

Gray, Wolfe, Heinlein

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 19 Apr 2003

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ArchD'Ikon Zibethicus — 19 Apr 2003, 02:12

Malco:

But the text does give the impression that
an alternative was at least possible and that it
depended largely on Lanarks actions.

But Nastler _intended_ Lanark to fail...you might recall that Nastler described the sort of success which Lanark fantasised about when he accepted the gig - people listen to him at the council, his speech sets profound reforms in place, he returns in triumph to a saved Unthank and is reunited with a chastened and finally appreciative Rima...and then says that he is not going to provide Lanark with anything of the sort, because "[i]f I give you an ending like that I will be like ten thousand other cheap illusionists! I would be as bad as the late H. G. Wells! I would be worse than Goethe. Nobody who knows a thing about life or politics will believe me for a minute." (p. 492)

All of these things echo with Severians story

That's right...and it clarifies one of the commonalities I would point out between the fictions of Mr. Gray and Mr. Wolfe; their 'heros' fail, blunder, are confused and fail to understand important things. Perhaps this humanity is a part of their attraction...

And you are _spot on_ about Sludden/Blair... *g*

...glad I'm not the only one who sees it that way...we just _call_ him Sludden in my family...

Allan:

I can think of few who are further from Gene Wolfe's view of the world
than Alasdair Gray, brilliant though he is;

I wonder...is it actually possible to ascribe a world-view to either author when both have produced such diverse works?

If you mean politico-religious outlooks, well certainly they're different, but not necessarily as vastly as some might think.

All of these writers produce intelligent complex fictions but if there >is
a difference between them and Wolfe, I would say that they all >write books
which are character driven, whereas Wolfe's books possibly >use the
characters to promote or act out his ideas.

Jonathan Carroll? I wonder...I have the greatest admiration for Mr. Carroll's work, but if we are to draw a dichotomy between character and idea I'd have to say that I've always thought of him as a novelist of ideas rather than character.

This could be why I have lost some of my admiration for Wolfe's recent work, and I would agree with Alga about his more recent short stories, some of which seem lacking in content and obscure for the sake of obscurity. I still have enormous admiration for the man, but sometimes it makes more sense if you just say what you mean.

I can't judge the recent short stories, but ever since reading someone's statement on this list that Mr. Wolfe is not at his best in the short story format, I've been winding up to take mild exception, mostly on the strength of 'Forlesen', which I personally think is one of the most memorable 'SF' short stories I've read...it's actually one of the few that I do remember at all.

I don't think that Mr. Wolfe obfuscates for the mere love of mystery, or at least right up to the Short Sun series, which is the last I've read. And I believe that some of the enjoyment of reading him comes from the mysteries and ambiguities...which are a decided incentive to re-reading...and speculation...and, as the discussions on this list show, the mysteries seem to have a purpose, and sometimes even admit of explanation...

Blattid:

It's entirely possible, and I suspect even likely, that Isangoma, Robert, and Marie are actually citizens of the Commonwealth who wandered in and were caught in this way.

Actually, I've suddenly entirely re-visioned the Botanic Gardens in my mind ... In other words, Father Inire has built (for whose amusement?) a theme park, a sort of posthistorical Walt Disney World with living audioanimatrons.

...precisely...caught and reprogrammed according to the best information available at the time, which was the movies and/or the books of the 20th Century...of which perhaps a handful survived in the Library...they took the people from one source, and the fauna from another...millions of years have passed since then, even the continents have changed...how are they gonna know what went where?

(The horror! The horror!)

Well...the autarchy plays pretty rough as it is...and one presumes that the exhibits have their meals supplied regularly...which doesn't always happen in Nessus proper...

Like every SF/F writer from the 1950s on, Moorcock uses (consciously or not) rhetorical techniques and moves invented or improved by Heinlein to establish the nature of his discursive pseudo-realities.

Every SF/F writer?

Ballard?

LeGuin?

Burroughs?

etc.

My wife still won't believe that anyone could call nipples "those twin spiggots of desire" or claim that one woman's "nipples went spung").

These are classic, aren't they ... Up there with "five minutes of squelching noise."

