

# Paper on 'Seven American Nights'

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6621>

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Gwern Branwen — 14 Aug 2014, 01:40

<http://silk4calde.blogspot.com/2014/08/upcoming-paper-gene-wolfes-seven.html>

'Gene Wolfe's "Seven American Nights" and the Ethics of the Open Text'

Science fiction has long been concerned with ethical questions, including the effects of new technology on humans and the impact of human activity on the environment, both of which are addressed in Gene Wolfe's "Seven American Nights" (1978). In both its form and content, however, Wolfe's novella displays a concern for a different kind of ethics: the ethics of literary representation.

In my examination of "Seven American Nights" I seek to identify the narrative styles and techniques that create openness in the text and produce the elusiveness and ambiguity characteristic of Wolfe's work. Written as a series of journal entries, the narrator's account of a post-collapse America disrupts straightforward interpretation on multiple levels. Many of the elements that create uncertainty including the unreliable narrator, fragmentary narrative and disruptive framing narratives are metafictional devices that draw the reader into approaching the text critically as a constructed artefact. Wolfe's innovative use of science fiction and fantasy tropes and intertexts further challenges the reader's expectations and opens up a wide range of interpretative possibilities. This open text draws the reader into an act of self-conscious co-creation of meaning, while resisting attempts to "pin down" a definitive interpretation.

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