A STUDY OF THE MAJOR SCIENCE FICTION WORKS OF GENE WOLFE

BY

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ABSTRACT

A STUDY OF THE MAJOR SCIENCE FICTION WORKS OF GENE WOLFE, BY NICHOLAS GEVERS

This thesis examines three major works by the American Science Fiction and Fantasy writer Gene Wolfe (Eugene Rodman Wolfe, 1931 -). The central argument of this thesis is that in The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972), the 'New Sun' cycle of novels (1980-1987), and Soldier of the Mist (1986), Wolfe presents the human desire for knowledge of the Self and of God and the near-impossibility of attaining this knowledge. Wolfe expresses obstacles to knowledge and fulfilment in his created fictional worlds, in the characters of his protagonists, and in the complicated narrative structures that distinguish all three texts. By converting the stable and reassuring world of conventional Science Fiction into a realm of uncertainty, ambiguity, and spiritual and cognitive confusion, Wolfe radically subverts the genre and exposes it to a new subtlety and flexibility.

The first three chapters are devoted to the five 'New Sun' volumes. Chapter One examines how these embody religious motifs and structures of millenial expectation, apocalypse, and Messianism, as well as Wolfe's own Roman Catholicism. Simultaneously, this chapter shows how Wolfe intimates the uncertainty of belief, the absence of any absolute revelation,

the deceptiveness of God and His servants. A final section shows the influence of other religions on the 'New Sun' cycle. Chapter Two indicates how the opposed imperatives of the 'New Sun' series - the demands of faith and inquiry and the reality of the universe's unresponsiveness to such demands - are reflected in the narrative structure and art of the books. Devices of narration that assist the hero and the reader in comprehension are contrasted with devices that complicate and obstruct understanding. The consequent uncertainties of Wolfe's created far-future world of Urth thus delineated, Chapter Three proceeds to the issue of Wolfe's treatment of the conventions of Science Fiction and Fantasy. With reference to the iconography of these genres - their standard symbols - and to their customary fictional situations, this chapter indicates how these are subverted and modified by Wolfe. They come to represent their polar opposites, or new values and conceptions entirely. Not only does this further complicate Wolfe's text; it points to new potentials for the genres of the fantastic. Wolfe acts as an experimenter even as he reveals the difficulty of the acts of reading, knowing, and believing.

Chapter Four analyses a much earlier work, The Fifth Head of Cerberus. Here Wolfe's emphasis is on the quest for self-definition. He reveals the obstacles to this by the use of Gothic techniques and the Dystopian situations of Science Fiction. This chapter shows how Wolfe's characters are menaced,

and their identities submerged, by the pressure of family and genetics, by colonialism, by the tyranny of an authoritarian government and its prison. The quest for identity is made still more complex by confusion of human and alien, of Self and Other, and by narrative modes that problematize the narrator's identity. This chapter concludes that Wolfe offers almost no hope of self-knowledge and integrity.

Chapter Five investigates Soldier of the Mist, a quite recent historical fantasy. Here it is argued that Wolfe again presents the need for religious enlightenment, but as the key to enlightenment as to the character of the Self. The hero is seeking his home and friends, and needs the help of the gods in this. Wolfe complicates this quest, first by means of the protagonist's amnesia, and then by means of the deviousness and inscrutability of the gods. The amnesia causes the hero's narrative to be fragmentary and obscure in various ways; and the gods, being those of ancient Greece, are uncommunicative. Wolfe's narrative art and his use of myth and ancient history allow a fresh depiction of the ambiguity of the world, the difficulty of attaining knowledge and existential certainty.

This Thesis concludes with comments on Wolfe's contribution to the evolution of Science Fiction into a literature of greater subtlety and art than the earlier, conventional and comfortable, versions of the genre.

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INTRODUCTION

In writing this analysis of some of the works of Gene Wolfe, I have sought throughout to emphasize his liberation or expansion of Science Fiction and Fantasy. He has, in his two-and-a-half decades of work in these genres, advanced by great strides the cause of those who, before and simultaneously with him, have endeavoured to make of these branches of popular fiction something profound, aesthetically powerful, artistically significant. He has in fact carried this process farther than any other writer. He has fused theological and philosophical subtleties with the literal gaudiness of the fictions of space-ship and sword. He has introduced with complete success the styles of the confessional and of magical realism into a field where their previous use was halting and unsatisfactory. He has elaborately deconstructed the ideology and iconography of Science Fiction, exposing their superficialities even as he moulds them into new and more powerful forms. He has brought a poeticism and experimental genius to a literature which as been immensely enriched thereby; already his influence can be seen in the excellent work of Orson Scott Card, David Zindell, Elizabeth Hand, Dan Simmons, and even the magical realists such as Pat Murphy, Ian McDonald, and (possibly) Lucius Shepard. (1) In all this, he has never been snared by the rather smug didacticism to be seen in previous experimenters such as Ursula Le Guin, Samuel

R Delany, and Harlan Ellison, whose work has lost all life even as it gains in prestige, the victim of over-confidence and the self-indulgence of the established artist. Wolfe continues on his luminous and fecund path, always altering the dross of the old to gold, always surprising with his intellectual and beautiful novelty.

Lest this read like a hagiography, some cold and sober facts must be offered. Gene Rodman Wolfe, born in 1931 in New York, trained in Texas as an engineer, resident for a long and continuing period in Barrington, Illinois, and a writer of successful fiction since 1965 (2), has had many influences on his career. As Joan Gordon suggests, his childhood, one of constant mobility as his father changed from one employment to another, may have contributed to his portraits of 'isolated children and uprooted adults'. (3) Thus the lonely and melancholy figures of Latro and Severian, of V R Trenchard and Number Five, of Marsch and Tackman Babcock and Alden Dennis Weer and Adam K Greene. (4) His university training, his army duty in Korea, and his industrial career may explain his pre-occupation with entrapment by regulation (5), his motifs of enclosure and Dystopian tyranny. His wit, puns and sudden turnings, his inversions and conceits, may owe a debt to Wolfe's early editorial mentor, Damon Knight, also an ironist and fabulist. (6) His literary progenitors are discernible: Proust in Wolfe's reflections on memory and the Gallicism of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, Borges in his intricate

fabulation and intellectualism, as seen in the 'New Sun' series, Robert Graves in his confessional narrative mode and Latinity, seen in all the works studies in this thesis. (7) These features, whatever their origins, make for an oeuvre of dark wit, relentless inner examination, acute explorations of form and genre, utopian speculation, narrative experimentation, and spiritual pilgrimage. This thesis sets out to investigate these modes and themes as expressed in three major works by Gene Wolfe.

The selection of these three works and their arrangement here is a product of a number of calculations. The five volumes of the "New Sun" cycle, The Fifth Head of Cerberus, and Soldier of the Mist are amongst Wolfe's best work to date; the first is his defining masterpiece, the centrepiece of his career, the second was his crucial formative work, and the third is not only of great literary importance, but is also a formal mirror-image of the 'New Sun' volumes. Where the latter are set in the far future and are framed by a narrator with perfect powers of recollection, Soldier of the Mist is set in the distant past and is narrated by a protagonist with no long-term memory. The implicit linkage of these works, whose heroes are similar in character and experience, is certainly deliberate. All three works covered are similar in their confessional modes of discourse, in their direct use of the conventions of science fiction and fantasy, and in their baroque surface, their ornamentation and use of poetic language. They all are pre-

occupied with elaborate quests for identity and holy truths, existential and spiritual quests which complement each other as the Self is found in God and the supernatural realm. All use Gothic devices and characterizations. Together these texts form a united body of expression and argument, of style and theme.

Thus the principles of inclusion; those of exclusion are more difficult to apply, though easy enough to define. One reason why some of Wolfe's books are omitted here is the consideration of space: a thesis of this kind is limited in length by regulation. But there are other reasons. His short fiction, excellent and voluminous (see The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories (1980), Gene Wolfe's Book of Days (1981), and Endangered Species (1989)), is too diverse in theme and manner for a single chapter or any quick summary. It often complements the texts I have discussed, but not directly or fully enough. As for Wolfe's intriguing novels of 'magical realism' - Peace (1975), Free Live Free (1984), There are Doors (1988), Castleview (1990), and Pandora, By Holly Hollander (1990) - these are a growing and different direction in Wolfe's art, requiring, when this mode has been fully utilized and developed by him, a separate study (which I may well undertake). Economy and their unity of theme and form have restricted me to the three major texts chosen for this study; they are adequate to express Wolfe's beliefs and techniques, certainly for the period of his career ending in 1987, after which I commenced this Thesis.

The arrangement of this study's five Chapters is designed not to be chronological, but to serve the interests of a clear succession of ideas. Because the 'New Sun' volumes are Wolfe's epitomal text, I have devoted three chapters to them, and placed these first in order. An examination of The Book of the New Sun (1980-83) and The Urth of the New Sun (1987) introduces Wolfe's complete range of ideas and his concepts of narrative art and metafictional commentary. Although The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972) is a much earlier piece, it is best analyzed in the light of the masterwork that followed it, and with the grounding terms of the study established; it is the concern of Chapter Four. The fifth and final Chapter, logically, deals with Soldier of the Mist (1986), a novel developing motifs from and contrasting with the 'New Sun' cycle. Chapter Five does not analyse Soldier of Arete (1989), a sequel to Soldier of the Mist, because this is a very recent text and falls beyond 1987, which I have determined as the closing point for the present study.

The need for a substantial treatment of Gene Wolfe is, I believe, clear. Until now, critical recognition of his pivotal role in modern Science Fiction writing has been forthcoming; Wolfe's publishers, Tor in America and Century in Britain, are able to cite dozens of eager recommendations from popular writers and reputable critics on the covers of Wolfe's books. C N Manlove, Colin Greenland, and others have written articles and essays

praising Wolfe highly. (8) But even though Wolfe has a high reputation, only one previous study of any length has been devoted to him: Joan Gordon's Gene Wolfe (San Bernadino, California: The Borgo Press, 1986). This small book, 116 pages long and published as a 'Reader's Guide', is useful, with some valuable ideas and a careful Bibliography. But it covers only the years until 1982, so lacking the insights afforded by The Urth of the New Sun, the 'Soldier' novels, and other more recent works; it is also too short and unambitious - being a 'Reader's Guide' - to achieve any depth or firm critical conclusions. I have sought to fill a gap, to provide a comprehensive assessment of Wolfe's religious doctrines, his narrative experimentation, his metafictional, Gothic, and Utopian modes and paradigms. I have been selective, but this permits detail and concentration.

The critical perspective of this Thesis operates in no fixed manner. Wolfe is an eclectic writer, who emphasizes the absence of absolute truths and reliable systems of thought in the world. He uses different religions, styles, national outlooks in his fictions; he is allusive, calling on countless different mythologies, languages, and literatures to lend resonance to his writing. I use whatever body of theory - narrative, religious, metafictional, Gothic, or mythological - to engage Wolfe's texts that appears to have been in his mind at the time of composition.

Insight into his thought and art is my primary objective; I have balanced theory and direct exposition, to serve both the needs of immediate reading and penetrating inquiry.

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CHAPTER ONE

GOD VEILED: THE 'NEW SUN' CYCLE AS A RELIGIOUS TEXT

Introduction

The five volumes of Gene Wolfe's 'New Sun' cycle, published between 1980 and 1987, form his masterpiece; but they are a masterpiece of great complication. They have their roots in countless previous narratives of apprenticeship and kingship, of damnation and redemption, of heroic questing; but they add to these formulas so much of the subtle and the metaphysical, so much that is intellectual and elusive, that they are Wolfe's most challenging texts. Before strategies to meet this challenge can be outlined, however, some consideration must be given to Wolfe's artful balancing of direct archetype and indirect, subversive argument.

As Joan Gordon remarks, 'the plot (the story) of The Book of the New Sun is straightforward and at first glance, unexceptional' (1). A young man of ambiguous parentage is born into apprenticeship in a once-glorious kingdom, now in decline and menaced by aristocratic rebels and tyrannical and superhuman enemies. He wanders across the land as an exile, acquiring talismans of power, various comrades, and much moral wisdom. He has adventures, conflicting with monsters, wizards, enemy armies; he meets time-travellers, androids, holy men, beautiful women. Ultimately, he rises to the kingship of his land, and prepares its salvation. This is indeed the plot of the first four volumes, The Shadow of the Torturer (1980), The Claw of the Conciliator (1981), The Sword of the Lictor (1982), and The Citadel of the Autarch (1983),

forming The Book of the New Sun. This standard arrangement of the stock elements of heroic fantasy, with an admixture of the cognitive elements of Science Fiction, is succeeded by The Urth of the New Sun (1987), which presents a somewhat more novel, but still formulaic, narrative of Messianism (2). The king or Autarch, Severian, now enters a heavenly realm, where he, as the representative of his world, Urth (Earth), is judged by an angel and found worthy. Urth's Sun is renewed and a Golden Age returns, after further exemplary adventures in far corners of time and space. The tale of the questing, kingly hero has again been told.