..not to mention having one of his supposedly 'sexually liberated' characters declare, in 'Stranger in a Strange Land', "[n]ine times out of ten, if a girl gets raped, it's partly her fault." (p. 281, NEL pbk, 1976)

I was trying to read the book with all due sympathy after quarreling severely with my mother-in-law, who takes the work as gospel, but it fell from my hands at this point, never to rise again...

...presumably Mr. Heinlein has never been raped himself...I daresay he would feel quite differently about the matter if so...but at least I now understand why Charles Manson adapted the book as his bible...he even called his son Michael Valentine Manson...

(ducks to avoid return fire from water-brethren...)

Chris:

something that I find a little disturbing in Wolfe's novels- the >frequency of rape committed by his protagonists or major characters.

...see above...perhaps it (sometimes) takes a female writer to present rape as a disgusting and humiliating experience with no symbolic or redemptive value...Le Guin does it rather well...

*

What a gloomy note to end on...how about this, instead: Happy Easter to those who believe!

->Zx<-

Mark Hall — 20 Apr 2003, 03:21 · follows ArchD'Ikon Zibethicus

On 4/19/2003, "ArchD'Ikon Zibethicus" <zibethicus at hotmail.com> wrote:
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etc.

Edgar Rice Burroughs was dead and buried by 1951. William burroughs i really wouldn't consider as a science fiction writer...

Best, MEH

Mark Hall
markhall at gol.com

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 20 Apr 2003, 03:39 · follows Mark Hall

I wrote and Deacon Mushrat responded:

Like every SF/F writer from the 1950s on, Moorcock uses (consciously or not) rhetorical techniques and moves invented or improved by Heinlein to establish the nature of his discursive pseudo-realities.

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Yes, yes, yes, sort of, and yes. I say "sort of" for Burroughs because he's writing outside the SF genre, using tropes from the SF/F toolbox ... In fact, his SF owes more to Edgar Rice Burroughs than to modern SF, but even he uses the strategic- deployment-of-details riffs Heinlein pioneered (especially, but not solely, in NOVA EXPRESS).

Of the three you mention, Le Guin is actually the easiest to demonstrate the point for; read the first few pages of THE DISPOSSESSED. The technique used there, to establish the border and contrast between two worlds, is pure Heinlein; what's pure Le Guin is the repurposing of that technique to put the two societies in a meaningful [juxta]position.

Ballard is the toughest one, because so much of his SF is in a deliberate rejection of Campbell-Heinlein SF/F; of the New Worlds "movement" that, in the late '60s, sought to radically recreate the storytelling style of SF, Ballard is perhaps the only one who succeeded to any significant degree. (The next candidate would be Aldiss, but even work like BAREFOOT IN THE HEAD and CRYPTOZOIC depend heavily on the use of Campbell-Heinlein rhetorical devices and deployments.) Some years ago I suggested in a review that THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION, CRASH, etc., are what happens if you write "hard SF," but do your speculating in abnormal psychology instead of physics or chemistry. The result is an SF where the alienation takes place at the level of character rather than landscape; this work does not use much-or-any of the rhetorical devices developed under Campbell, by Heinlein and the others, and required a raft of new techniques.

But if you go and (re-)read his earlier novels -- his "cozy catastrophe" quartet and a number of short stories -- you find a lot of those techniques in play. Played by a writer rather than a storyteller, to be sure; played in ways and in ranges Heinlein could never on his best days have come near; but those same techniques.

Enough.

These are classic, aren't they ... Up there with "five minutes of squelching noise."

..not to mention having one of his supposedly 'sexually liberated' characters declare, in 'Stranger in a Strange Land', "[n]ine times out of ten, if a girl gets raped, it's partly her fault." (p. 281, NEL pbk, 1976)

Which isn't about sex at all (as the feminist movement spent many years informing us), but is nonetheless boneheaded.

...presumably Mr. Heinlein has never been raped himself...I dareUnforsay he would feel quite differently about the matter if so...but at least I now understand why Charles Manson adapted the book as his bible...he even called his son Michael Valentine Manson...

(ducks to avoid return fire from water-brethren...)

Unfortunately for your understanding, the whole business about Manson basing his religion on STRANGER turns out to be a sort of STFnal urban legend; he had never even read the book before going to jail. Oh well, it's a good story anyway.