

"Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe

The Urth list — 58 messages, 14 voices, 29 Apr 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5999>

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James Wynn — 29 Apr 2011, 19:24

I just read this quote by Wolfe.

Irony? Pot-Meet-Kettle?

J

David Stockhoff — 29 Apr 2011, 19:49 · in reply to James Wynn

The wolf is definitely calling the schnauzer ... lupine?

On 4/29/2011 3:24 PM, James Wynn wrote:

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J

Urth Mailing List

To post, write urth at urth.net

Subscription/information: <http://www.urth.net>

avast! Antivirus: Inbound message clean.

Virus Database (VPS): 110429-1, 04/29/2011

Tested on: 4/29/2011 3:25:11 PM

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<http://www.avast.com>

Marc Aramini — 29 Apr 2011, 20:43 · in reply to James Wynn

Some of Wolfe's interviews are priceless for that quality. "Looking for the thumb print under the lily"? Oh, it was a lily, huh?

Anybody read his contribution to Last Drink Bird Head? I feel like that little exercise is SO classic Wolfe. Sets up a scenario, throws in a random plastic toy, and then leaves us to figure out how the concluding event went down. I think it is not necessarily an impossible task, but it sure is a bit inscrutable to fully "get" that conclusion. (Did Damon Knight get really mad? What happened to the toy? why is the unconscious guy back there at the end of the bar? Is that his toy bird?)

I do think he is saying realistic fiction leaves out the unexplained mystery of life, the majestic grace of the impossible that creeps into our everyday, that ignores things that are beyond the rational and explicable laws of the commonly perceived reality and fiction, (but we all know what he was really saying, anyway).

--- On Fri, 4/29/11, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com>
Subject: (urth) "Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Friday, April 29, 2011, 12:24 PM
I just read this quote by Wolfe.

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Daniel Petersen — 29 Apr 2011, 21:50 · in reply to Marc Aramini

'I do think he is saying realistic fiction leaves out the unexplained mystery of life, the majestic grace of the impossible that creeps into our everyday, that ignores things that are beyond the rational and explicable laws of the commonly perceived reality and fiction'

Yes. So, no. I don't think it's the pot/kettle scenario.

DOJP

On Fri, Apr 29, 2011 at 9:43 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:
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Subject: (urth) "Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe

James Wynn — 29 Apr 2011, 22:43 · in reply to Daniel Petersen

Well, I understand that Wolfe is saying, among other things, that Naturalism and Realism address solely what *is* as opposed to What Might Have Been and therefore cannot state authoritatively "Why What Is Is". You can't address the nature of Identity in Realistic fiction. You can't take seriously mythology, miracles, magic or ghosts (even though people REALLY act as though such things are true, and some claim experiences that confirm it).

Still, it's quite a thing to say for an author who typically stops the narrative just when a big (apparently important) action scene is about to occur-- a writer who creates vast worlds and has the reader look at it through a paper towel tube.

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On 4/29/2011 4:50 PM, Daniel Petersen wrote:

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> From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com <mailto:crushtv at gmail.com>>
> Subject: (urth) "Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe

Bruce Hayles — 30 Apr 2011, 02:15 · in reply to James Wynn

See <http://mysite.verizon.net/~vze2tmhh/wolfeint.html>

Q: *What's available to an adult, adventurous reader in science fiction? Why should they read that genre? Why should they move past realism?*

GW: The adventurous reader has probably already moved past realism. I realize that sounds like a smart remark, but I mean past the kind of fiction that is called "realism" as a literary genre, and that's what it is: a literary genre. It is archtypically the story about the college professor who is married to the other college professor.

Did you read Ursula K. LeGuin's <<http://www.uic.edu/~lauramd/sf/leguin.html>> novel, *The

Dispossessed<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/science_fiction/dispossessed.html>

*? It was about the college professor who's married to a college professor, only science fiction, and this planet is Russia and this planet is the United States. When I read it I was so disappointed. I'd had a dozen people tell me how wonderful it was.

Q: *Yeah, I heard that too. Then I read it.*

GW: I've read that book before; I've read it as realism many a time. It's a John Updike kind of book. I've read that story so many times ... now I read a book until I can recognize the story, and say, "This is what it is," and that's as far as it goes, since I have no urge to finish it. I'm long past feeling so guilty that I have to finish everything I start. I don't finish ninety percent of what I start.

Look, the reason someone should go past that sort of realism is that it is narrow, stultifying and ultimately false.

Q: *And the fantastic genres aren't?*

GW: No, not the better stuff. We're dealing with the truth of the human experience, as opposed to what we are willing to accept from other people.

Q: *Wait, I don't see that distinction. The truth of experiences versus other people's experiences?*

On Fri, Apr 29, 2011 at 6:43 PM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:
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Gerry Quinn — 30 Apr 2011, 11:17 · in reply to Bruce Hayles

From: Bruce Hayles

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I have to wonder whether it can be problematic for a writer to feel like that - does it lead to an obsessive concern with *concealing* the story, lest any reader recognise it before the last page?

- Gerry Quinn

Marc Aramini — 30 Apr 2011, 14:32 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

--- On Sat, 4/30/11, Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie> wrote:

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?Don't worry, Wolfe is so good at concealing it even the last page won't help.

However, except for maybe some inscrutable nonsensical word plays by Joyce, I've never had so much fun re-reading with notes as I have with Wolfe, so I like it.

-----Inline Attachment Follows-----

Jack Smith — 30 Apr 2011, 14:48 · in reply to Marc Aramini

" Don't worry, Wolfe is so good at concealing it even the last page won't help."