There is, however, another cardinal aspect of Wolfe's text to be considered: the manner of its telling. The five volumes are all told from the perspective of the Autarch Severian, in the form of his memoirs. Blessed, or cursed, with a perfect memory, he is a thorough but unreliable narrator; because of his upbringing as a torturer in an already brutal and decadent society, his morality is warped, and always suspect to the reader. Thought, often convoluted, metaphysical, and inconclusive, is predominant in the narrative, rather than action. Severian is whimsical and digressive, an uncertain guide to his life and times. Many actions undertaken by Severian are motiveless or circular; the eventual resolution of his quest, the bringing of the New Sun to Urth, is more destructive than redemptive. The reader soon perceives that Wolfe is writing a subversive text, seeking to suggest not the simple solutions and resolutions of a linear quest, but rather their opposites, the doubts, the acknowledgements of

imperfection and inconclusiveness, stemming from a darker view of the world. Wolfe utilizes the simple archetypes of Fantasy in order to argue the existence of teleology and virtue in the cosmos; but he is concerned equally to reveal the uncertainties and terrors engendered by human imperfection, by our pitifully weak understanding of our own natures, let alone of Divine plans and glorious destinies. Severian is a flawed hero, because he is the servant of an inscrutable God.

In the 'New Sun' cycle, the dark doubtfulness of knowledge and purpose has a full textual embodiment. This challenge to reader and critic is truly subversive, as familiar genre materials become, in John Clute's words, sea-changed 'into something utterly strange, sui generis' (3). This chapter and the following two are designed to present strategies for the penetration of Wolfe's baroque and relentlessly complicated text. Chapter One investigates the religious components of the five volumes, the doctrines and techniques, the atmosphere and symbolism, that Wolfe uses to portray his dark Saviour and dubious salvation. Chapter Two continues with an examination of how Wolfe's theme of ambiguity of knowledge and purpose is woven into Severian's narrative, with its plethora of complicating devices. Chapter Three concludes the series, by arguing the nature of the cycle as a metafiction, as a parodic commentary upon its genre and thus as an act of literary as well as of religious subversion. These strategies, acting complementarily, together reveal Wolfe's doctrine of uncertainty - a phrase in itself indicative of the paradoxes of Wolfe's work.

In constructing his labyrinthine narrative, Wolfe offers suggestions as to why a universe governed by God - Severian's 'Increate' - should be so darkly illumined, so bereft of ready understanding of the Divine Will. In Cabbalistic terms, our universe, known to Severian as 'Briah', is vouchsafed only imperfect or incomplete versions of the Holy Word, or the emanations that symbolize God to the worlds (4). As Severian himself explains in an early conversation with his lover Dorcas, 'everything, whatever happens, has three meanings', - a 'practical meaning', or an everyday significance; a soothsayer's meaning', reflecting relationships with other objects; and a 'transsubstantial meaning', reflecting the Divine Will (ST, 272). This third meaning is revealed more by some objects than by others, indicating the difficulty even the gifted and powerful Severian must have in discerning the Increate's Will, in a world of omnipresent but dubiously profound 'signs'. The consequence is that the people of Wolfe's world, and no less his hero, are, as John Clute says, 'creatures fallen from the Word; and their abode is the sands of the desert of the world'. They long for a code, a key, a new perception, to return them to the Word, to God, to a nurturing Sea (5). They are created by God, but then left in neglectful ignorance. Severian's quest is for a new understanding of the Divine, a method of escaping from the relentless enigma of his life, his narrative. But his eventual success is doubtful, and the Increate comes little closer.

Wolfe suggests this dark religious design by means of four thematic devices, all of which this chapter examines in turn. The first is his depiction of the world of Urth, its ambience, culture and theology. By evoking a civilization in terminal decline, Wolfe is able to portray his broken, ignorant people, and their natural searching for a redeemer or redemptive pattern which will elevate them to truth and blessedness once more. The second device is his arrangement in his text of Apocalyptic patterns, ones that again intimate the desire for a redemption but also the destructive and doubtful nature of such a process. The third tactic Wolfe uses is the deployment of elements of his own Catholic belief, ones that affirm his fundamental teleology but reinforce also his motif of obscuring ambiguity. Fourthly, and most significantly, Wolfe creates in Severian a Messiah who is Christ-like only in an uncertain and indeed parodic way; the Autarch is much less than a Son of God, and is subversive of any simple belief. In its final section, this chapter indicates religious influences other than Catholicism at work in the text, ones illuminating Severian's (and the reader's) quest for clarity, but also complicating it yet further. Throughout this chapter and its successors, light is also cast on details of the text, so that some of the prominent enigmas of the narrative itself can be clarified.

Urth : Decadence and Faith

Wolfe's most immediately noticeable technique in the 'New Sun' cycle is the baroque, mannered surface of his text. The

texture of Severian's reminiscent style is rich, ornamented, and allusive, as in this description of the routine of an apprentice in Severian's Guild of Torturers:

> 'His duties take him to other parts of the Citadel - to the soldiers in the barbican, where he learns that the military apprentices have drums and trumpets and ophicleides and boots and sometimes gilded cuirasses; to the Bear Tower, where he sees boys no older than himself learning to handle wonderful fighting animals of all kinds, mastiffs with heads as large as a lion's, diatrymae taller than a man, with beaks sheathed in steel....' (ST, 33).

Wolfe's emphasis upon nomenclature, upon formal designation and place, both suggests the hierarchical rigidity of Urth, and, through archaic and medieval terminology, detailed parallels with past ages of faith (6). Urth is an amalgam of dead civilizations, its elaborate theologies and court ritual suggesting Byzantium, its guild structure evoking medieval Europe, its Praetorian guards ancient Rome. But Wolfe enriches his dying world with another parallel, to the 'entropic romances' (7) of such Science-Fiction writers as Jack Vance, M. John Marrison, Robert Silverberg, and Michael Moorcock (8). His Urth, like the far-future Earths of the other writers, is a place of vast ruins, decadence, visionary cults; like the other 'dying Earths', his milieu is portrayed with an archaic and poetic formality (9). The result is a world to which faith is appropriate; Urth is a natural setting for a drama of religious belief, of its imperfection and longed-for re-attainment. In the dark society of Urth, Severian, flawed also, is the natural Redeemer.

Urth is consequently a place of millenial expectation, where theological speculation is the essence of intellectual discourse. Severian himself, as a typical member of his society, often ponders issues concerning the Divine:

> 'The tale I read to little Severian said that the universe was but a long word of the Increate's. We, then, are the syllables of that word.' (SL, 182).

In addition to Severian's digressions of this kind, the text is often illuminated by the imagery and rhetoric of prophecy:

> 'From far below I heard a step that might have been the walking of a tower on the Final Day, when it is said that all the cities of Urth will stride forth to meet the dawn of the New Sun'. (CC, 55).

Metaphors use similar imagery:

> 'From somewhere not far off, the silver voice of a trumpet called to the renascent stars.' (ST, 233).

In a world where the sun may die at any time, where the end of everything is imminent, not only is the desire for revelation particularly strong; it is particularly doubtful of fulfilment. Wolfe dramatizes his theme of the need for faith and its difficulty, by constructing an Urth caught between visionary nope and entropic hopelessness. This tension is greatly extended in Wolfe's second religious motif: Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse : Creation and Destruction

The 'New Sun' cycle is a fiction of Apocalypse on both literal and philosophical levels. Severian's quest for a new Sun to replace the old brings a deluge that destroys the old world, Urth, and engenders the new, Ushas. Philosophically, Wolfe's emphasis upon novelty, upon surprises and conceptual transformations, induces an intellectual or literary upheaval in Severian, in his narrative, in its effect upon the reader. But even as he achieves his subversive purpose, defying expectation and creating new worlds of thought and belief, Wolfe emphasizes the darker side of the Apocalyptic process, its destructiveness and unreliability. Redemption is inscrutable in Severian's cosmos, its effects incalculable, the Increate's purpose unclear.

Having established his imaginary world of prophecy and despair, of expectation and confusion, Wolfe sets Urth on the path to literal apocalypse. Many of the motifs and patterns drawn from the 'Book of Revelation' and similar works by R.W.B. Lewis (10) and Frank Kermode (11) are paralleled in Severian's marrative. Urth is, in Kermode's terms, a place of 'Terrors', of 'decadence' associated with the hope of 'renovation' (12). Wolfe creates monstrosities that signal the coming end of the world: Erebus and Abaia, the unseen but rumoured submarine giants, whose watery realm threatens to submerge Severian (CC, 261-3), and who manipulate the Autarch's enemies, the Ascians; the Alzabo, the monster that devours humans and mimics them

(SL. Ch. XV1); and the extra-terrestrial apparitions summoned by the caller Hethor - the notules (CC, 107) and the Salamander (SL, Ch. IX). These are only a part of Wolfe's evocation of a society in fear: Severian is nurtured among the Torturers, and his role as an executioner is central to the first three volumes of the cycle. Furthermore, prisons (the Antechamber in the House Absolute. the Vincula of Thrax, the Matachin Tower, the pyramid in the jungle) are frequent settings, as are other items of traditional Gothic apparatus, such as Baldanders' gloomy castle, the dead town on the pampas, the ruined sections of Nessus, and the abandoned town of Typhon. Elsewhere, Severian describes necropolises and his own mausoleum. Terror of the supernatural joins with fear of the imminent end of the world. as one sign of the Apocalypse.

Decadence is a predictable sequel to such Terror, a cultural exhaustion (13) that, representing the need for the new, prefiguring the renewal of the world in its celebration and distortion of the dying order, Wolfe also fully evokes. From early in the cycle, indications are given of social immobility, such as that the roads are closed (ST, 125) and that caste is of hereditary origin and is largely fixed. In Severian's description of the gardens of the Autarch's palace, the House Absolute, the idle lives of the inbred aristocracy are rendered with a rich poetry and with some irony:

> 'Couples lay on the soft grass beneath the trees and in the more refined comfort of summerhouses and seemed to think our craft hardly more than a

> decoration sent idly downstream for their delectation... Lone philosophers meditated on rustic seats, and parties, not invariably erotic, proceeded undisturbed in clerestories and arboriums'. (CC, 208).

These nobles, the Exultants, have transformed the natural landscape into an elegant habitation. Their intrigues, through the imprisonment of Severian's early lover, Thecla, are constantly felt in the earlier stages of Severian's narrative. In their jealous revelry, and in the general rigidity of Urth's society, Wolfe intimates the need for Apocalypse.

Parallels with the Apocalypse in 'Revelation' can be found in the prophecies of new, happier societies often mentioned by Severian, as when he muses on 'worlds in which all the people ... treated one another as brothers and sisters, worlds where there was no currency but honour' (SL. 101-2). The Antichrist can be seen in Erebus and Abaia, Armageddon in the brilliantly-evoked battle with the Ascians (CA, Ch. XXII). But any simple parallelism is prevented by Wolfe's embodiment in the text of the ambiguity of the Apocalypse. In The Book of the New Sun, Severian becomes aware of two clearly opposed visions of the future of Urth, versions that, in his temporally fluid universe, can equally come to be. Both are presented by time-travellers from the future; one is of an Urth renewed and green (CC, 27) and the other of a dead Urth, covered in ice (CA, 133). While the second vision is suggestive of the barrenness attendant upon a cowardly refusal to accept the

Apocalypse, it also implies the uncertain outcome of all Severian's efforts. That outcome, in the end, remains of dubious value to himself and his world.

Although Severian manages, in The Urth of the New Sun, to gain approval for humanity from the heavenly judges of Yesod (VNS, 153), his reward - the coming of Urth's 'New Sun' - is as much, or more, of a loss than a gain. In a new Flood, the city of Nessus, the palace, and the entire Commonwealth are submerged (UNS, Ch. XLIII). As David Ketterer and Zbigniew Lewicki separately remark, the Apocalyptic process has both entropic and creative effects (14). The irony of the cycle's climax is that few of those who longed for the New Sun survive, other than Severian. In human terms, the Deluge is a cataclysm, and so Wolfe intimates the harsh remoteness of the Divine. The very unexpectedness of the disaster - a surprise even to Severian (UNS, 307) - reveals the fallibility of prophecy, which predicted a new Golden Age for the Commonwealth, and so the fallibility of all human knowledge. A further irony of the flood is its aftermath, which is both anticlimatic and mysterious. The inscrutability of the Apocalyse is suggested by its name, which denotes an unveiling, the release of knowledge of the new, the transforming (15). This very unveiling is ambiguous, for the veil, the 'eschaton', acts in American literature both to divulge and conceal (16). True to his tantalizing habit, Wolfe unfolds only a fragmentary glimpse of the new world, Ushas, as a primitive colony of fishermen, their future quite unguessable. They already have the follies and eccentricities of the previous inhabitants of

Urth (UNS, 369-370). Severian is left to acknowledge himself a 'godling', of limited knowledge and power (UNS, 370), 'though no doubt the Increate can do much more'. God can do more, Wolfe says; he can destroy one world and create another; but his purpose in doing so will remain unclear, as will the value of the exercise. As Frederick Kreuziger remarks, the Apocalyptic concentrates upon promise and visionary possibility, rather than actual fulfilment (17). Wolfe demonstrates how unfulfilling fulfilment can be.

