

Pick a rest

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 23 Dec 2002

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Nigel Price — 23 Dec 2002, 15:34

Alga wrote:

I invite you both to do a Google on "picaresque Tom Jones." Follow it up with "picaresque Don Quixote" and then with "picaresque Candide."

Thank you - I did. Loads and loads of references!

Intersting, too, to do a search on the term "picaresque". I didn't go through all these, but most of the ones at the top of list stressed that picaresque stories about rogues. I particularly liked this wonderfully patronising explanation, taken from some sort of children's reference site:

"Picaresque" is a technical literary term you are unlikely to have a use for. It labels a sort of literature involving a picaro (Spanish), a lovable rogue who roams the land having colorful adventures.

(From <http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/picaresque.html>)

So, the term has three inter-related connotations: a story about a rogue, a story in which the hero travels about, and a story which is loosely constructed around episodes generated by travel and chance.

As I said before, "Tom Jones" has picaresque elements (travel, roguery), but I would still maintain that these are subordinated to a rigorous plot structure and that this places it generically at a very great distance from the Spanish picaresque prototype.

In an effort to make some sort of gesture towards more lupine concerns, can I ask whether anyone round here would want to describe any of Wolfe's stories as picaresque? As in the "Tom Jones" example, you could easily find plenty of travelling heroes (New Sun and Short Sun, and Soldier too) who, if not rogues themselves, then certainly meet rogues upon the road. But the plotting in Wolfe is always tight, whatever his use of episodic models of narrative development (and see his article on Vance's "The Dying Earth" for his considered and approbatory thoughts on that subject!), so I wouldn't consider any of his stories in the least picaresque.

Though of course, if I were covering my back, I might refer to their having "picaresque elements"...

Seasonal greetings, Alga et al.

Nigel