LOL

On Sat, Apr 30, 2011 at 10:32 AM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

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Jeff Wilson — 30 Apr 2011, 16:56 · in reply to Bruce Hayles

On 4/29/2011 9:15 PM, Bruce Hayles wrote:

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<<http://www.uic.edu/~lauramd/sf/leguin.html>> novel, /The Dispossessed

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was about the college professor who's married to a college professor, only science fiction, and this planet is Russia and this planet is the United States. When I read it I was so disappointed. I'd had a dozen people tell me how wonderful it was.

I've seen this part of the interview before, somehow...

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Gwern Branwen — 30 Apr 2011, 19:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Sat, Apr 30, 2011 at 12:56 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I've seen this part of the interview before, somehow...

It's been quoted at least once before:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0012/0558.shtml>

It's a great quip and sums up a lot of people's impression of _The Dispossessed_ (at least, it did mine), so I suspect it's been alluded to or quoted before in other places.

gwern

<http://www.gwern.net>

Jeff Wilson — 30 Apr 2011, 21:08 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

On 4/30/2011 2:30 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

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Yeah, I know that feeling. I read, "Those Walk Away From Omelas," and thought, "This is supposed to be some kind of utopian/dystopian comment? These people have this tremendously prosperous, liberal, industrialized society with the only externality being train smoke and the lower classes shrunk to a single person! Boy, are those people walking away in for a surprise."

Jeff Wilson - jwilson@io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
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Jerry Friedman — 30 Apr 2011, 21:33 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson@io.com>

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Very different from my impression, though I don't think it's a flawless book by any means. What book was a previous version of it? And which planet did Wolfe think was Russia?

Yeah, I know that feeling. I read, "Those Walk Away From Omelas," and thought, "This is supposed to be some kind of utopian/dystopian comment? These people have this tremendously prosperous, liberal, industrialized society with the only externality being train smoke and the lower classes shrunk to a single person! Boy, are those people walking away in for a surprise."

Unlike /The Dispossessed/, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" isn't about practicalities. I'd say it's a dramatization of the William James quotation about morality and moral feelings.

Since I assume Catholicism is on topic here, I hope I can compare it to another quotation:

"The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse."

--Cardinal Newman, /Apologia Pro Vita Sua/

Jerry Friedman

Gwern Branwen — 30 Apr 2011, 21:35 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On Sat, Apr 30, 2011 at 5:08 PM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
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It's funny you bring up that particular LeGuin story - I once wrote a sort of reply to it:
<http://www.guern.net/fiction/The%20Ones%20Who%20Walk%20Towards%20Acre>

(Well, it's funny to me because it so rarely comes up, but with this, today I have twice had occasion to link someone to the story; the other link was in the context of a Bitcoin and assassination markets (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assassination_market) discussion.)

guern
<http://www.guern.net>

David Stockhoff — 30 Apr 2011, 22:51 · in reply to Guern Branwen

It's disappointing to many readers of science fiction. I wonder if it's disappointing to fans of college professor fiction?

I always thought of it as a response to Heinlein's lunar/stellar imperium stories, which certainly needed one.

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James Wynn — 01 May 2011, 00:15 · in reply to David Stockhoff

I think Wolfe's problem with it was that there was no reason not to have written the story in the Realistic genre. It was a Naturalism story with SF scenery. Pointless. It didn't deal at all with all the "other stuff" that Wolfe thinks Realistic fiction cannot address.

Of course the same could be said of Heinlein's "Starship Troopers" -- just War fiction with lasers. J.

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David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 01:27 · in reply to James Wynn

Precisely!

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Matthew Knapton — 01 May 2011, 02:29 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Well, it's a comment that even when the 'gain' is as huge as it is in Omelas, there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent. Whether you like the story or not, that's undeniably a moral statement, yes.

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On 4/30/2011 9:29 PM, Matthew Knapton wrote:
Well, it's a comment that even when the 'gain' is as huge as it is in Omelas, there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent. Whether you like the story or not, that's undeniably a moral statement, yes.

But is "there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent" a useful or meaningful moral statement? Is the wrongness greater or lesser if the

mistreatment is without purpose, or if the purpose is unknown? Compare Jackson's "The Lottery," and the news items about the third-world villages poisoned by 1st world computer waste.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 02:52 · in reply to James Wynn

On 4/30/2011 7:15 PM, James Wynn wrote:

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Can you tell me what page the lasers appear on?

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Matthew Knapton — 01 May 2011, 03:23 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Well you're asking a mouthful there. It's certainly meaningful, at least - what constitutes a morally wrong thing, whether such a thing can be justified (and how, if so), etc, are all real issues in the field of ethics. More particularly, Omelas seems like a utilitarian society; a criticism of it is a criticism of its principles, and there has been plenty of criticism and discussion of utilitarian ideas over the years.

Whether the story is useful is less easy to say, though even if it is you can't really move from dismissing it to dismissing the large swathes of ethics it happens to touch upon :)

On Sun, May 1, 2011 at 3:51 AM, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:

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Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 03:42 · in reply to Matthew Knapton

On 4/30/2011 10:23 PM, Matthew Knapton wrote:

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Whether the story is useful is less easy to say, though even if it is you can't really move from dismissing it to dismissing the large swathes of ethics it happens to touch upon :)

But there aren't any societies that are able to avoid harm to innocents for the benefit of others. How can it be morally wrong when it's impossible to do otherwise?

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Jerry Friedman — 01 May 2011, 03:53 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Both /The Dispossessed/ and /Starship Troopers/ had to be SF because they're about societies that have never existed. Otherwise, it's true they don't provide much in the way of stfnal thrills beyond the suits in ST and the description of Shevek making his discovery in TD. There's nothing in either that you could call religious or spiritual (I think), either. As some of the Kesh say in /Always Coming Home/, the problem with novels is they never go beyond the Five Houses (the material world, sort of).