The literal Apocalypse Severian describes takes place on a personal level also, with a repetition of the irony already encountered. Severian, as the sole narrator of the events, absorbs them into his perfect memory; Urth's drama is his also. His identity with the rest of the human species is recognized when he is dubbed the 'Epitome of Urth' (UNS. 113 and Ch. XXI), and he is named 'The New Sun', making the new star that comes to Urth an extension of himself also (UNS, 153). Not only is there this broad association of macrocosm and microcosm; Severian undergoes a succession of resurrections on the purely human level. The first is his rescue from drowning by the undine Juturna (ST. 12), the second his revival after falling on Tzadkiel's spaceship (UNS. 65), and the third his resurrection in his tomb by the Hierodules (UNS. 355). As these proceed, Severian's insights and powers advance in magnitude. Like Urth, he discards old selves for the new, in his case maturity and new abilities, and yet, as he himself concedes, he is an 'eidolon' of the Increate, a 'godling' only. His closing uncertainty in The Urth of the

New Sun suggests again the emptiness of human wisdom and attainment, however great. The reader is once more left ignorant of the true purpose, the value, of Severian's powers, and Wolfe rebuts the myth of superhumanity that Northrop Frye associates with the Apocalyptic, his conviction of a cosmos made human, and fully accessible to the human mind (18). Severian can heal at will, and travel through time; but this reveals little, to narrator or reader. Wolfe subverts Science Fiction's general assumption of the efficacy of power (19).

The patterns of Apocalypse are manifest in the cycle also on a philosophical level. Wolfe's emphasis upon novelty, upon expressions of the fantastic in spite of his text's archaic or medieval surface, ensures that Severian's narrative meets David Ketterer's requirement, that Apocalyptic literature concern 'the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational extrapolation and analogy or religious belief) with the "real world", thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that "real world" in the reader's head' (20). Ketterer identifies this philosophical Apocalypse in particular with works that place humanity in a new perspective, that create a vision of 'the present world in other terms' (21). The premise of such a work must be 'transforming', deeply speculative. The effect of the 'New Sun' cycle on the reader is compounded of the familiarity of its historical nomenclature and its archetypal patterns of quest on the one side, and on the other of its disorienting questioning of the fabric of reality, of human religious and perceptual assumptions.

Severian's world is both related to the known past, and jarringly discontinuous with it.

Wolfe creates a new world, with its own culture, languages, history, and thought, with a narrator who serves as its personification. Thus, Ketterer's 'metaphorical destruction' of the 'real world' is conventionally realized. But Wolfe's subversion of the 'real' is far more fundamental. Those elements of the present, phenomenal world found in Severian's account are rarely what their conventional labels imply. The 'cathedral' of the order of Pelerines, for example, is revealed to be a tent (ST, Ch. XVIII). This is surprising, both disorienting and anticlimactic. The reader is frequently led to doubt the reliability of the text, its quantifiable relation to images and vocabulary that are known. Such uncertainty is seen in the descriptive fluidity of the following passage:

> 'Something vast and bright - a moon, a sun - was rising, madly shaped and drenched with light. It was as though some golden seed soared in the atmosphere of this strange world, borne aloft upon a billion black filaments. It was the Ship; and the sun called Yesod, though the horizon was above it, struck that vast hull full and was reflected with a light that seemed like day' (UNS, 139).

Severian inhabits a numinous world, not easily comprehended, its very referents untrustworthy, as is shown in Chapter Two's discussion of Wolfe's narrative complication. A ship that is also moon, sun, and seed, a sun that shines below the horizon but is also visible: paradoxes are continuously present, some soluble, others less so. Wolfe's replacement of the present

world with his alien, theistic domain is absolute: a philosophical Apocalypse is realized, to match its literal counterpart.

But Wolfe is fully aware, at this level as on the literal one, of the negative, or destructive, potentiality of Apocalypse. The irony that governs Wolfe's fecundity of imagination is the fact of its imminent destruction: Urth is a dying world, and Wolfe, in a second annihilation of a world, destroys Urth in the final deluge, submerging her wonders beneath the sea. The already-remarked vagueness of the new Urth, Ushas, her embryonic condition and consequent inscrutability, reflect the dubiety and unknowability of new worlds once again.

Thus, Wolfe embodies religious images and processes in his work, with the Apocalyptic governing plot, narrative, and the relations between author and created world, between text and reader. But this religious influence is used to demonstrate the destructive nature of any creative process, and the difficulty of deciding motivation, in God as well as author. The unfolding suggested by 'Apocalypse' remains necessarily doubtful, raising more questions than answers.

Catholicism : Affirmation and Denial

Wolfe's third major religious patterning in the 'New Sun' cycle has its roots in Roman Catholicism, a faith to which he claims he conventionally adheres (22). Wolfe utilizes the doctrines and tenets of Catholicism to inform the arguments and symbolism

of his text. Ultimately, Catholic teaching serves to underlie the cycle's presentation of the uncertainty, the moral ambiguity, of the world. The very catholicity of Catholicism exposes it to this heterodox interpretation; its 'radical openness to all truth and to every authentic human and spiritual value' (23) is an openness inviting ambiguity.

On a descriptive level, the cycle reflects many elements of Catholic belief. The Church's hierarchical structure is mirrored by that of Severian's universe: the Increate is served by Hierogrammates, Hierarchs, and Hierodules, each type with its distinct place in the Divine Plan. The Hierogrammates are angels, the Hierarchs their children, the Hierodules ('holy slaves') are alien beings; but humans too serve, Severian as Messiah, others as priests and laity. But even while hierarchy functions as an organizing principle, it leaves the lower levels in ignorance of the same principle, its purpose and meaning. Severian compares the `body politic' to a 'pyramid of lives' (SL, 252). Although he, as Autarch and Conciliator, has more awareness of his reasons for existence and action than his subjects, although he stands at the summit of the pyramid, he is only gradually, and even then vaguely, aware of any ordained teleology. In The Urth of the New Sun, Severian, Autarch and Epitome by this time, hears that the angels and their offspring play a cosmic game of 'shah mat', or chess, against `Entropy' (UNS, 135); he had not known this before. In Wolfe's world, the assurance of hierarchy is just as much a reminder of ignorance.

Wolfe also respects the Catholic tradition of reason, a reason which faith must match, as the former is conceived as a gift from God (24). The cerebral quality of Severian's narrative, with its intellectual digressions, lends the text a rational gloss. As Science Fiction, the 'New Sun' series partakes of the cognitive element declared by Darko Suvin to be essential to the genre (25). But the very inconclusiveness of Severian's quest implies that reason, however important, has the limitation of never supplying conclusive answers. In The Sword of the Lictor. Severian seeks to probe the nature of reason itself, wondering what separates animal instinct from human intellect; he observes nest-building hawks, and ponders the basis of their programmatic behaviour. He can find no answer to his inquiry: 'The wheeling birds traced their hieroglyphics in the air, but they were not for me to read' (SL, 144). Reason itself is insusceptible to rational explanation. Again Wolfe argues the limitations of human knowledge; faith in hierarchy and rational inquiry are alike imperfect, and the intellectual support they can lend each other is undermined. Like C.S. Lewis, Walter M. Miller, and James Blish, Wolfe combines Catholicism (Anglicanism in the case of Lewis) and Science Fiction in order to probe the extent of humanity's actual and potential awareness of the Divine and the laws it dictates; like them, he concludes that knowledge is a doubtful tool, bound by its own lack of completeness, misleading (26). As Joan Gordon remarks, in a divine world 'the mazes of elaborate detail in Wolfe's baroque style take on

a new necessity: they replicate the way we approach unseeable, eternal ideas' (27). The 'New Sun' cycle is appropriately labyrinthine, in argument and form.

In addressing Catholicism's modes of metaphysical explanation, Wolfe turns positive traditional arguments into darker, less certain ones. As Richard McBrien argues, Catholicism answers questions of meaning in terms of the 'reality of God' (28). Never is Severian in doubt as to the Increate's existence; but that very existence, accompanied by the veil across the face of God and His actions, makes theological inquiry a baffling necessity. Three cardinal concerns of Catholicism - sacramentality, mediation, and communion (29) - suffuse the 'New Sun' volumes, both in the form of Severian's arguments and the symbolism of his recollections. It is profitable to consider how in each instance Wolfe complicates a conventionally clear and profound conviction.

Sacramentality, McBrien declares, reflects the assumption that God can make Himself manifest in anything in the present world; His presence makes sacraments of the things of history, creating a positive world, one with a fundamentally positive teleology, a movement towards the kingdom of God (30). The world of Urth is in the hands of the Deity and his servants, the Hierogrammates (CA, 279-280 and UNS, 153), who control its destiny. But in Severian's narrative, the Divine Plan, however bright the promise of Ushas, is uncertain, and coloured with the complicating emotions of the architects. In The Citadel of the Autarch, Severian reveals the general nature of

the Plan, as the 'key to the universe' (CA, 270-280). Because the Hierogrammates were harshly moulded in a previous cycle of the cosmos by humans or near-humans, 'they shape us now as they themselves were shaped; it is at once their repayment and their revenge' (CA, 279). Urth is thus a harsh place; Severian proceeds to declare that the anvil on which humanity is being forged 'is the necessity of life', and that that necessity takes the form of war (CA, 280) The mechanics of salvation are purgatorial on Urth; and not only is the ultimate object of the Plan forever obscured by mortal ignorance, but its very outcome is uncertain, as the terminal future of ice that may await Urth implies (CA, Ch XVII). The Increate infuses much on Urth, intervening through the Hierodules 'to inculcate wisdom in the human race' (SL, 262), acting through Severian as His 'Thesis' and 'Messiah' and through the Pelerines and others in less dramatic ways (as in the functioning of the Pelerines as a hospital order in The Citadel of the Autarch, healing and advising). But conviction of a positive teleology is not easy in a world of war and uncertain destiny, in a world of angels who behave deceptively and capriciously (as Tzadkiel does in The Urth of the New Sun).

The principle of sacramentality depends upon the second of McBrien's concerns, that of mediation. The concept of the mediation of created phenomena, or sacraments, between God and humans in their interaction (31) is embodied in the symbolism of the 'New Sun' cycle. Two objects in Severian's possession act as his personal sacramental tokens, or symbols: the sword 'Terminus Est', made to represent both male and female

destructiveness and cruelty by its opposite 'man-edge and woman-edge' (ST, 129), and the 'Claw of the Conciliator', the blue gem of healing that Severian, apparently accidentally, acquires from the Pelerines (ST. Ch. XVIII). As executioner, Severian uses the sword repeatedly. in the execution of Agilus (ST, 264-5) and Morwenna (CC, 37). As healer. he uses the Claw to resurrect Dorcas (ST, 202-203) and to heal the girl in the jacal (JL, 66-67), among many others. Although 'Terminus Est' is eventually destroyed (SL, 291), while the Claw remains in an immortal and seemingly replicable form (CA, 253), for the first three volumes of the cycle, Severian's sacramental objects, filled with divine power, are of similar weight. Wolfe regards the dark aspect of Christ (as torturer) as a necessary part of a Messiah's design (32), just as harshness and pain are necessary phases of the Divine Plan. Severian's sacraments, then, reflect the cruel as well as the merciful aspects of the Increate; all that is mediated is not kind. Thus Wolfe darkens the influence of God, and makes Divine manifestations ambiguous, as ambiguous as the natural contrary tendencies in the character of Severian. the appointed tormentor and saviour.

McBrien's third basis for the Catholic view of God and the world - communion - makes a further mediation between individual and God necessary, that of a community of faith (33). Wolfe reflects this conviction in the patterns of mass expectation and millenial prophecy common on Urth. But the symbolism of communion. and its implications for individual insight, are, again, rendered ambiguous in his text, and even sinister. In

The Claw of the Conciliator, Severian encounters a ceremony paralleling the Eucharist - the ceremonial consumption, among Vodalus' rebels, of the flesh of other human beings, so that their memories and characters may be imbibed and savoured (CC, 98-99). Through this cannibalism, Severian absorbs the personality of his dead lover, Thecla - 'She was there, filling me as a melody fills a cottage' (CC, 99). He gives her an 'attenuated' immortality of sorts; rapturously, he knows her again, better than before; but the principle of the consumption of the blood and flesh of Christ is lowered, rendered base and horrifying. Severian later meets a creature belonging to the species from which the ceremonial drug, the 'analeptic alzabo', is extracted (SL, Ch. XVI), finding it to be a psychic vampire, feeding upon and mindlessly imitating the thoughts of its victims. A divinely symbolic action, the Eucharist, is made, not communal and affirmatory, but animal, mere anthropophagy. Furthermore, the concept of the communion of souls, again literally reflected in the 'New Sun' cycle, is as confusing in Severian's narrative as it is fulfilling. When Severian, captive among the Ascians, succeeds the previous Autarch, he absorbs the memories of hundreds of his predecessors. The experience, as with his previous use of the Alzabo drug, is enlightening, broadening his consciousness:

> 'The dead Autarch, whose face I had seen in scarlet ruin a few moments before, now lived again. My eyes and hands were his.... His mind was mine and filled mine with lore whose existence I had never suspected and with the knowledge other minds had brought to his.' (CA, 231).

But the communion with the dead is also disorienting:

> 'The phenomenal world seemed dim and vague as a picture sketched in sand over which an errant wind veered and moaned.' (CA. 237).

Severian's confusion as a narrator stems to a large extent from his multiple personality, the sharing of his brain with dead minds. Communion does little to help solve the enigmas and paradoxes of Urth and Briah; it is a communion of the mortal and ignorant, and the blood and flesh of the Son of God himself is never consumed.

