be specific, I think Trivigaunti culture satirizes the more ludicrous claims of male dominance, which perhaps do not have their full charge of stupidity when put before us because we are accustomed to seeing them put forth seriously, regain that charge when reversed in this way: much the way Swift's Hounyhynms (or however you spell it) satirize the claim for human dominance.<<

Well, Viron doesn't seem to me especially male-dominated, not the way that Trivigaunte is female-dominated, at least on a street level (behind the scenes, or under the lake, yes, and of course New Viron--but that is another story). Let me see what you're saying--by putting forth a militant female society, complete with the requisite lesbian officers, GW is satirizing males rather than females? Hmm. Put it in cinematic terms: who would you, in the audience, think was being satirized? OtOH, I don't think it is a nasty or pointed satire; I think, as you say, that it is a genuine exploration, but that he had some manly fun with it. Baum had fun with General Jinjur and her army too--but then nearly everything in Baum's Oz is female-dominated, so one of the jokes is that there is no "patriarchy" to attack.

The odd thing is that I am not at all sure that Wolfe intended such a satire.<<

I'm not sure of your context: satire of men or of women? I think for sure he intended to satirize women, but I would agree that the satire of men that you find implicit (and that I don't disagree with) may have escaped him. (And I think he intended General Mint to be a hero in every way--though with a tad of affectionate condescension.)

I don't think, however, that Wolfe intends satire on the other cultures he uses as templates in the Long/Short Sun books. I think he uses Indian and Italian -- and Dutch and Hispanic -- cultures as templates, but does not intend any criticism, satirical or otherwise, of any of these cultures. One could, perhaps, argue that he was too lazy to create "new" cultures; one could, on the other hand, claim that he was making a point about there being a limited set of cultural "types" into which humans will fall again and again.

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Here, I really was being careless. But so was he. The laziness annoyed me, also the failure, except in silly ways (like Pig's embarrassing accent). to make any real reference to these cultures. Indian culture was nonexistent except on the most cliched level (a harem, gorbliney); Italian culture lacked even that.

In fact, I think that all the cultures depicted on Blue -- Gaonese, Grandecivitan, Dorpish, and New Vironese -- _are_ satirical, in a sense, but not of the human cultures on which they are patterned.

Rather, all of them seem, to me, to use the rhetoric of satire, in a non-humorous mode, to point up general issues about the reasons why human societies in general fail to be humane. This is most blatantly obvious in New Viron and Dorp -- which is, perhaps, why you don't mention Dutch and Hispanic culture as targets for satire? -- but the roots of war and unrest in Gaon and the Grandecivitan colony towns are as universal as the corruption of Dorp and the strong-man-ism of New Viron.<<

I didn't mention Dutch and Hispanic because they slipped my mind as more peripheral. Yes, I think you are correct about the intent, but the execution seems obvious, superficial and two-dimensional to me, not nearly as interesting as the inhuman-Neighbor situation, and not as illuminating of the human condition either. In short, I became bored and highly critical of the cardboard aspects of this thread in the third book in particular. But in general, I agree with you about the use of "satirical," and stand corrected.

-alga