Is Heinlein's "lunar imperium" story /The Moon is a Harsh Mistress/? I can certainly see thinking of /The Dispossessed/ as a response to that--a different kind of anarchy. (I don't know about "imperium", though.) And what's his "stellar imperium", /Starship Troopers/?

Jerry Friedman

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

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Precisely!

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James Wynn — 01 May 2011, 04:11 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

James Wynn:

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Jeff Wilson:

Can you tell me what page the lasers appear on?

"Lasars" was only intended as a cipher for a SF. "ST" is at its core a fictionalized military service memoir. Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords". But if one see SF (as Wolfe here is arguing it should be IMO) as an opportunity to put Reality on trial to better understand its limits, then "ST" falls short.

Jerry Friedman:

Both/The Dispossessed/ and/Starship Troopers/ had to be SF because they're about societies that have never existed.

Wolfe's comment was:

"It was about the college professor who's married to a college professor, only science fiction, and this planet is Russia and this planet is the United States."

Wolfe is saying that *really* the societies are *not* intended to be ones that have never existed. We're supposed to see that they are actually quite close.

J

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 04:27 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

On 4/30/2011 10:53 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Both /The Dispossessed/ and /Starship Troopers/ had to be SF because they're about societies that have never existed.

Only if the S is for speculative. Plenty of other never-existed societies are written about without the benefit of an appeal to the authority of science for suspending disbelief in counterfactual elements (A HANDMAID'S TALE) or even existence of scientifiction (a trunkload of utopian novels and essays from the 16th-19th centuries).

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much in the way of stfnal thrills beyond the suits in ST and the description of Shevek making his discovery in TD. There's nothing in either that you could call religious or spiritual (I think), either. As some of the Kesh say in /Always

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see thinking of /The Dispossessed/ as a response to that--a different kind of anarchy. (I don't know about "imperium", though.) And what's his "stellar imperium", /Starship Troopers/?

BETWEEN PLANETS for stellar, CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY for interstellar, possibly others, esp if you count the settings where earth is largely left to itself through lack of importance to the alien galactics.

This is not to say that the humans in ST don't wage a conquering war against the bugs, but they apparently ally with the skinnies rather than subjugate or exterminate them.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 04:38 · in reply to James Wynn

On 4/30/2011 11:11 PM, James Wynn wrote:

James Wynn:

I think Wolfe's problem with it was that there was no reason not to have written the story in the Realistic genre. It was a Naturalism story with SF scenery. Pointless. It didn't deal at all with all the "other stuff" that Wolfe thinks Realistic fiction cannot address.

Of course the same could be said of Heinlein's "Starship Troopers" -- just War fiction with lasers.

Jeff Wilson:

Can you tell me what page the lasers appear on?

"Lasars" was only intended as a cipher for a SF. "ST" is at its core a fictionalized military service memoir.

That's awfully kind of you; I would say it's a persuasive essay on the supremacy of patriotic duty dramatized as a war memoir.

Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords".

You're doing the bogus details as part of the dismissive character, right?

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

James Wynn — 01 May 2011, 05:11 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

"Lasars" was only intended as a cipher for a SF. "ST" is at its core a fictionalized military service memoir.

That's awfully kind of you; I would say it's a persuasive essay on the supremacy of patriotic duty dramatized as a war memoir.

Okay. But starting from Wolfe's view of Realism vs SF, was there actual value in telling it as a SF story?

Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords".

You're doing the bogus details as part of the dismissive character, right?

I'm not planting a flag. I'm just exploring Wolfe's argument. Personally, I've never read anything on Oprah's list, so if a publisher wanted to get me to read that sort of story, he'd package it as a different genre.

J

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 12:08 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Is it impossible? I had no idea. ;)

On 4/30/2011 11:42 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 4/30/2011 10:23 PM, Matthew Knapton wrote:

Well you're asking a mouthful there. It's certainly meaningful, at least - what constitutes a morally wrong thing, whether such a thing can be justified (and how, if so), etc, are all real issues in the field of ethics. More particularly, Omelas seems like a utilitarian society; a criticism of it is a criticism of its principles, and there has been plenty of criticism and discussion of utilitarian ideas over the years.

Whether the story is useful is less easy to say, though even if it is you can't really move from dismissing it to dismissing the large swathes of ethics it happens to touch upon :)

But there aren't any societies that are able to avoid harm to innocents for the benefit of others. How can it be morally wrong when it's impossible to do otherwise?

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 12:28 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Yes, those two especially, I think. (It's been a long, long time!) There were also some novels about star colonization....

It's funny to see what the genre has grown into outside SF fiction proper. There are dozens of star conquest games worshiping energy-wasting military technology and exterminatory policies of human expansion. Not Heinlein's fault, but the seeds are there somewhere nevertheless. Le Guin dislikes and opposes all such ideas, real or fictional.

On 4/30/2011 11:53 PM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

Both /The Dispossessed/ and /Starship Troopers/ had to be SF because they're about societies that have never existed. Otherwise, it's true they don't provide

much in the way of stfnal thrills beyond the suits in ST and the description of Shevek making his discovery in TD. There's nothing in either that you could call religious or spiritual (I think), either. As some of the Kesh say in /Always

Coming Home/, the problem with novels is they never go beyond the Five Houses (the material world, sort of).

Is Heinlein's "lunar imperium" story /The Moon is a Harsh Mistress/? I can certainly see thinking of /The Dispossessed/ as a response to that--a different kind of anarchy. (I don't know about "imperium", though.) And what's his "stellar imperium", /Starship Troopers/?