The doctrines of Roman Catholicism are eventually most engaged in the 'New Sun' cycle where they specifically justify a view of the world as ambiguous or unquantifiable. As Joan Gordon demonstrates, Wolfe refers in his text to two assumptions: one, found originally in Second Corinthians, stating that while the 'seen' things of the phenomenal world are bound by time, the unseen, the aspects of Spirit and the Divine, are eternal; and a second, the idea of 'precognition, with free will' (34). The first idea is reflected when Severian refers to men as images that are visual only, the creation of a 'pattering' of 'photons' (CA. 139). This view of the world as 'Maya', or illusion, justifies the unreliability of the text, as all Severian's experiences are made suspect, the products of hallucination. The second idea stems from the same assumption: the Divine is eternal, and sees all of time simultaneously (35); we in the phenomenal world, however ephemeral, have free will, because although the Divine knows

what we will do, and plans accordingly, it does not dictate our actions (36). Gordon concludes that this Boethian perspective makes the morally ambiguous actions of Severian, and of all others, serve the Increate equally well if, in Severian's words, they 'obey' or if they 'rebel' (37). All behaviour, even that of a Torturer, serves the Divine Plan, so acquiring a virtuous justification. But this interpretation is placed in doubt by the publication after Gordon's essay of The Urth of the New Sun; the apocalyptic, divinely-ordained deluge, causing the deaths of millions, renders any conventional Christian association of virtue with obedience to the Divine Will purposefully dubious. The justification lent to evil and cruelty by their service to the Increate is, instead, once again indicative of the uncertainty of the world; morality itself is blurred, as impermanent as any other aspect of the merely phenomenal universe.

The Messiah : Torturer and Redeemer

Wolfe's heterodox use of Catholic motifs is matched by the fourth, and last, of his religious devices: his creation, in Severian, of an ambivalent and perverse Messiah. Gordon associates Severian, by a process of logic and analogy, with Jesus Christ; and the resemblance is plain and deliberate. But as Wolfe remarks in an essay, Christ, as a carpenter, is known to have produced only one artifact, a whip, and thus:

> 'If Christ knew not only the pain of torture but the pain of being a torturer (as it seems certain to me that he did) then the dark figure is also capable of being a heroic and even a holy figure, like the black Christs carved in Africa' (38).

If Christ had co-existing elements of light and dark in his character, then Severian even more so, through his apprenticeship as a 'carnifex', and the opposed symbolism of his sword and his jewel. Excepting that his early 'crime', his co-operation with Thecla's desire for suicide, is an act of mercy, to save her from torture, Severian closely resembles Hyam Macroby's figure of 'The Sacred Executioner':

> 'By this I mean the figure of a person (either a god or a human being) who slays another person, and as a result is treated as both sacred and accursed. Commonly, such a person in myth is ejected from society and condemned to long wanderings; yet he is also regarded as having special privileges....' (39).

Severian is an unusual Messiah through the reader's lack of certainty as to his mission, his moral imperative; this stems from the ignorance in which Severian himself stands. Until the end of his wanderings in The Citadel of the Autarch, Severian has only vague intimations of why he is carrying the Claw of the Conciliator, of his destiny to be Autarch, and even at the end of The Urth of the New Sun he is in perplexity. Unlike the Christ-figures created by other Science Fiction writers, such as Orson Scott Card, Gordon R. Dickson, Frank Herbert, and Robert A. Heinlein (40), Severian is guided only by instinct, by inertia, or the pull of forces he cannot understand. In Wolfe's novels, causation is usually unsure, partaking of the fortuitous or the supernatural. Wolfe

deliberately sets his hero apart from the archetype of the inspired leader and wanderer; in order to emphasize this difference, Wolfe makes the resemblance between Severian and Christ a parodic one. Incidents and images in the 'New Sun' cycle that recall the New Testament carry different, often ironic, freight (41). It is the purpose of this section of this chapter to trace Severian's growth as a Messiah through the cycle. indicating how Wolfe develops his parallel characteristics of ignorance and moral ambiguity, how Wolfe mirrors Severian through a succession of anti-messiahs, and how episodes in the narrative stand in parodic relation to their Biblical originals. Through this set of processes, Wolfe creates a hero appropriate to his fallen world, representative of its darkness, yet carrying some hope and a growing wisdom. The difficulty of knowing and achieving is exhaustively demonstrated; and in this heterodox text, the way is opened for interpretations in terms of other religions.

In the original tetralogy of volumes - The Book of the New Sun - Wolfe develops Severian's character and experience through stages of environment and narrative pacing. The first volume, The Shadow of the Torturer, is the urban phase of the cycle, set entirely within the sprawling, ruinous, stratified city of Nessus, by the river Gyoll. Severian describes his childhood and apprenticeship as a Torturer, within the Matachin Tower, which is really an ancient. grounded spaceship. He falls in love with the aristocratic prisoner Thecla. and saves her further torment by permitting her suicide. Exiled to a provincial town, he begins his odyssey there by wandering the

City, encountering Thespians and thieves, all of whom are not what they seem. He fights a duel, acts in a play, performs an execution, visits the Botanical Gardens.

The very aimlessness of these latter actions, connected only by the secret motivations of Agia and Agilus, the plebeian haberdashers, and Dr. Talos and Baldanders, the scientists-turned-actors, all of whom manipulate Severian, who himself lacks all but the vaguest direction, is deliberate. If Severian has a vocation or a destiny, it is mysterious to the reader and himself. He comments often on his ignorance, his irresolute lethargy; attributing it, for example, to the oppressive effects of his perfect memory (ST, 19). The thread of his speculations in this volume often runs towards an acknowledgement of the impossibility of knowledge: 'The would-be sorcerer alone has faith in the efficacy of pure knowledge; rational people know that things act of themselves or not at all' (ST, 17) This is also seen in Severian's already-cited comments on levels of meaning, some transsubstantial, metaphysical, unattainable. The labyrinthine city of Nessus is an appropriate backdrop to such thoughts, for as an officer tells Severian, 'The City grows and changes every night, like writing chalked on a wall.' (ST, 134).

In this milieu of impermanence and mystification, a rambling narrative naturally ensues. Severian spends most of the second half of the volume in preparation for a duel, one without explanation or necessity; his opponent is anonymous, masked and a stranger (ST, 156). Severian acts without true

volition, thinking that 'if I were killed, that would be no more than just'. (ST, 156) Thus, to ready himself for a combat unrelated to his mission to the provincial capital of Thrax, he goes in quest of a weapon in the Botanical Gardens, a long and dangerous process. He miraculously survives the duel (Ch. XXVII) and in due course acts in Dr. Talos' play, without any concrete motive once more. All the play serves to demonstrate is the impossibility of communication (ST, 274-5). Thus, at the end of The Shadow of the Torturer, Severian is only just leaving Nessus, the start of his journeying.

Wolfe skilfully explodes the archetype of the Messiah possessed of prophetic purpose; assured destinies and linear quests are not to be Severian's. A consequence is moral ambiguity; Severian's actions have a random violence, most prominently seen in the duel, and a ritual of torment, as in his execution of Agilus, when the shadow of his sword - the shadow of the torturer, darkening the world - is described as 'forever blotting out the sun' (ST, 265). Whatever justifications the Increate's plan for the world provides for necessary cruelty, Severian is by nurture and behaviour a figure of frequently menacing darkness, as Agia tells him (ST, 163) and as Dr. Talos suggests when he gives Severian the allegorical label of 'Death' (p.273). To escape such labels is difficult for Severian, and Wolfe's attribution of a necessary heroism to the figure of the 'Black Christ' is recalled. Cruelty is part of any true Messiah, who thus becomes a symbol not of teleology but of the uncertainty that pervades Wolfe's world.

The comparisons that naturally arise between Severian and Christ are present already in The Shadow of the Torturer. Like Christ, Severian is educated as a craftsman; but this craftsmanship is a parody of carpentry, as methodical, detailed, and dedicated, but devoted to exquisite cruelty (ST, 114-117). This distortion of Christian echoes is sustained through the entire volume. When Severian performs his first act of mercy (to Thecla), it consists of allowing her to die (ST, 119). Cruelty is made the stuff of miracles. Furthermore, unlike Christ, Severian is often unaware of his miraculous actions. When he resurrects Dorcas, he is conscious only that a woman is swimming in the water, not that she is a re-animated corpse (ST, 201-202). Severian is similarly unconscious of miraculous processes when he revivifies himself (ST, 239). That incident carries an additional, unexpected irony, that this miracle is self-directed. Wolfe distances Severian from his Biblical predecessor by complicating him, creating darker parodies of Christ's wonders of healing and rebirth. In Wolfe's philosophy, a Messiah must embody uncertainties, must be human in his ignorance, to be a true part of the merely phenomenal world he saves. The chosen of the Increate is perplexed, fallible, perplexing. And yet he is part of the Divine Plan for the Cosmos, which darkly builds, and develops; Severian's miracles are merciful and wonderful in their end results. It is their perversity, their indirectness alone, that mirrors the obscurity of the world.

The Messiah has thus some purpose and virtue, however hidden. To intimate this, Wolfe begins in his opening volume to create counter-Messiahs, who represent egotistical, truly evil or empty opposites of the Christ-figure. Agia, as manipulator and thief, and the rebel leader Vodalus, with his idle romanticism (ST, Ch. I), begin to emerge as such entities. By contrast, Severian's passivity, conventionally frustrating, becomes a virtue, the only truly beneficial behaviour in a universe where the outcome of any action cannot truly be guessed. He does the least harm.

The 'New Sun' cycle's second volume, The Claw of the Conciliator, carries Wolfe's theme of the ambiguous Messiah further forward. Severian travels to the palace of the Autarch - the House Absolute - carrying out executions for municipal authorities, and accompanied by a new acquaintance, Jonas, who turns out to be a cyborg, a half-artificial survivor from an ancient spaceship. He is kidnapped by Vodalus, who then entrusts him with a message; he conveys it to the palace, where he is imprisoned, escapes, meets the Autarch (who appears to be Vodalus' agent), acts in a court performance of Dr. Talos' play, and much else. Leaving for Thrax, he encounters an undine, who is a messenger from the submarine tyrant Abaia. Finally, Severian has a mystical experience in a ruined town, venturing psychically into the past, where he beholds Apu-Punchau, who is later revealed to be himself, or his alter ego. As this account suggests, the second volume has more narrative momentum than the first. But Wolfe contrives to make its events function much as those before.

Although The Claw of the Conciliator is pastoral in its setting, providing nature's counterpoint to Severian's earlier urban experience, its landscapes suggest conflict between humankind and the natural order. The House Absolute is 'landscaped' to seem natural (CC, 121), and Vodalus calls himself 'the liege of leaves', making his shadow court in the forests (Ch. IX). These attempts to arrogate or assume the semblance of nature are shown to be futile, not only by the decadence of the palace and the cannibal addiction of Vodalus' followers - unnatural and failed already - but also by scenes of nature's revenge. When exploring an underground cavern, Severian sees man-apes, the decayed descendants of humans turned troglodyte, conquered by their environment:

> 'I felt more sorrow for those who had triumphed in the dark battles than for those who had poured out their blood in that endless night' (CC, 54).

In Chapter XXX, Severian enters a town, ruined, worn away by wind and rain. Ultimately, his lessons from nature are of its ability to resist human incursions and inquiry; like Nessus, this aspect of Urth does not encourage confidence that secrets will be explained.

Perhaps in consequence, Severian continues in this volume to act in ignorance. He enters the caves in response to a false message (CC, 45); he acts as Vodalus' messenger out of false confidence in the rebel leader; he believes the Autarch to be Vodalus' agent (CC, 185), and he fails for a long time to

recognize that Dr Talos and Jolenta (a voluptuous actress) are artificial beings. Wolfe's prodigies of invention are not helpful to Severian in his quest for understanding - 'there are beings - and artifacts - against which we batter our intelligence raw' (p.116).

Severian's cruel aspect continues to manifest itself in The Claw of the Conciliator, particularly in Chapter IV; here, after his execution of Morwenna, even the justification his role as executioner lends his action is undermined when it emerges that the 'criminal' was innocent (CC, 38). To offset this, Severian continues to behave as a healer, awakener of the dead, and Messiah. Unfortunately, his miracles still bear stigmas of ambiguity and failure. When he resurrects the uhlan he and Jonas meet near the House Absolute (CC, 111), this is only after he allowed the uhlan to be killed in order to save his own life, in the name of the 'New Sun' (CC, 106). Despite Severian's best attempts, Jolenta, briefly his lover, dies, and only then does he recognize her as 'the waitress who had served Dr Talos, Baldanders and me in the cafe in Nessus' (CC, 295). One of the man-apes whom he fights in the great caverns begs him to heal its wounds, but he lacks time to do so before Jonas arrives and frightens it away (CC, 61-62). As a leader and liberator, Severian is not especially successful either, as he fails to deliver the other prisoners from the Autarch's dungeon, even while he escapes with Jonas (CC, Ch. XVIII). Thus, Wolfe continues in this volume to render his Messiah a hesitant and unaware figure, bereft of rigorous purpose.

In this volume, the anti-Messiahs, Vodalus, Agia, and Abaia, continue also to be developed; and again they indicate by contrast Severian's virtues and the value of his indecisiveness. They testify gradually to his moral evolution as well. The first, Vodalus, is a romantic figure, leading, like Robin Hood, a revolt from the forests. He describes to Severian his dream, of a return to cosmic power for the human race - 'the road to domination' (CC, 84). But he and his followers are anthropophages, who later in the Cycle are shown to be servants of Abaia and the Ascians. They represent also, in their advocacy of unlimited human power, a threat to the wider universe, of precisely the kind that makes the Hierogrammates doubt the wisdom of sending Urth its New Sun; thus, Hierogrammates judge Severian, to judge the future he, a human being, 'will create' (UNS, 153). Vodalus' technophilic attitudes, criticized in the text, are typical of conventional Science Fiction, and are thoroughly rebutted. Agia, another emerging rebel, acts through deceit, as when she sends Severian a letter, supposedly from Thecla (CC, 42-44), in order to lure him into an ambush. Severian succumbs to the blandishments of Vodalus and Agia, falling into the trap of the letter, and later carrying Vodalus' message; but by the closing stages of The Claw of the Conciliator, he is conspicuously wiser, rejecting the overtures of Abaia's undine in favour of the human companionship of Dorcas (CC, 263). Not only does Severian gain in stature by comparison with these rivals personifying greed and evil, but he learns from them by negative example. Although this volume ends with a mystifying

seance in the ruined town, one raising the enigma of the long-dead Apu-Punchau, Wolfe by this stage allows his narrative to yield hints of meaning and moral direction.

