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## **Interesting Times**

Terry Pratchett, the fertile fantasy writer sometimes took special cultural practices, periods, phenomena to ignite the fantasy. The location is still the Discworld, his trademark fantastic universe, but the story still works as a parody of something known from our round world. The parody, however, never functions as the exclusive, not even the main layer of meaning.

The 1995 novel *Interesting Times*, as the title already implies, uses classical Chinese culture as the main source of inspiration. It does not show deep knowledge of Chinese culture; it rather works with commonplaces but tends to reinterpret them in the highly original and witty manner that is characteristic of the author. Politics made in the imperial palace, cruelty, extreme oppression appear as negative stereotypes, while highly sophisticated art and craftsmanship, astonishingly developed ancient technology counterbalance them on the positive end. Pratchett's interpretations of Chinese cuisine, stable social order, and the easy assimilation of barbarian conquerors during the history function as neutral but enlightening commentaries.

Pratchett's parody is always universal, resulting in a carnivalesque laughter in the Bakhtinian sense. He does not allow exception for his general critique of cultural and social phenomena, which is always based on a humanist value system.