Jerry Friedman

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

From: David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net>

Precisely!

On 4/30/2011 8:15 PM, James Wynn wrote:

I think Wolfe's problem with it was that there was no reason not to have written the story in the Realistic genre. It was a Naturalism story with SF scenery. Pointless. It didn't deal at all with all the "other stuff" that Wolfe thinks Realistic fiction cannot address.

Of course the same could be said of Heinlein's "Starship Troopers" -- just War fiction with lasers.

J.

On 4/30/2011 5:51 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

It's disappointing to many readers of science fiction. I wonder if it's disappointing to fans of college professor fiction?

I always thought of it as a response to Heinlein's lunar/stellar imperium stories, which certainly needed one.

Gerry Quinn — 01 May 2011, 14:03 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

From: "Jeff Wilson" <jwilson at io.com>

On 4/30/2011 9:29 PM, Matthew Knapton wrote:

Well, it's a comment that even when the 'gain' is as huge as it is in Omelas, there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent. Whether you like the story or not, that's undeniably a moral statement, yes.

But is "there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent" a useful or meaningful moral statement? Is the wrongness greater or lesser if the mistreatment is without purpose, or if the purpose is unknown? Compare Jackson's "The Lottery," and the news items about the third-world villages poisoned by 1st world computer waste.

I think the story vividly and memorably points up a rather difficult ethical issue, which most makers and/or purveyors of moral/ethical systems would like to be able to ignore, given that to some extent it is probably insoluble in a practical sense.

So for me that makes it a story worth writing/reading, even if the author herself cops out at the end (they seem to know where they are going, those who walk away from Omelas, but the reader is left pretty much in the dark).

Those other questions you ask may be interesting too, though they are different questions. [Indeed, you could have found questions that are nearer the point - the computer waste thing in particular does not really fit into easy categories of 'mistreatment by the First World', given that we don't oblige anyone to import and process said waste; you would have to extend the argument to make it fit.]

- Gerry Quinn

Jerry Friedman — 01 May 2011, 14:27 · in reply to James Wynn

From: James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com>

...

Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords".

But if one see SF (as Wolfe here is arguing it should be IMO) as an opportunity to put Reality on trial to better understand its limits, then "ST" falls short.

I think you're right about what Wolfe is arguing, but it's interesting that he divides things up the way he does. Lots of Americans take it as axiomatic that liberal one-adult-one-vote capitalism is the best possible organization of society--probably far more than the number who take it as axiomatic that supernatural powers don't affect our lives. TD (and ST) try to put that political assumption on trial, convict it, send it to the oubliette, and hire an

aquastor to replace it. For Wolfe, though, TD is a realistic Updike novel about

a college professor, maybe because what it puts on trial isn't fundamental enough, in his view.

Jerry Friedman:

Both /The Dispossessed/ and /Starship Troopers/ had to be SF because they're about societies that have never existed.

Wolfe's comment was:

"It was about the college professor who's married to a college professor, only science fiction, and this planet is Russia and this planet is the United States."

Wolfe is saying that *really* the societies are *not* intended to be ones that have never existed. We're supposed to see that they are actually quite close.

Supposed by Le Guin? Hardly. The counterpart of the Soviet Union in TD is the nation of Thu, the America-like nation's rival on Urras. Anarres is obviously different from the Soviet Union. If Wolfe thought the planet of Anarres was Russia, he totally misunderstood the book. The best way I can understand his comment is an oblique criticism, something like "Le Guin meant Anarres to be different from the USSR, but actually it's the same in crucial ways." Or "The supposedly stable anarchy of Anarres would soon degenerate into a dictatorship that differs from the USSR only in the names of its supposed principles."

Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 14:43 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Well put.

It occurs to me, as an aside, that Arthur C Clarke also wrote quite a bit about mega-technology and human imperial expansion, but he was (as a Brit) plainly very critical of such empires, unlike Heinlein, who was more libertarian than liberal, but whose work may have been misinterpreted as being more straightforwardly supportive of empire (due to its strain of militarism) vs Clarke's, and certainly of capitalism.

Somehow it doesn't surprise me to think that Wolfe may have misinterpreted Anarres as a if-only-Stalin-was-a-nice-guy fantasy. Observation of Communism even before it collapsed led

many people to be skeptical of socialism and anarchism, which are related but very different systems, and which have long been confused by Americans. Anarres is bad enough, but it lacks the authoritarian element.

On 5/1/2011 10:27 AM, Jerry Friedman wrote:

From: James Wynn<crushtv at gmail.com>

...

Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords".

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aquastor to replace it. For Wolfe, though, TD is a realistic Updike novel about

a college professor, maybe because what it puts on trial isn't fundamental enough, in his view.

Jerry Friedman:

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Jerry Friedman

From: Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie>

From: "Jeff Wilson" <jwilson at io.com>

On 4/30/2011 9:29 PM, Matthew Knapton wrote:

Well, it's a comment that even when the 'gain' is as huge as it is in Omelas, there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent. Whether you like the story or not, that's undeniably a moral statement, yes.

But is "there's something wrong about the purposeful mistreatment and deprivation of an innocent" a useful or meaningful moral statement? Is the wrongness greater or lesser if > > the mistreatment is without purpose, or if the purpose is unknown? Compare Jackson's "The Lottery," and > > the news items about the third-world villages poisoned by 1st world computer waste.

I think the story vividly and memorably points up a rather difficult ethical issue, which most makers and/or purveyors of moral/ethical systems would like to be able to ignore, given that to some extent it is probably insoluble in a practical sense.