The cycle's third volume, The Sword of the Lictor, contains a consistent acceleration of narrative pace, one affording Severian fresh opportunities for enlightenment and self-definition. In a long, picaresque journey, Severian comes to Thrax to serve as its Lictor, or Chief Torturer of the provincial town. For a second time, he must flee after releasing a condemned woman from her designated fate; he enters the wilderness, where he meets monsters, a resurrected tyrant, a society of magicians, and ultimately storms the Gothic castle of Baldanders, after a debate with aliens; in his final battle with the giant of the castle, both his sword and the Claw of the Conciliator are shattered.

The plethora of wonders encountered in The Sword of the Lictor is complicating and confusing, and yet the very nature of the book's landscapes, their sublimity and resonance with the unconscious, makes them Gothic, exemplary (42). Severian's environment, the wilderness, compels him to develop his character and purpose, and his morality, while still uncertain, is improved by enforced choice and more reversed examples. The sublime landscape is best summarized by Mount Typhon, carved in the likeness of a man:

> 'Then the mountain rose before us, too near for us to see it as the image of a man. Great folded slopes rolled down out of a bank of cloud; they were, I knew, but the sculptured drapery of his robes. How often he must have risen from sleep and put them on, perhaps without reflecting that they would be preserved here for the ages, so huge as almost to escape the sight of humankind.' (SL, 183).

The mirroring of the human form in Nature is a product of regal vanity on a dead ruler's part, as he had the mountain carved in his likeness; but such sights as these excite in Severian such visionary thoughts as his speculations on Utopia (SL, 101-102), on nobility and the nature of the Divine. But the landscape is also populated by monstrosities, such as the Alzabo (SL, Ch. XVI), the human-animal zoanthrops (Ch. XVII), the two-headed tyrant Typhon (SL, Ch. XXV), and the experimental creatures created by Baldanders (SL, 285). However much these warn against evil, they intimate that it can never be ignored, is always present as a principle.

Although The Sword of the Lictor makes Severian's ultimate mission little clearer, he meets three major challenges with increased resolution. The first comes when the Archon of Thrax, Abdiesus, orders Severian to execute Cyriaca, a member of the local gentry. As with Thecla in The Shadow of the Torturer, Severian is in sympathy with the victim, and allows her to escape (SL, 94). On this occasion, mercy allows the woman to live, and in this respect Severian has matured as a giver of mercy. This again, however, means his exile, and this time he has no destination, and leaves countless other prisoners behind, in the Vincula, the 'House of Chains', in

Thrax. In a second episode, the outcome again speaks of growing purpose and moral insight in Severian, but is complicated and imperfect all the same. While on Mount Typhon, in the wilderness, Severian revives the long-dead monarch in whose likeness the mountain has been carved. Typhon is a tyrant, who longs to rule again - 'I shall be autarch again' (SL, 212). He tempts Severian - in a direct parallel with the temptation of Christ in the Wilderness - promising that Severian shall rule Urth as his 'steward' (p.213). Severian resists his blandishments but, true to his character as a Torturer, and in quite un-Christlike manner, kills Typhon (SL, 215). Wolfe's distortion of the Christ myth operates again to emphasize Severian's difference; and typically of the 'New Sun' cycle, good and evil co-exist, serving the same cause. Typhon has used the body of a slave, Piaton, as a vehicle for his own head and personality; the killing of Typhon is mercy for Piaton. In Severian's equation of death and mercy, a fundamental moral dilemma remains, at least in conventional terms.

In a third section of the narrative, Severian plays a truly Messianic part - that of the liberator of an oppressed people. He successfully leads the islanders of Lake Diuturna to the conquest of the castle of the giant Baldanders, their foe, who makes experimental teratoids out of human material (SL, Chs. XXXVI and XXXVII). But again Wolfe makes Severian's achievement unsatisfactory, both in its results and in its nature. Baldanders, being an aquatic entity, simply leaps into the lake to escape; the only dead on his side are his own

victims, the creatures from his laboratory (SL, 286). Severian loses his sword, shattered in his fight with Baldanders, and it seems that the Claw has been destroyed also, until its kernel, the real essence of its being, is found again (SL, 296). Wolfe intimates the emptiness of the victory also in the sense of its flamboyant futility; Severian, again quite unlike Christ, is a leader in war, his means unsubtle, his reward (the love of the woman Pia) carnal, the mark of a conventional, worldly hero. In any case, he soon leaves the castle, his concern shifting elsewhere.

To emphasize Severian's only partial realization of any Christ-like role, Wolfe at a critical stage in the text deprives Severian of the company Severian needs to become whole, that of the eponymous boy whom he adopts as his son. Owing to a failure of resolution, Severian cannot use the Claw to resurrect the dead child (SL, 197), just as earlier he could not rescue the boy's family. Miracles remain uncertain resources where the miracle-worker is unsure of the means, and his own capability, of effecting them. The Sword of the Lictor, however, does take Severian's awareness and purpose forward, as the frequency of his speculations and attempts at positive action grows. To this extent, the Gothic settings fulfil their inspirational purpose, and it is significant that while the sword 'Terminus Est' is destroyed, the Claw remains to enlighten Severian: 'each time I emerged [from it], I felt I had gained some inexpressible insight into immense realities' (SL, 298).

The fourth and final volume of The Book of the New Sun, The Citadel of the Autarch, brings Severian to the position of Autarch - but he is still only a potential Saviour of Urth. In this closing stage of the initial formation of Severian's character as Messiah, there are many revelations, but an ultimate obscurity remains. Wolfe uses a landscape of war to test and develop Severian in this volume. After leaving Lake Diuturna, Severian arrives in the north, where the Ascians, the pawns of Abaia and Erebus, the undersea tyrants, are waging a fanatical war against the armies of the Autarch. Severian resurrects a dead soldier, Miles, and accompanies him to a field hospital managed by the Pelerines, where many exemplary tales are told. Sent as a messenger to a hermit, Severian beholds the entropic future the dying of the Sun holds for Urth, as the hermit is in truth a time-traveller; he wanders into the battle zone, where he fights as a soldier, before being injured in a great battle. Rescued by the Autarch, he is captured with him by the Ascians and rebels, and in captivity undertakes his mystical absorption of the dying Autarch's essence. After imprisonment and escape, he meets eidolons who embody both his memories and the instructions of the Increate. With these, he becomes Autarch, and ends his narrative as he prepares to plead for the salvation of Urth at the ends of the universe.

As The Citadel of the Autarch falls into two distinct parts, the long interlude in the field hospital and then the rapid unfolding of events and insights that follows, so its presentation of Severian is in two stages. In the first half

of the book he remains the uncertain apprentice Messiah and healer. The first two chapters, 'The Dead Soldier' and 'The Living Soldier', aptly sum up in their titles his resurrection of Miles. This emerges as more than a simple resurrection: Miles is a re-incarnation of Severian's lost companion Jonas (CA, 52). Miracles assume a personal and redemptive significance, as Severian can consciously use them to achieve good results for friends. But other acts of mercy and duty remain ineffectual. When Severian tries to aid a wounded 'gallant' by touching him with the Claw, Emilian - the wounded man - reacts with horror (CA, 65). Severian cannot use the Claw at will:

> 'I held the Claw overhead and tried to focus my thoughts on Melito and Foila as well as Emilian - on all the sick in the lazaret. It flickered and was dark' (CA, 66).

Later, Severian's determination to bring the hermit, Master Ash, down from his 'Last House' or eyrie results in the man's dissipation, as he is not bound by full temporal causality to Urth's present (CA, Ch. XVIII),. Even though Severian has relinquished the role of executioner, he remains impulsively ruthless, and presently serves as a soldier.

It is only in the second half of The Citadel of the Autarch that the resemblance of Severian to Christ, his full Messianic nature, becomes apparent. This is partly by contrast with Vodalus and Agia, the anti-Messiahs, whose forces march through landscapes of nightmare (CA, 228-229), who serve the Ascians, and who assume postures of ritualized cruelty and horror:

> 'Agia stood behind me, naked to the waist, and Hethor [her lover] behind her, showing all his rotten teeth as he cupped her breasts. I fought to escape. She slapped me with an open hand - there was a pull at my cheek, tearing pain, then the warm rush of blood' (CA. 213).

And as the old Autarch makes clear, Vodalus' dream of renewed human progress is illusory:

> '"Your wish for progress? The Ascians have it. They are deafened by it, crazed by the death of nature till they are ready to accept Erebus and the rest as Gods"' (CA, 235).

As a Messiah, Severian follows a well-trod path. Like Christ, he experiences an excruciation of pain and imprisonment, following his wounding at Agia's hands, and learns more of the meaning of pain (CA, 213-220). He has divine instruction, at least indirectly, as the eidolon of his old teacher, Malrubius, reveals to him cosmic secrets (CA, Ch. XXXI). Like Christ again, Severian comes to the Capital (Nessus) to meet his destiny:

> 'And I walked on as a mighty army, for I felt myself in the company of all those who walked in me. There were women in my ranks, smiling and grim, and children who ran and laughed and, daring Erebus and Abaia, hurled seashells into the sea' (CA, 254).

His progress is rapturous, a sense of powerful joy is conveyed. The above-cited passage, involving Severian's multitude of absorbed personalities, indicates how he typifies the Messianic

or Christic pattern: he personifies or epitomizes the people he wishes to save, assuming the burden of their hopes and fears, and - in due course - their sins. By the end of The Citadel of the Autarch, Severian is prepared, following his long apprenticeship to good and evil, to the wonder of miracles and the reality of torture, to plead for Urth's salvation before the servants of the Increate.

Although the climactic passages of this volume are revelatory, there is in the midst of revelation a constant recognition of the unreliability, and of the destructive potential, of Severian's mission to Yesod, where Urth will be judged. In Chapter XXXI, 'The Sand Garden', the aquastor Malrubius informs Severian of how he must fly to the stars, of how he may bring a 'White Fountain', the antithesis of a black hole, to replenish the Sun (CA, 248-9). A rapturous vision of a new Eden that may result occurs to Severian himself (p.246). But Malrubius cautions Severian that success is not guaranteed. '"If you fail, your manhood will be taken from you"' (CA, 249). All fertility, all potential, may be suppressed; the uncertainty of the future is seen when Malrubius, despite his divine provenance, admits, '" I can give you no assurance"'. Thus, although Severian has a conviction that the Increate and His influence are all-pervasive, Wolfe emphasizes the fugacity of the person of God, and of the specific significance of sacramental objects. Severian is worshipful when he perceives that all things are relics, and all ground holy, because they drop from the Pancreator's hand (CA, 253); Severian feels the Increate's presence, so that he feels he might 'surprise some

shining figure' at any moment (CA. 306). But the Increate is 'too large to be seen' and is indirectly present only, 'in an obscure room on another floor' (CA. 306). Human beings are motes, and cannot behold the whole. Appropriately, then, The Book of the New Sun ends cryptically, with the resolution of Severian's quest yet to come. Severian is like Christ, but partially and ironically so; he is not a literal Son of God, and his imperfections, his mortality, are clear in the dubiety and unpredictability of his revelations and his mission.

When Gene Wolfe added The Urth of the New Sun to the cycle in 1987, he gave to his readers a key, a Rosetta Stone, to allow illumination of the volumes of the tetralogy. A more expansive book than its predecessors, this sequel is directly concerned with revelation. It takes Severian, in a further autobiographical narrative, to realms unlike the dying Urth, depicted in a sublime manner and affording a readier enlightenment. Severian's descriptions are, at least initially, less melancholy than before:

> And I drank in that air! Words cannot do it justice save by saying that it was the air of Yesod, icy cold and golden with life' (UNS. 106).

Severian's wonderment is justified: he travels to the higher plane of existence, Yesod, aboard a massive starship that crosses the boundaries of the cosmos, experiencing the majesty of space amidst mutinies, intrigues, and new enigmas. On Yesod, a world seemingly all ocean and islands but in reality hollow, he faces a judgement of himself and Urth; he satisfies

this scrutiny by the Hierogrammate, or angel, Tzadkiel, and is returned to Urth knowing that the New Sun comes. But he has come to the Urth of the far past; baffled, he wanders, performing miracles, experiencing imprisonment, and confronting again the tyrant Typhon. Returning to his own era, he beholds the deluge, faces a penance by journeying to the primitive past to function as holy man among ancient aboriginals, and only belatedly, following his own resurrection, reaches the time of the New Urth, Ushas, and sees the uncertain outcome of his own, and the Increate's actions. The New Sun's gravitation has flooded Urth, and a new Adam and Eve have re-seeded the land. Where Wolfe's narratives lagged or digressed before, they now proceed at an ever more rapid pace, disclosing, challenging, intriguing. But even now ambiguities are frequently generated, and the implication grows that greater knowledge begets greater confusion.

