

Those Orwellian Ascians

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 28 Jul 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3377>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 29 Jul 2002, 03:15

I believe it was blattid who fairly recently complained that he did not grok how or why some people keep saying that the Ascians are "Orwellian" with their Correct Thought when it is clearly and only Mao's little red book.

Right. Not to take away anything from the Mao's little red book angle at all, because it is there.

OTOH, to the best of my knowledge, even at the height of the personality cult the Chinese did not make a practice of speaking exclusively in quotes from the little red book. So the historical context of the little red book does not contain the aspect of Approved Texts/Correct Thought.

Orwell's novel, NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, has "Newspeak," which is a state-created lexicon of ever simplified words, standardized grammar, etc., that was expected to replace English by 2050. IIRC, Symes boasts that the Party will eliminate the orgasm, because once the word is vaporized, it will no longer exist (the Party gains tremendous strength from sublimated sexual drives among the members -- so the Party has made great progress in eliminating the physical sensation that the word refers to). IIRC, "Ingsoc," the philosophy/mindset of citizens, is engendered by Newspeak; "Oldthink" is all that pre-revolutionary stuff (Capitalism, etc.); not to mention "thoughtcrime." And then there is the Thought Police (emphasis on "thought" to show linkage to philosophy of Ingsoc in this case).

So it seems to me that "Correct Thought," while sounding nicely Maoist, actually leads to a rich association with Orwell's novel: Insoc = Correct Thought; Newspeak (in 2050) = Approved Texts; etc.

I think that the "mirror" is being held up, not to Mao's China, but to Orwell's Oceania. By having the Ascians saddled with a form of Newspeak, Gene Wolfe is able to show that even then they are capable of telling stories and other frivolities -- thus the Party has not in fact "vaporized the orgasm," as it were: the human spirit finds ways around it. (Not that this is necessarily a direct criticism of Orwell by Wolfe: Orwell, after all, does not say the Party is able to do this thing, only that it is a goal.)

I hope this answers the complaint.

=mantis=

Josh Geller — 29 Jul 2002, 03:39 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

On Sun, 28 Jul 2002, Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

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And, in fact, Oceania is Great Britain/America in the 1984 world, and Ascia is North America to the Commonwealth's South America on Urth.

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Andy Robertson — 28 Jul 2002, 09:43 · follows Josh Geller

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

From: "Michael Andre-Driussi" <mantis at siriusfiction.com>

Orwell's novel, NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, has "Newspeak," which is a state-created lexicon of ever simplified words, standardized grammar, etc., that was expected to replace English by 2050.

Can any educated person be ignorant of this?

I think it was I who brought up the Orwell reference: but I assumed everyone knew about Newspeak. :-)

hartshorn