And an emotional issue, an issue about our moral feelings. The James quotation is

"Or if the hypothesis were offered us of a world in which Messrs. Fourier's and Bellamy's and Morris's utopias should all be outdone, and millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torture, what except a specifical and independent sort of emotion can it be which would make us immediately feel, even though an impulse arose within us to clutch at the happiness so offered, how hideous a thing would be its enjoyment when deliberately accepted as the fruit of such a bargain?"

<http://books.google.com/books?id=iSikDHxjlyEC&pg=PA68>

In /The Wind's Twelve Quarters/, Le Guin points out James's "naively gentlemanly" assumption that all his readers are "as decent as himself".

So for me that makes it a story worth writing/reading, even if the author herself cops out at the end (they seem to know where they are going, those who walk away from Omelas, but the reader is left pretty much in the dark).

Well, the narrative voice clearly admits that she too is in the dark. But /The Dispossessed/, /The Eye of the Heron/, and /Always Coming Home/ certainly look like attempts to show how societies could exploit nobody, how reduction of the number of deliberately tortured lost souls could be reduced to zero. I don't know what Le Guin would say about what she really believes.

I haven't read /The Devil in a Forest/, but those who have might enjoy comparing it and contrasting it to "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas".

Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 16:31 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 5/1/2011 7:08 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Is it impossible? I had no idea. ;)

If your freedom to swing your arm doesn't end where my nose begins, obviously my nose is harmed for the benefit of you getting to swing your arm as you like.

If we agree to limit the freedom to swing our arms where the noses of others begins, there's no check on the the proliferation of noses and one day I am harmed by the atrophy of my arms because there's no room to swing them at all.

We could compromise on a minimum arm-swinging radius, but this harms armless people by reducing their nose-room while they obviously get no benefit from more arm room.

And so on.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 16:46 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 5/1/2011 9:03 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:
Those other questions you ask may be interesting too, though they are different questions. [Indeed, you could have found questions that are nearer the point - the computer waste thing in particular does not really fit into easy categories of 'mistreatment by the First World', given that we don't oblige anyone to import and process said waste; you would have to extend the argument to make it fit.]

We don't know that Omelas obliges people to put their kid in a hole, either. The hole has to be filled for Omelas to prosper more than it would otherwise, so a family that would risk starvation would be motivated to put their kid in the hole so the kid is better off alive than dead, and the family is much better off.

Likewise, the First World has to spend much less to deal with its garbage than the profit of the garbage-making enterprises in order to prosper acceptably, so they find places in the second and third world where poverty is bad enough that people are willing (either directly, collectively, or mostly by their representatives) to let their kids be poisoned by the garbage in return for enough salvage to feed them instead of letting them starve.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 16:47 · in reply to James Wynn

On 5/1/2011 12:11 AM, James Wynn wrote:
"Lasars" was only intended as a cipher for a SF. "ST" is at its core a fictionalized military service memoir.
That's awfully kind of you; I would say it's a persuasive essay on the supremacy of patriotic duty dramatized as a war memoir.
Okay. But starting from Wolfe's view of Realism vs SF, was there actual value in telling it as a SF story?

Sure, the war with aliens lets you isolate variables. Out actual wars have concerns about divided loyalties, inhumane treatment, atrocities and war crimes, etc.

Honestly, I was only attempting to consider SF literature from the POV of what I think were Wolfe's problems with 'The Dispossessed'. The counter-argument could be "Oh, then Wes Craven's 'Halloween' is just a Crime Thriller with a supernatural killer", or "Star Wars is just King Arthur with extra shiny swords".

You're doing the bogus details as part of the dismissive character, right?

I'm not planting a flag. I'm just exploring Wolfe's argument. Personally, I've never read anything on Oprah's list, so if a publisher wanted to get me to read that sort of story, he'd package it as a different genre.

Oh, I got that you were doing a dismissive person rather than speaking for yourself, but when you include bogus trivia it can seem like you actually didn't bother to read or see the original source; there are no lasers in ST because they weren't quite invented yet when RAH wrote it, and Wes Craven was not involved with that particular slasher movie franchise.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Marc Aramini — 01 May 2011, 17:02 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

The truly strong arm swings where it wills, and by the strength of that swing convinces other arms of its rightful rotational reign.

--- On Sun, 5/1/11, Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com> wrote:
From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com>
Subject: Re: (urth) "Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe
To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Sunday, May 1, 2011, 9:31 AM
On 5/1/2011 7:08 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Is it impossible? I had no idea. ;)

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If we agree to limit the freedom to swing our arms where the noses of others begins, there's no check on the the proliferation of noses and one day I am harmed by the atrophy of my arms because there's no room to swing them at all.

We could compromise on a minimum arm-swinging radius, but this harms armless people by reducing their nose-room while they obviously get no benefit from more arm room.

And so on.

-- Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M
Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 17:08 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

One could establish a democracy under the rule of law. But I see the basic principle.

I don't see how it extends to poor Chinese people whose water supplies are poisoned by melamine simply because Americans want plastic things and China is unable or unwilling to protect the Chinese from the effects of corruption and environmental pollution (can I call it

"environmental corruption"?).

There's a lot going on there between arm and nose in such a case.

At any rate, as far as that word "impossible"---I doubt anyone has really tried doing avoiding injustice on a large scale without excluding certain classes of people as nonhumans. And those that have tried have been shot.

On 5/1/2011 12:31 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 5/1/2011 7:08 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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And so on.

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 17:19 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 5/1/2011 12:08 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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Your suggested democracy under the rule of law does this: people outside the democracy's rule are not given equal protections to those within. This allows exploitation of those without by those within, which is where the principle extends to or at least abuts the poor people in China.