As Severian gains in power and knowledge in The Urth of the New Sun, he continues to encounter both positive and negative Messianic examples, and to this extent he gains insight. Wolfe's text functions in a directly exemplary manner when the difference between dark necromancy, personified by Ceryx, and Christlike resurrection of the dead is demonstrated. Ceryx, perceiving Severian as a competitor, sends the dead man, Zama, to kill him; Severian transforms the walking corpse into a living man, so that 'his eyes were no longer dead things, but the human organs by which a man beheld us' (UNS, 218). Severian's ability to achieve miracles of healing advances greatly in this section of the novel, as he repairs Herena's

withered arm (UNS, 200-201) and cures the seriously ill Declan (UNS, 205). His function as executioner has been reversed; when he heals Declan, he feels the same sensation as when he executed Agilus (UNS, 205). Further on his quest, Severian meets Typhon a second time, and is able to avoid as violent a resolution to their quarrel as occurred in The Sword of the Lictor; now, he understands fully Typhon's evil and tyrannical example (UNS, 274-5). Quite deliberately, Wolfe makes Severian himself function as his own example several times in the text. Versions of his self appear to him as the processes of Divine intervention and time-travel allow his duplication: he sees himself as an empty puppet-king, a model serving as an icon for mutineers on the starship (UNS, 89-90); he sees scenes from his past from the perspective of friends and victims, in tableaux created by the Hierogrammates, and so can judge himself better (UNS, 125-6); and finally, he sees the corpse of his previous self upon his own final resurrection, the dedicated, insane, and martyred Apu-Punchau, or 'Head of Day' (UNS, 354-5). Apu-Punchau's experiences among the ancient aboriginals are the basis for Severian's tutelary role among the primitive folk of Ushas. Severian can learn, as his own Messianic nature is presented to him in its sundry potential forms.

The central symbolism of The Urth of the New Sun is also indicative of the possibility of knowledge, even of the Divine. Wolfe's use of the term 'Briah' to describe Urth's universe and of 'Yesod' as a name for the realm of the Hierogrammates invokes the Cabbalistic terminology of early modern Hebrew

mystics and their successors. While this complicates any simple Christian or Catholic message that the 'New Sun' cycle may carry, it does lend meaning to Severian's quest and his actions on Yesod. The original Cabbalists, in the despair and isolation of the Diaspora, developed symbolic structures allowing for communion with the Divine, for the involvement of God in the affairs of men (43). In their belief, while the original God, the Ein Sof, was inaccessible to humanity, His emanations, his qualities and influences, could be drawn by human contemplation and devotion into the world. These emanations, or Sefiroth, ten in number and symbolically configured as the primordial Adam or as a cosmic Tree, formed a structured hierarchy, open to purified man and rewarding the dedication of the lonely and persecuted Jews (44). The realm of the Sefiroth is described as 'atsiluth', a world where the full Torah, or Divine word, is apprehensible; but in 'beriah', the 'world of creation', the Torah only appears as a sequence of 'holy names of God' (45). Thus, our universe, beriah or Wolfe's 'Briah' is a place of imperfect knowledge, where great effort is needed to grasp Divine meanings. Our world is below 'atsiluth', which is a soaring 'archetypal seal', only open to a few mystics.

In the course of mystical discovery, only the lower emanations are accessible, and a decisive role is played by Yesod, a procreative or symbolically phallic member of the Sefiroth. In the Sefirotic tree, Tiferet acts as the 'uncreated word' of God; another emanation, Netsah, releases this as an effusion of light, which Hod refracts into its phenomenal forms, to be

transmitted through Yesod into Malkuth, the community of Israel (46). Thus, Wolfe uses Yesod as a symbol or medium of the Increate's, or God's, involvement in the world. The Cabbalists believed that mystical devotion could release divine sparks that lingered in the world, restore the primordial vigour and power of Adam before the Fall (47). In Wolfe's symbolism, Severian's mission to Yesod becomes, consequently, a bid to bring the Divine back to Urth; the New Sun is an emanation of God, returning to renew the world. As the 'Epitome of Urth', Severian acquires precisely the characteristics attributed to the Primordial Adam, or Adam Kadmon: immortality, proximity to God, superhuman power. He renews humanity and himself, he attains the mystical goal.

The Cabbalists often viewed the Sefiroth as qualities that engaged in partnerships, marriages, even erotic twinings; and from this, Severian's pronounced erotic aspect gains justification. His junction with the Hierarch Apheta (UNS. 145) becomes a Hieros Gamos, a Sacred marriage of Yesod and Briah. Although he dismisses the cosmic symbolism of their copulation ('all folly'), he recognizes that something is reshaped in this process - himself, and by extension the humanity he epitomizes. The junction of Tiferet and Malkuth through phallic Yesod occurs, the Sefirotic light enters and reshapes Briah, the world. Through his Cabbalistic symbolism Wolfe suggests the operation of the Divine in the world, the change that human striving and prayer can induce in the condition of Earth, of life. But the difficulty of this process, the imperfection of the Apocalyptic result that it

brings, the implication that only a few can attain higher knowledge: these qualify the mystical path. Wolfe's use of the symbolism of Christ adds to the impression that even in the midst of revelation, such qualifications abound.

The Urth of the New Sun makes the literal association of Severian with Christ more pronounced than before; specific incidents recapitulate specific elements of the Gospels. Severian, like Christ, wanders the countryside after returning to Urth; he performs miracles, and preaches a message of redemption. He is betrayed by friends into the hands of the ruling tyrant, to suffer imprisonment and physical abuse; the actions of Judas Iscariot and their aftermath are precisely echoed. There is a Crucifixion of sorts; in due course, Severian emerges from his own tomb or cenotaph, in a parallel to the Resurrection. Finally, there is an apocalyptic redemption of the world, resembling the visionary promises of Parousia and the millenium contained in the Book of Revelation. But in identifying Severian with Christ, Wolfe is also pointing to decided differences; he is portraying an imperfect Messiah, whose humanity commits him to error, and whose distance from the Divine is far greater than Christ's. Even the Saviour of mankind is, in a universe governed by illusion and ignorance, impulsive, a tool of cruelty, a hapless victim of bitter irony. The details of Severian's Christlike path reveal the scope of Wolfe's parodic treatment of the Christ myth.

When Severian proclaims his mission as Conciliator to the villagers of Vici (UNS, 204), he is ignorant of the fact that he

is in Urth's far past. The message he brings is one he himself heard in his own, far-future time; in short, he begets the legend that, passed down over the generations, will motivate his young self in times that for him are gone, but lie ahead for all others. Revelation and prophecy, unlike their Biblical originals, become circular and paradoxical, self-engendering. Later, Severian realizes this fully:

> 'Declan wished to know how Urth would fare when the New Sun came: and I, understanding little more than he did himself, drew upon Dr Talos' play, never thinking that in a time yet to come Dr Talos' play would be drawn from my words' (UNS, 266).

Severian borrows from the future to inform the past, and does so inaccurately; prophecy is placed in doubt, and its Divine provenance made suspect. In another respect Severian departs from his model: he is, upon being betrayed, murderously violent, killing three soldiers (UNS, 247); when he is imprisoned in the Matachin Tower, he slays the Prefect, and attempts escape (UNS, 255). He is still a Torturer by nature, and does not redeem by any meek example. When brought before the tyrant, Typhon, he presents a dirk he had concealed on his person; this results in a crucifixion, not of himself, but of the officer whose negligence permitted him to carry the weapon into Typhon's presence (UNS, 274-5). Severian frees the officer, and starts a rebellion. His involvement in temporal affairs, his activism and violence, achieve immediate effects, but the reader may doubt their long-term wisdom. By

distorting the events of the New Testament, Wolfe indicates how a human, ignorant messiah is likely to operate in a dark world governed by a remote and inscrutable God. The role is ambiguous of necessity.

Severian's emergence from a tomb echoes Christ's Resurrection, but only superficially; he is sent back to his own era by a mischievous aspect of the angel Tzadkiel, and materializes in a cenotaph erected in his memory, decades after he left for Yesod (UNS, 289). His genuine resurrections occur elsewhere; this parodic version of a Biblical event is a trick of one of God's servants, a minor jest. It is in this sardonic spirit that much of Severian's narrative may be viewed: he is an ignorant puppet of ultimate forces, never able to attain any clear, Christlike resolution to the problems of the world. The final ironic echo of the Christ-legend that Wolfe creates is in the nature of inversion: Christ died to save humanity, but in The Urth of the New Sun it is humanity that dies in the deluge, and Severian who survives.

The climax of the 'New Sun' cycle leads to a suspicion in the reader's mind that Wolfe is engendering two readings of his text, readings both heterodox in theological terms, but differing in the extent of their radicalism. The first and most likely reading suggests that the impossibility of a full Christlike resolution, of a redemptive climax, simply reflects the presence of ambiguity and evil in the world. Their existence is integral to the Divine Plan; however cruel and disillusioning, they serve the designs of the Increate in some

measure. Human beings have flawed perceptions, and evil is a reality; we cannot expect perfect revelations, or the full purgation of our 'negative' tendencies. But a suggestion emerges of a second reading, with two corroborations. The first is suggestive only: the agents of the Increate, in particular the Hierogrammate Tzadkiel, act deceptively. Tzadkiel adopts a succession of animal and human disguises, culminating in an impersonation of Severian himself (UNS, 123). He is unreliable, appearing as an awesome judge, who is not a judge (UNS, Ch.XXI); as an overwhelming maternal angel (UNS, 179); and as a treacherous, childish trickster (UNS, Ch. XL). The shifting impermanence of heavenly beings intimates either a testing process of Severian, consonant with the first reading, a testing of his faith and resource, or the unreliability of the Divine, its indifference, inaccessibility, and even irrelevance to human concerns. The second corroboration is stronger: the genocide of the people of Urth in the great flood. Their annihilation indicates a possibility that Severian is a dupe, the unwitting agent of his people's destruction. If the Increate is malignant or simply indifferent, He might well allow such a result: one suiting the aliens, the Hierodules, the 'slaves of God', who are fearful of any human renaissance, the return of an interstellar human tyranny - 'they fear us because of things we did before' (UNS, 204). The second possible reading, of God's treachery, is only suggested by Wolfe, to add yet another uneasy note to his edifice of ambiguities. It lingers in the reader's mind, a final confirmation of the uncertainty of all knowledge and

all beliefs, a radical doubt in a text theologically based but never sure (48).

Other Faiths and Severian's Quest

The 'New Sun' cycle, in its bizarre and heterodox complexity, contains another element modifying any simple Catholic, or even generally Christian, message. Allusions to other religions, in particular Oriental ones, introduce new doctrinal bases for interpretation, although none that can be rigorous or supersede Catholicism. When Father Inire refers to Severian as 'messenger of Dawn, Helios, Hyperion, Surya, Savitar, and Autarch' (CA. 287), he is intimating the scope of Severian's religious symbolism. Elsewhere, Severian himself invokes the concept, originating in Hinduism (49), of the 'Veil of Maya', the 'glorious spinning of appearances hiding the last reality' (UNS. 332) Wolfe's view of the world as ephemeral and illusory is thus corroborated outside Catholicism, and references to 'nirvana' and the 'Gandharvas' (UNS. 108), attaching to Buddhism and to Hinduism again, (50) add to this interplay of faiths. A general correspondence with Taoism is also noteworthy, and all these parallels deserve consideration.

The conviction of the Hindus and Buddhists of the illusory nature of the world - whether this leads them to an association with the Brahman or Self at the root of the universe and all men (51), or to the nirvana of non-Being and non-association with the temporal (52) - finds a strong echo in Wolfe's work. Severian is aware that appearance is unreliable or unreal:

> 'Our eyes receive a rain of photons without mass or charge from swarming particles like a billion, billion suns - so master Palaemon, who was nearly blind, had taught me. From the pattering of those photons we believe we see a man. Sometimes the man we believe we see may be as illusory as master Ash, or more so' (CA, 139).

The notion that appearances are actively misleading is central to Wolfe's design of ambiguity and cognitive confusion. For Severian, the world is the Hindu 'Maya' (UNS. 332) or the Buddhist 'Samsara', a cloak, an appearance; and this adds to his frustrations, because the reality behind the cloak, the Increate's world, the transsubstantial meaning, remains inaccessible. Still, comfort can be drawn, as the dream that is the world is made of a common dream-substance, and Severian's vision of the unity of all things (CA, 253) is perhaps attainable (53).

In Taoism, Wolfe's arguments find considerable resonance. This Chinese philosophy, with its emphasis upon the complementarity of darkness and light, and its idealization of inaction, matches well Wolfe's inclusive and passive emphases. The belief that good and evil equally serve the Divine, often presented in the 'New Sun' cycle, has a correspondence in the Tao conceptions of energy, the female 'Yin' and the male 'Yang' (54). Because these superficially opposed qualities are universal, acting and reacting upon one another, necessary to each other's existence (55), they represent more fully than monistic Catholic conceptions Wolfe's complementary harmony of good and evil. The striving of Taoists for a balance of 'Yin'

and 'Yang' in themselves, the pre-requisite for 'sagehood' (56), underlines the desperate nature of the struggle in Wolfe's world also: a struggle for a correct balance of male and female, of 'active' and 'passive' qualities, a struggle that Severian, in never finding 'Severa', cannot win. The 'Tao', the 'Way', is difficult; in Severian's world, it is practically impossible.

