

Steven Brust

“The WSWs functions for me as an antidote”

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As part of marking the 15th Anniversary of the World Socialist Web Site, we invite readers to send in comments on why you read the WSWs. Below we publish a letter from Steven Brust, American science fiction writer and son of Workers League founding members, Jean and Bill Brust.

The WSWs functions for me as an antidote.

To a writer, nothing is more important than milieu; the people with whom one associates on a daily basis inevitably have a powerful effect on one's work. It is largely from conversation and interaction with colleagues that a writer forms conclusions about what to strive for, and how to use technique to achieve those goals.

Working as a writer, more particularly as a genre writer, I find myself surrounded by all manner of petit bourgeois ideology. Dismissal of science as applied to history, each and every form of identity politics, and smug, arrogant superiority directed against any coherent theoretical position are just some of what I see around me. To be sure, there is the other side: These are intelligent people, and conversation with them on literary subjects is invaluable to spurring my own ideas on how best to please, frighten, move, and occasionally even enlighten those who have trusted me to tell them a story.

It is one thing to have faith that the world around us is understandable; it is quite another to have that demonstrated: to read, every day, concrete scientific analysis of the day's events.

The first thing I always look for is a letter and a reply—because those demonstrate most sharply the methods of science, and I get positively excited following the reasoning. Next, for a similar reason, I look for polemics. The art reviews—especially those by Mr. Walsh—are naturally of great interest to me.

But it is the daily news coverage that is the most valuable. It is easy to think in abstractions, like, the war in the Middle East is about oil, or, the Obama administration is as reactionary as the Bush administration was. It is far more difficult and valuable to see in detail, with hard facts and clear, precise argument, exactly how specific events fit into the broader context. When surrounded by impressionism disguised as politics, or reaction cloaking itself as liberalism, or subjectivism passing itself off as principle, actual understanding is vital for keeping my feet on the ground.

Because here's the thing: No matter how much one tells stories of magical beasts or impossible worlds, in the end, it is always the world of here and now one is writing about. The better one understands that world, the more powerful the stories will be.

Steven Brust

American science fiction writer and son of Jean and Bill Brust



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