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

James Wynn — 01 May 2011, 19:01 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Oh, I got that you were doing a dismissive person rather than speaking for yourself, but when you include bogus trivia it can seem like you actually didn't bother to read or see the original source; there are

no lasers in ST because they weren't quite invented yet when RAH wrote it, and Wes Craven was not involved with that particular slasher movie franchise.

Ah. Sorry Wes Craven. Brain-fart. As for the lasers...well, I just liked the way it sounded. (Incidentally, the ST movie didn't use lasers either as far as I remember).

J.

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 19:52 · in reply to Marc Aramini

to say nothing of the noses ...

On 5/1/2011 1:02 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

The truly strong arm swings where it wills, and by the strength of that swing convinces other arms of its rightful rotational reign.

--- On Sun, 5/1/11, Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com> wrote:

From: Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) "Realistic fiction leaves out too much." - Gene Wolfe

To: "The Urth Mailing List"<urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Sunday, May 1, 2011, 9:31 AM

On 5/1/2011 7:08 AM, David Stockhoff wrote:

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And so on.

-- Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

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David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 20:01 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Exactly. But there's nothing inevitable about exclusion from democracy/humanity.

On 5/1/2011 1:19 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 5/1/2011 12:08 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

One could establish a democracy under the rule of law. But I see the basic principle.

I don't see how it extends to poor Chinese people whose water supplies are poisoned by melamine simply because Americans want plastic things and China is unable or unwilling to protect the Chinese from the effects of corruption and environmental pollution (can I call it "environmental corruption"?).

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Your suggested democracy under the rule of law does this: people outside the democracy's rule are not given equal protections to those within. This allows exploitation of those without by those within, which is where the principle extends to or at least abuts the poor people in China.

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 20:02 · in reply to James Wynn

You could have said death-ray guns. They were "invented" in the twenties, I think.

On 5/1/2011 3:01 PM, James Wynn wrote:

Oh, I got that you were doing a dismissive person rather than speaking for yourself, but when you include bogus trivia it can seem like you actually didn't bother to read or see the original source; there are no lasers in ST because they weren't quite invented yet when RAH wrote it, and Wes Craven was not involved with that particular slasher movie franchise.

Ah. Sorry Wes Craven. Brain-fart. As for the lasers...well, I just liked the way it sounded. (Incidentally, the ST movie didn't use lasers either as far as I remember).

J.

Gwern Branwen — 01 May 2011, 20:20 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On Sun, May 1, 2011 at 4:02 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
You could have said death-ray guns. They were "invented" in the twenties, I think.

Actually, I've been reading the 1897 serialized novel, Edison's Conquest of Mars
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edison%27s_Conquest_of_Mars on Project Gutenberg http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1515336&pageno=1

Besides electrical spaceships, Thomas Edison also invents radiation guns that 'vibrate' at frequencies which dissociate atoms - disintegrators. Seem like death-ray guns to me!

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 20:26 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Why, that's almost steampunk!

On 5/1/2011 4:20 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On Sun, May 1, 2011 at 4:02 PM, David Stockhoff<dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

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Actually, I've been reading the 1897 serialized novel, _Edison's Conquest of Mars_

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edison%27s_Conquest_of_Mars on Project

Gutenberg http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1515336&pageno=1

Besides electrical spaceships, Thomas Edison also invents radiation guns that 'vibrate' at frequencies which dissociate atoms - disintegrators. Seem like death-ray guns to me!

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 21:35 · in reply to David Stockhoff

On 5/1/2011 3:01 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Exactly. But there's nothing inevitable about exclusion from democracy/humanity.

I don't see how a such a democracy can obtain the means to enforce these ideals over all the world without corrupting them and rendering the enforcement moot.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com

Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana

< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 22:44 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

I see. But that's a practical matter, not a theoretical one. Certainly it's a problem, but if the conditions of horizontal and vertical nonexclusive democracy are met, then theoretically, why should not the worst excesses of strong arms (excess mortality, morbidity, deformities, poverty) be avoided?

A more serious concern, I would think, is whether wealth can be created or must be stolen, even if only in small increments. In other words, when we run out of slaves and foreigners to exploit (and bomb), will our absolute standard of living rise or fall?

On 5/1/2011 5:35 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

On 5/1/2011 3:01 PM, David Stockhoff wrote:

Exactly. But there's nothing inevitable about exclusion from democracy/humanity.

I don't see how a such a democracy can obtain the means to enforce these ideals over all the world without corrupting them and rendering the enforcement moot.

Jeff Wilson — 01 May 2011, 23:13 · in reply to David Stockhoff

I see. But that's a practical matter, not a theoretical one.

If you agree that we as an actual society cannot practice abstention from exploitation, why are you maintaining that the irreducible minimum of exploitation can still be morally wrong in a relevant sense? Should we dissolve our societies?

it's a problem, but if the conditions of horizontal and vertical nonexclusive democracy are met, then theoretically, why should not the worst excesses of strong arms (excess mortality, morbidity, deformities,

poverty) be avoided?

Because you can't get the democracy to agree on a uniform ranking of which excesses are worse than others. Not even murder is a universally agreed upon excess in democracies; as late as 1970, cuckoldry was allowed as a defense in Texas.

David Stockhoff — 01 May 2011, 23:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

On 5/1/2011 7:13 PM, Jeff Wilson wrote:

I see. But that's a practical matter, not a theoretical one.

If you agree that we as an actual society cannot practice abstention from exploitation, why are you maintaining that the irreducible minimum of exploitation can still be morally wrong in a relevant sense? Should we dissolve our societies?