The Taoist sage Lao Tse argued inaction as a virtue: it avoided reaction; it could, through humility and compassion, but also through calculation, allow not only survival, but persuasion and success (57). Inaction is a characteristic of Severian, especially in The Book of the New Sun; he is in contrast with the anti-messiahs, Agia, Typhon, Ceryx, Vodalus, who are assertive, and who achieve nothing. However cruel and impulsive he may be, Severian is largely a figure of resignation, easily guided and manipulated, first by his enemies, and then by the Divine. Slowly, he learns the wise calculation advocated by Lao Tse, but, as always, only in imperfect measure. At least he survives, and reaches some of his objectives; he cannot expect perfection in anything, and accommodation to this is at the heart of Taoist philosophy.

In the end, Wolfe's cycle is a subversive text, fully in keeping with Taoism's rejection of the conventional, rigid beliefs of society (58), seeking a difficult and profound balance, an accommodation of knowledge of the darkness of the world and the desire for purpose and revelation. The result is a catholic and Catholic work, full of the symbols of belief

but constructed as a maze, daunting and thwarting easy and conventional analyses of the universe. However benign or remote the Increate may be, for Wolfe the pre-occupation is not His nature but that of the veil behind which He stands. Severian probes but can never penetrate the veil, and all consequences of this are exhaustively observed by Wolfe. The frustration and complexity of the probing are everywhere apparent in the cycle, and now their embodiment in Wolfe's narrative art must be considered.

CHAPTER TWO

THE VEIL'S FOLDS: THE NARRATIVE ART OF THE 'NEW SUN' CYCLE (1)

Because the pre-occupation of his 'New Sun' cycle is the fugacity of knowledge, Wolfe adopts for his text baroque complication, challenging and elusive to the reader. Perhaps the most significant achievement of the cycle is its complex narrative experimentation: the numerous devices Wolfe employs to balance its multitude of impressions and assertions and, above all, to suggest his theme. Wolfe's narrative strategy allows a profound ambiguity: an opposition of concealment and revelation, of textual obfuscation and spiritual enlightenment. Because this strategy is the most fundamental assertion of Wolfe's argument that understanding is always compromised by incomplete information and imperfect comprehension, a full analysis of it is central to any successful study of The Book of the New Sun and The Urth of the New Sun. It is the aim of this chapter to provide such an analysis, by indicating first those narrative tactics that conceal, and then those that reveal; first those that obstruct a theological quest, and then those that support one.

The literary antecedents of The Book of the New Sun, insofar as they can be deduced, lend some insight into Wolfe's purpose. The style of the tetralogy is, generally, melancholic, contemplative, lyrical; the narrator, Severian the Autarch, is a writer of regal memoirs, filled with the philosophical attitudes he has acquired through his many vicissitudes. One

literary progenitor is the genre of Imperial mock-autobiographies of which the best examples are I, Claudius and Claudius the God by Robert Graves, and Memoirs of Hadrian by Marguerite Yourcenar (2). The Roman Emperors who tell their stories in these novels have many qualities in common with Severian: a contemplative temperament; a fatalism, akin to Severian's passivity, born of experience and a wide range of disappointments. The confessional, Imperial narrator, involved yet detached, has a clear ancestry here.

Also detectable is the influence of Mervyn Peake, whose 'Gormenghast' trilogy (3) has a similar formula, the Bildungsroman set among psychologically reflective Gothic architectures, eccentric evils and hierarchical rituals. The complexity of Severian's psychology and the consequent complications of his narrative have a precursor in Peake's bizarre Fantasy. A major narrative feature, the interplay of textual present and past memory, has an origin perhaps in Wolfe's acquaintance with Marcel Proust, whose Remembrance of Things Past (4) is full of recollections conjured up by objects of mundane nature, and the tyranny of memory. For Severian, the past is ever-present, and this results in the analysis and digressions that render intricate the superficially simple story-line of the five volumes.

Wolfe, by combining these traditions, allows external history and inner psychology to mingle; as the majestic Hadrian of Yourcenar encounters the prosaic Marcel of Proust's masterwork, simplicity and complexity, outward action and inward

complication, combine. It is this unusual narrative balance, or dialectic, that sets the 'New Sun' series furthest apart from other works of Science Fiction: Wolfe is, as in the respects mentioned in Chapter Three, controverting a tradition of linear and transparent narrative strategies that typifies the work of Heinlein and Asimov, and all the other 'Grand Masters' of Science Fiction (5).

The simple quest-structures of the genre remain, but they are hedged, qualified, never allowed simple paths and outlets. In Wolfe's narrative art, simple faith is sorely tested.

One of the converging qualities of Wolfe's dialectic - the more conspicuous one - is ambiguity, occlusion. The reluctance of the text to yield clear statements of fact and opinion - any isolatable 'meaning' - implies the limitations of attempts to comprehend personal, philosophical, and theological mysteries. To achieve his objective of narrative complication and circularity, Wolfe utilizes nine devices, some of them available only to a writer of Science Fiction. These, in order of their treatment here, are: temporal confusion, involving analepsis and prolepsis; confusion of motivation; intrusions by the surreal into the narrative; a multiple narrator, which complicates viewpoint; archaism without identity; unreliability of constructed hierarchies; the presence of an implied translator; the frequent failure of description; and the unreliable position of the text's audience.

The technique of temporal confusion is apparent in the structure of the initial tetralogy, The Book of the New Sun. Its appearance is that of a linear epic, the rise of a poor young man through wandering rites of passage to power and riches. But Severian is aware in the arrangement of his autobiography that a simple symmetry of narration is impossible:

> 'I had originally intended to begin it at the day that I left our tower and to end it when I returned. But I soon saw that.... it would be impossible for anyone to understand my adventures without knowing something of my adolescence. In the same way, some elements of my story would remain incomplete if I did not extend it..... a few days beyond my return' (CA, 269).

The reader is thus made aware of how textual past and future, lying outside the essential story, may interfere with textual present. Furthermore, each volume may end with a sense of appropriate pause - 'Here I pause again, having taken you, reader, from town to town' (CC, 295) or 'from gate to gate' (ST, 301) - but much time and information are omitted in between volumes, an at times mystificatory temporal lacuna.

Severian's narrative shifts in time are most conspicuously into the past, a technique - analepsis - which reinforces the work's sense of antiquity and burdensome history. Repeatedly, the telling of the quest is interrupted by delvings into incidents of past years:

> 'When I cast my mind into the past.... I remember it so well that I seem to move again in the bygone day, a day old-new, and unchanged each time I draw it to the surface of my mind, its eidolons as real as I' (CC, p.71).

This makes Severian 'drugged and drunken', betraying him, in this case, into capture by Vodalus (CC, p.72). At times, the present has forcefully to reassume its grip upon Severian's attention: while imprisoned by the Sorcerers, he becomes involved in a past dialogue with Thecla, so that she and his captor are simultaneously alive for him: 'Something [the captor] was in the cell with us' (SL, p.162). 'The cell grew darker, and Thecla and even I myself vanished with the light' (SL, 162-3): so substantial is memory that Severian is almost as ephemeral as it. Flashbacks do not simply complicate the text; they interfere with the narration of the present.

This tendency is sometimes literal: the barriers between the tenses are blurred further when past, often deceased characters from Severian's memory are physically embodied as 'eidolons' or 'aquastors' (Malrubius and Triskele in The Citadel of the Autarch, and a large host of figures in Chapter XXI of The Urth of the New Sun). These act , influence textual events. Not only this: the Severian who visits Yesod is an eidolon himself, created by Tzadkiel, 'remembrance taking from your dead mind to build your mind and you anew' (UNS, p.359). The writer of this last volume supposedly is a further eidolon, based on recollections of the earlier one. The only link to the old Severian is a lingering 'anima'. Thus, memories are

actors; they narrate themselves, in the case of The Urth of the New Sun. Temporal ambiguity is not the only consequence; a question is raised as to narrative agency, as to the distinction between narrator and focalizer.

In an autobiographically-formed fiction, the reader's assumption is that the central character's mature self, heterodiegetic or outside the text's story, is its narrator, whereas his younger self, participating in the events, is a focalizer, or prism of perception, refracting the story through his own, less conscious, senses. But the story of the 'New Sun' volumes is made up of solid independent recollections, as concrete to Severian as he writes as when he experienced them. Thus the question arises: whether past or present is being narrated, whether the old Severian-narrator and the young Severian-focalizer are separate or distinct. Does an old man write, or a young man act? Lack of clarity as to this blurs time profoundly, and blurs the reader's grasp of what is being described, whether events or thoughts only, whether a youth's or a mature man's responses are involved.

Prolepsis - the introduction of future elements into a narrative before their time - is often present, as a general foil to analepsis. From the start, the reader is aware that Severian is to become Autarch: by a paradox, Severian remarks, 'I have backed into the throne' (SI. 18). The textual past is informed by the narrator Severian's present. Prophecy also allows knowledge of what is to come: a dream suggests the battle at Baldanders' castle, which occurs two volumes later

(ST, 139-142). The shape of the Vatic Fountain suggests the coming of the New Sun: 'I glimpsed a many-pointed star, growing ever larger' (CC. 191). As this omen, seen by the young Severian, passes, his older self refers to his Imperial present explicitly, in terms of servants and ministers. When Juturna, Abaia's 'Odalisque' addresses Severian (CC 251-3), she refers to the throne that will be his.

While such examples may seem to illuminate events rather than obscure them. they are in fact rendered unreliable by the element of false prophecy. In Chapter III of The Claw of the Conciliator, a future of green plenty is foreseen for Urth; but in Chapter XVII of The Citadel of the Autarch, one of ice and death emerges. Only at the end of the series' final volume does the first option appear as the genuine one. No prolepsis can be trusted fully: the expectation until the end of the sequence is that the 'New Sun' will bring a paradise, but it is not one for the people of Urth, who perish.

Variations on the interplay of present with past and future are encountered in the form of another temporally disruptive device: analeptic prolepsis and its obverse. Only in Science Fiction can future influence past, owing to time-travel and similar conventions. Thus, at the end of The Claw of the Conciliator, Severian looks into the past in a mystical seance; as a young man, he beholds his older self, Apu-Punchau, in an era long dead. In the past is the future seen: analeptic prolepsis. Conversely, Severian tells Juturna that she rescued him in his childhood; she replies that it will happen

(in her personal future) because he has spoken of it (UNS, 306). A future event is a past one.

Time is a relative phenomenon in Gene Wolfe's work; it is perceived in uncertain order, and much ambiguity results. Dark present, overwhelming and teeming past, and cryptic future cannot readily illuminate each other. All of this mirrors the existential confusion of the oppressed age Severian inhabits; the desire for revelation becomes urgent, as will be seen in the second section of this Chapter.

Temporal confusion has a counterpart in confusion of motivation, Wolfe's second device of ambiguity. The text is often guilty of causal omission; the reasons for Severian's actions, in particular his early support for Vodalus the rebel and his desire and pursuit of the final Apocalypse, are left uncertain. Vodalus does him no service, nor does he reveal what he represents until Volume Two. The Deluge that brings Ushas, the New Urth, is not the redemption of Urth, but the creation of a different, alien world. Severian's loyalty to the ruin of his world is perplexing. Even a minor episode like the duel (ST. Chapter XXVII) is not an issue of honour for Severian, yet he takes part, nearly dying. A general explanation may be the cryptic nature of influences that Severian describes (ST. 17), their abilty to act on men ignorant of them; but this is no specific guide. The reader has no certainty as to the psychology of the text's direction.

Wolfe's third device - the intrusion of the surreal - is a function of a fundamental ambiguity, that between reality and illusion. Generally, reality is blurred in the text, as the emphasis upon masks and a numinous theological idea-structure makes clear. Heavenly beings like Tzadkiel (in The Urth of the New Sun) impose the fantastic upon a mundane Urth. But more basic is the collapse of boundaries between the physical world and that of Severian's dreams, as when Severian sees his acquaintances in a bizarre fever-dream (CA, Ch.IV). Whereas that one has little thematic significance, another set of visions (UNS, 65) contains the vital image of 'the winged woman of Father Inire's book', the angel who resurrects Severian. Visions can embody truth, but, confusingly, do not always do so.

The text justifies the physical embodiment of non-existent things. Father Inire's mystical mirrors are able to create originating objects for pre-existing reflections (ST, 186). The Caller, Hethor, uses such a means to generate horrors like the notules (CC, Ch. XII) and the Salamander (SL, Ch. IX). The eidolons are, of course, thought made flesh. But it is not only physical actors in the plot that are surreal. Surrealism is a constant concomitant of Wolfe's poetic prose style: 'Her face was drained of its wisdom, which condensed in crystal drops at the corners of her eyes' (ST, 212). In action, thought, and imagery elements not real mingle with the actual, making narrative certainty still more difficult. This is perhaps a natural effect of Severian's mingling of cosmic

speculation with an account of his everyday living, of the Eternal and the Ordinary.