Not at all. The minimum is quite acceptable, as long as all the players are roughly equal under the law. Eliminating things like slave labor at gunpoint in the extraction industries (say, diamonds, which have no intrinsic value anyway but never mind) hardly means eliminating the relatively tiny advantages buyers and sellers may exercise over one another in the short term. Investing in bombs and getting dividends in oil, however, should be eliminated by the conditions below.

it's a problem, but if the conditions of horizontal and vertical nonexclusive democracy are met, then theoretically, why should not the worst excesses of strong arms (excess mortality, morbidity, deformities, poverty) be avoided?

Because you can't get the democracy to agree on a uniform ranking of which excesses are worse than others. Not even murder is a universally agreed upon excess in democracies; as late as 1970, cuckoldry was allowed as a defense in Texas.

Nonsense. Your very example of Texas proves that democratic states can get along without worrying about such details. But mass murder, poisoning, and starvation, for examples, are clearly ruled out by all international norms, with zero disagreement. And any society that actually prefers genocide to cuckoldry will never survive to adopt a stable, nonexclusive democracy anyway (but even Pakistan will do so eventually, because they do not prefer genocide).

soloviev at irit.fr — 05 May 2011, 17:35 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

G. H. Wells The War of the Worlds (1898) makes a full-scale use of death-ray guns -

Sergei Soloviev

On Sun, May 1, 2011 at 4:02 PM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

You could have said death-ray guns. They were "invented" in the twenties, I think.

Actually, I've been reading the 1897 serialized novel, _Edison's Conquest of Mars_

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edison%27s_Conquest_of_Mars on Project Gutenberg

http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1515336&pageno=1

Besides electrical spaceships, Thomas Edison also invents radiation guns that 'vibrate' at frequencies which dissociate atoms - disintegrators. Seem like death-ray guns to me!

--

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

soloviev at irit.fr — 05 May 2011, 18:01 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

Dear Jerry,

it is interesting to compare our impressions - I've read with great interest "The Dispossessed". I found the psychological portrait of an Anarchist society quite deep. For me, it was a good example of literary experiment in the domain of politics, my impression was that central theme is a sort of "deconstruction" of Anarchist ideal. I.e., whether a complete freedom (without destroying the others, and keeping a form of a society is truly possible). Other societies in "TD" were for me less convincing, almost caricatural.

I would like to remark (to the list) that since I've grown up in the USSR (and was living there continuously until my 34), I may have a particular interest in this sort of book as an observer. So, to me in TD there is no convincing image of soviet-style society.

By the way, I didn't like much the Orvell's "1984" (I did like the Animal Farm). The reason - "Animal Farm" is presented as abstract, symbolic fiction, and it seems almost perfect symbol. The "1984" contains many details that were not convincing, even as a possible development of the society in the USSR. It was still very good as a scheme, on the level of abstract ideas (language in "1984", inner Party, etc), but not in realistic details.

My guess concerning the opinion of Gene Wolfe about "TD" is that a)he may not like these experiments with politics and b)as any good writer with his own agenda he needs sometimes to be harsh on fellow writers to define better his own "method" (define by opposition).

All the best

Sergei Soloviev

From: Jeff Wilson <jwilson at io.com>

On 4/30/2011 2:30 PM, Gwern Branwen wrote:

On Sat, Apr 30, 2011 at 12:56 PM, Jeff Wilson<jwilson at io.com> wrote:

I've seen this part of the interview before, somehow...

It's been quoted at least once before:

<http://www.urth.net/whorl/archives/v0012/0558.shtml>

It's a great quip and sums up a lot of people's impression of _The Dispossessed_ (at least, it did mine), so I suspect it's been alluded to or quoted before in other places.

Very different from my impression, though I don't think it's a flawless book by any means. What book was a previous version of it? And which planet did

Wolfe
think was Russia?

Yeah, I know that feeling. I read, "Those Walk Away From Omelas," and thought,
"This is supposed to be some kind of utopian/dystopian comment? Ththese people have this tremendously prosperous, liberal, industrialized society with the only externality being train smoke and the lower classes shrunk to a single person! Boy, are those people walking away in for a surprise."

Unlike /The Dispossessed/, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" isn't about practicalities. I'd say it's a dramatization of the William James quotation about morality and moral feelings.

Since I assume Catholicism is on topic here, I hope I can compare it to another quotation:

"The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse."

--Cardinal Newman, /Apologia Pro Vita Sua/

Jerry Friedman

Mo Holkar — 06 May 2011, 09:00 · in reply to soloviev at irit.fr

At 19:01 05/05/2011, Sergei wrote:
By the way, I didn't like much the Orvell's "1984" (I did like the Animal Farm). The reason - "Animal Farm" is presented as abstract, symbolic fiction, and it seems almost perfect symbol.
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It's interesting that you had that reading of Nineteen Eighty-Four. I read it not as trying to depict a development of USSR society, but as trying to depict what a collectivist society would be like specifically as it could be in the UK. So I think there is no real attempt by the author to think about the Soviet actuality -- but mostly just a mission to critique tendencies in 1930s-40s UK politics and society.

I guess I have this perspective because I live in the UK myself, but then Orwell did too :-) and I think that in Nineteen Eighty-Four he was trying to send a message to his own country, more than to the rest of the world. As you say, Animal Farm, because of its abstraction, is a more universal piece of work.

best wishes,

Mo

~ # ~

WolfeWiki -- a wiki about Gene Wolfe

<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/>

James Wynn — 06 May 2011, 15:01 · in reply to Mo Holkar

Mo,

That's interesting observation. What specific ideas did you find unconvincing? Have you seen the movie "The Lives of Others"?

The only thing that *might* be unconvincing to me is that such a society could be maintained worldwide among three nations. But then, I only know about the other two nations from what we are told. They might actually be free. On the other hand, the belief in the eventual inevitably universal spread of Soviet Socialism was not uncommon in the UK in 1947 (much as the current belief in Liberal Democracy). So, maybe Orwell was speculating "What if it did happen?"

J.

On 5/6/2011 4:00 AM, Mo Holkar wrote:

At 19:01 05/05/2011, Sergei wrote:

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best wishes,

Mo

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James Wynn — 06 May 2011, 15:03 · in reply to James Wynn

Actually, that was to Sergei.

On 5/6/2011 10:01 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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I

soloviev at irit.fr — 06 May 2011, 16:16 · in reply to James Wynn

Dear Mo, dear James,

in my posting I tried to explain what was my impression when I first read "1984" in 80-es (I don't remember now, was it before or during Gorbachev's "perestroika" - could be before, I had enough possibilities to read it in "samizdat"). At this time in the USSR in "intellectual" circles it was naturally seen as a grotesque representation of Soviet society. It is interesting to note that in Gorbachev's time (when Soviet propagandistic system still worked but tried to discuss critically "anti-soviet" books, instead of just rejecting them) it did say quite cleverly

something in the sense of what Mo is saying: that "1984" is not the satire against Soviet society, but that it depicts exactly Angsoc - English totalitarian society. What I did find unconvincing in "1984"? As far as I remember, not the ideas, but rather the combination of "romance", the love story, as it is described in "1984" with the totalitarian society background. If you wish, the feeling that this romantic line is borrowed from XIX century literature, and not really felt by Orwell. I could believe in the society he describes - it was not so much different from our stalinist period, as I could see. But accepting this, I felt (and knew - the USSR after Stalin was not so totalitarian, but there was certain continuity) - I felt that the romantic line in such a society would be different, that the "psychology" of heroes would be different.

For example, the member of "inner party" would never pay so much attention to a destiny of an individual, playing as a cat with a mouse. The owner of the bookstore who gave a room to the hero (to meet with his lover) and sold him later to the security, again paid too much attention to an individual. The personage was taken right from Dickens. The idea that the torture will be most efficient using personal fears - again too much attention to the individual. It was not convincing.

The feeling of the totalitarian epoch for us could be better described by a line of the poet Mandelstam (by the way, Gene Wolfe uses him once for an epigraph) - "epoch of anonymous deaths", and by recollections of prisoners of Stalin's time (one, as I remember, counted the number of times the prison attendants checked whether he is hiding something in his arse - it was precisely described algorithm for such a check - it was 13 times one day, when he was moved from one prison to another).

By the way, I think Gene Wolfe understands very well the spirit of totalitarian times. I remember his "Eyeflash Miracles". I don't know whether our Russian nationalists (very anti-american) do read Gene Wolfe, but sometimes I've glanced their pamphlets and I had an impression that they have read something like this and later presented (pretended) that American literature itself gives a proof that American society is totalitarian. (Total identification by irises, killing of genetically modified children after an experiment, a boy who was blinded and who is the miracle-worker and Christ-like figure, hunted by federal agents, the computer possessed by devils...)

All the best

Sergei Soloviev

Actually, that was to Sergei.

On 5/6/2011 10:01 AM, James Wynn wrote:

Mo,

That's interesting observation. What specific ideas did you find unconvincing? Have you seen the movie "The Lives of Others"?

The only thing that *might* be unconvincing to me is that such a society could be maintained worldwide among three nations. But then,

I only know about the other two nations from what we are told. They might actually be free. On the other hand, the belief in the eventual inevitably universal spread of Soviet Socialism was not uncommon in the UK in 1947 (much as the current belief in Liberal Democracy). So, maybe Orwell was speculating "What if it _did_ happen?"

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as a scheme, on the level of abstract ideas (language in "1984", inner Party, etc), but not in realistic details.

I

David Stockhoff — 08 May 2011, 17:13 · in reply to James Wynn

I've always assumed the second: that sovietism had won out.

Oceana is presumably the most likely candidate for liberal democracy anyway; if either of the other two actually adopted democracy, it seems pretty indistinguishable from sovietism from the outside.

On 5/6/2011 11:03 AM, James Wynn wrote:

Actually, that was to Sergei.

On 5/6/2011 10:01 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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David Duffy — 11 May 2011, 10:43 · in reply to Mo Holkar

On Fri, 6 May 2011, Mo Holkar wrote:

At 19:01 05/05/2011, Sergei wrote:

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Have you read Anthony Burgess's 1985? The first half is an essay discussing these points, the second half an adequate extrapolation not of 1948 Britain, but 1984 Britain.

Cheers, David Duffy,

Mo Holkar — 11 May 2011, 11:42 · in reply to David Duffy

At 11:43 11/05/2011, David Duffy wrote:

On Fri, 6 May 2011, Mo Holkar wrote:

At 19:01 05/05/2011, Sergei wrote:

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Have you read Anthony Burgess's *_1985_*? The first half is an essay discussing these points, the second half an adequate extrapolation not of 1948 Britain, but 1984 Britain.

Mm, it's an interesting book (although, I think, an extrapolation of 1978 Britain rather than 1984 Britain). I didn't read it until the mid-80s some time, by which point the idea that UK trade unions might ever advance to exercise significant power over people's lives was already a laughable anachronism, thanks to Mrs Thatcher's brisk work...

I like some of Burgess's work, but *1985* seems to me spoilt by excess of snobbery and hobbyhorsery.

best,

Mo

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