A fourth mechanism of ambiguity is the multiple or fragmented narrator. Owing to Severian's absorption into his own personality of the memories of others, his is a complex narrative voice, composed of his own perspective, that of Thecla, ingested through the alzabo drug, 'filling me as a melody fills a cottage' (CC. 99), and those of the Autarch and his predecessors, assimilated much later. Comprehension of such a multiple mind is not easy for the reader: 'you that read this, who have never perhaps possessed more than a single consciousness, cannot know what is to have two or three, much less hundreds' (CA. 236-6). This composite intellect explains some of Severian's narrative mannerisms, such as his regal reflectiveness, perhaps derived from the old Autarch; but it is no sure guide as to which facet of his nature is speaking at what stage of the text. On occasion, a particular subordinate voice will break through Severian's generalized one: Thecla emerges in reflection (CA. 20-21) and to curse the Autarch (CA, 203), and the old Autarch whispers (UNS. 65). But these cases are few. The intra-cerebral co-operation of minds is never analyzed at any length in Severian's narrative; it remains a mystical condition, not explanatory. It justifies some textual contradictions and ellipses, but only as the results of a mind inclined towards self-contradiction by nature; and uncertainty grows, as the inner turbulence is revealed only in Volume Four. What previous assumptions by the reader must be

revised in the light of Severian's bizarre psychology? The reader is compelled into a process of doubtful reassessment.

The next device - archaism - is one preferable to the mere invention of exotic terms, the standard resort of narratives of cognitive estrangement. Such items as 'Vincula', 'cultelarii', 'undine', 'odalisque', and 'abacination' have meanings, contexts; their consideration as historical analogues can throw light on the text. The 'Vincula' is indeed a place of chains, a prison, as a lexicon would suggest. But as C.N. Manlove points out, a statement such as 'a few days before I had been given a set of paper figures. These were soubrettes, columbines, coryphees, harlequinas, figurantes, and so on - the usual thing' (ST, 182) is on a level of familiarity which we cannot share (6). Similarity of far-future objects and present or past ones is not identity; similarity can conceal vast differences. Indeed, where Wolfe provides details of Urth's institutions - such as the Guild of Torturers - they are very different from any historical equivalents. Carnifexes of Urth have a religious organization, and many resemblances to a hospital order (in The Shadow of the Torturer). Urth is not Earth: archaism may suggest parallels, but none is reliable; clues are provided, but often lead nowhere.

On the sublime or at least elevated level, the religious qualities of the 'New Sun' series suggest a revelatory process, a reliable expression of hierarchical and doctrinal structures. But even here - his sixth device - Wolfe allows no easy

decipherment of his narrative. The figures of authority in the text are all unreliable in the extreme, because they are protean. The angel or Hierogrammate, Tzadkiel, shifts like a mirage. She has many guises in The Urth of the New Sun: she is an alien, a human, a false Autarch, an angel and judge, a starship captain and finally, by The Brook Madregot, a mischievous fragment of herself. Her trial of Severian turns out as a charade, a pompous fiction (152-3). She is fallible: her son dies. The other major authority-figure of the series - the old Autarch - is similarly evasive in aspect. The narrative presents him at different times as different things: whore-master, servant, ruler. His androgynous nature is generally suggestive of his actual vagueness. By allowing no stable impression of these hierarchical figures to emerge, by placing contradictory clues as to their qualities in the text, Wolfe once again denies any final meanings to his reader. God, the Increate, is kept inscrutable: there is no appeal to that quarter.

The seventh disruptive ploy of the text is the addition to the conventional levels of narration of an experimental textual filter - an implied translator. In the appendix to the first volume, reference is made to the 'rendering' of 'this book - originally composed in a tongue that has not yet achieved existence - into English' (ST. 302). In the text, inscriptions and names in obsolete languages are translated into Latin: yet Wolfe's mock translator - persona says: 'What the actual language may have been. I cannot say' (ST. 303). Such admissions of ignorance suggest that the entire

tetralogy may be mis-rendered in translation, a distortion far worse than that conveyed by 'the heresy of paraphrase'. The reader is confronted with yet another implication of unreliability in the narrative.

The devices thus far mentioned are ones largely beyond Severian's own control; his own style, his narration and expositions, are transparent and accessible enough to the reader. But on the simple level of description, Wolfe imposes a further obstacle to ready comprehension: his eighth aid of ambiguity, failure of description. When Severian attempts to depict other-worldly beings, he is at times literally at a loss for words, as when he reassesses his portrayal of the animated statue in the House Absolute's gardens: 'I have failed utterly to convey the essence of the thing' (CC,117). In other instances, his account is self-contradictory. In speaking of the Salamander (SL, 72-3), he says, 'it seemed a reptilian flower' and 'a desert asp.... dropped into a sphere of snow'. The horror of the encounter is something 'I cannot describe'. Soon, the monster assumes an aspect like that of 'an old, hunched man in a black coat' (73). It burns in a way never known on Urth'; it flutters 'in a wind that was not of air'. Inconsistency, and resorts to half-valid metaphors, complicate the text further, and the point is made that the alien is accessible only when speaking with a human voice (as the alzabo does in SL, Ch. XVI), but even then the voice is a facade, like the masks of the Hierodules.

A final device is another means towards an unreliable narrative: the effective absence of an audience, the listener or reader of the text's basic narration. Severian does not believe his autobiography 'will ever find a reader, even in me' (UNS, 1). 'Let me describe then, to no one and nothing, just who I am and what I have done to Urth'. There is no necessity for reliability in a relationship with nothing; there is no guarantee of correctness in any of the text's details.

The shape of the 'New Sun' series, digressive and unbalanced, does not provide any reliable measures either. Time runs at an inconsistent pace in the text; the narration of The Shadow of the Torturer is first fast, as Severian grows up, then tortuously slow, as he wanders Nessus. The Claw of the Conciliator is leisurely, with long pauses in Saltus and the House Absolute; but The Sword of the Lictor has a rapid, picaresque quality. The Citadel of the Autarch has a slow beginning half and a very much accelerated climax, a rapidity that extends all through The Urth of the New Sun. The variability of pace is distracting to a reader; he expects the slow sequences to have an extra significance, to justify their protraction, but the time in the lazaret, consuming a third of the fourth volume, is a time for the exchange of digressive, exemplary tales. A pause is no guarantee of revelation; much detail is given of executions (SST, Ch.XXXI), but almost none about such a crucial figure as Father Inire, the Autarch's assistant and friend. Significance might also be required of Severian's long metaphysical disquisitions, but these, while they raise such intriguing subjects as the nature of the love

of woman (ST, 231-2), reversal and origin (ST, 211-2), and the implications of magic (SL, 181-2), do not come to conclusions or resolutions. They are suggestive asides, insinuating but not revealing.

The sundry means by which Wolfe attains his ambiguity are a formidable artillery, laying a comprehensive smokescreen. The 'New Sun' volumes assume the appearance of the Library of Nessus, or of that City itself: vast, unquantifiable. Master Ultan remarks of his vast store of books. 'We have books cased in perfumed woods shipped across the inconceivable gulf between creations - books doubly precious because no one on Urth can read them' (ST, 61). The lochage of guards laments the impenetrable complexity of Nessus, its shifting appearance (ST, 134). These conditions are metaphors for their text: the mutable, the book that defies perusal. Wolfe succeeds in complicating his work to the extent that his message of the universe's inherent uncertainty is corroborated by the act of reading itself.

But, as Chapter One has shown, the 'New Sun' series is a work with strong religious groundings. This implies a need for a revelation of some degree. Wolfe achieves the balance his dialectic of uncertainty and certainty requires by means of further narrative devices, ones adding meaning to the text as their negative counterparts subtract it. Wolfe does not convey positive information bluntly: he does so in an intricate, indirect, and gradual way, a way often resisted by the nine features of discontinuity cited before.

When Tzadkiel speaks in the Examination Chamber, Severian remarks,

> 'although I can, as I do, write the words he used, I cannot convey his tone or even hint at the conviction it carried. His thoughts seemed to thunder forth, raising pictures in the mind more real than any reality....' (UNS, 153).

Even while failed description and paradox ('more real than any reality') play their obfuscatory role, the reader perceives the theme of transcendent meaning, breaking through any verbal limitation. Obscurity need not be an exclusive condition, for as Severian speculates, meaning can function at more than one level. There is a practical level of significance ('the thing the plowman sees'). The second level reflects context, bearing on other objects and influence by them. The third is Transsubstantial, marking the will of the Divine (ST, 171-2). If comprehension is confounded by one level, perhaps another will be significant. The ambiguity of clarity and obscurity, in the nature of a balance, allows the former some scope of its own.

There is evidence that Severian desires clarity: he explains why he fleshes out his narrative with detail. Having quoted an extract from the memoirs of his distant predecessor the Autarch Ymar, which in its unrelenting factuality is prone to a multitude of conflicting interpretations, Severian indicates where truly extreme ambiguity lies: 'Thecla had had many

teachers, each of whom would explain the same fact in a different way' (ST, 158). Facts alone reveal nothing; at least when Severian says that he cannot explain his love for Agia, and details his relationship with her in emotional terms, he imparts a human understanding of it, and an acknowledgement that people are controlled by forces beyond their comprehension (ST, 159). Human nature and cosmic mysteries are a better explanation than none at all. Having implied this, Severian resumes his account of his experiences: 'However that may be ...' He has a narrative vocation of sorts; he is determined to express something.

The mechanics of the clarity that Wolfe affords his text can be identified as five devices: the use of sublime language; the process of translation; dialogue couched in pedantic terms; embedded narratives; and, very importantly, augmentation of significance as the narrative progresses. It is in these that the functions of religious belief emerge: affirmation, and knowledge of higher things.

The use of the language of the Sublime is, as remarked in Chapter One, most typical of the depictions of wilderness in The Sword of the Lictor, but such passages occur in all sections of the 'New Sun' cycle. A typical example is found in The Urth of the New Sun, suggesting the passage of aeons of time, the strangeness of the familiar, and wonderment all at once:

> 'Then it was whole once more, though fluttering still in the icy winds that blow from Reality to Dream and carry us with them like so many leaves. The "palace" that had suggested the House Absolute was my city of Nessus. Vast as it had been, it seemed larger than ever now; many sections of the Wall had fallen like our Citadel Wall, making it truly an infinite city. Many towers had fallen too, their walls of brick and stone crumbled like the rinds of so many rotten melons. Mackerel schooled where yearly the Curators had paced in solemn procession to the Cathedral' (UNS, 332).

The contemplative and stately tone of such passages, infused with a tragic sadness (as all is Severian's burden of guilt, in this case the sinking of Nessus), allows meditation and the poetic expression of truths. One variety of such expression is used by Wolfe on a frequent basis: the interruption of prevailing obscurity by fragments of revelatory imagery or speculation. Just before the duel on the aptly-named Sanguinary Field, 'the silver voice of a trumpet called to the renascent stars' (ST. 233). Death is suddenly rebutted, a hope (justified, as it emerges) of resurrection is inexplicably raised. In his dungeon in the jungle, Severian has striking thoughts about the dead:

> 'Their spirits haunt our minds, ears pressed to the bones of our foreheads. Who can say how intently they listen as we speak, and for what word?' (CA. 219).

Here, Severian is exploring the relationship of the living and the dead, a connection embodied in his own resurrections and embodiment of the dead Thecla and Autarch. Such unexpected thematic reinforcement is another form of the text's

unpredictability, but is a definite help to an analytical reader.

A second clarifying feature is found prominently in Chapter XI of The Citadel of the Autarch. Here the captive Ascian, 'Loyal to the Group of Seventeen', tells a story entirely in the form of rote phrases: slogans and exhortations which are the only means his people use to communicate. Foila provides a ready translation, as in this section:

> `"One is strong, another beautiful, a third a cunning artificer. Which is best? He who serves the populace."' (CA, 85)

Foila renders this as, 'On this farm lived a good man' (CA, 85). The Ascian can converse despite limited verbal resources: any narrative, by implication, can impart at least some of its burden of significance. Elsewhere, Severian can report the dialogue of angels, aliens, undines, giants, robots, and homunculi. However imperfect the communication may be, the absent world, the world of the alien and non-existent, Severian's often numinous text, can impart something, even if it misleads.

A third indicator of the will to communicate is pedantic or catechistic dialogue. Severian is often in the position of a student, as he is lectured by a succession of older and more knowledgeable figures: Thecla, the Guildmasters, Ultan, Master Ash, the Autarch, Tzadkiel, Baldanders. In his final meeting with the Hierodules, Severian is informed about the nature of

eidolons, the Soul, and Apu-Punchau; his response is a pupil's: 'I understand' (UNS, 361). On other occasions, he is a teacher himself, to the boy Severian, for example (SL. Ch. XVIII). However unreliable or withdrawn the teacher may be, some information is related; and the similarity of some of these educative exchanges to catechisms and Socratic dialogues (especially the final discussion with the Hierodules) is suggestive of the importance of deductive processes. Wolfe's pre-occupation with knowledge is evident in asides, classical allusions and appendices in the 'New Sun' sequence; it implies and creates the text's pronounced cognitive component. The importance of knowledge establishes the 'New Sun' cycle as Science Fiction: intellect and the desire for truth are vital, after all.

A fourth and constant technique is one familiar from earlier Wolfe novels. The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972) and Peace (1975): the embedded narrative, or 'story-within-a-story'. These have various sources: 'The Tale of the Student and His Son' (in The Claw of the Conciliator) and 'The Tale of the Boy called Frog' (in The Sword of the Lictor) are from a book of stories Severian carries with him; the tale of Domnina and the mirrors (ST, Ch. XX) is one of Thecla's reminiscences; the tales in The Citadel of the Autarch are narrated by a variety of characters; 'Eschatology and Genesis' is a play enacted at the House Absolute (CC, Ch. XXIV). These serve to complement and illuminate the text, although not all do so equally. The Student's son in the first-mentioned tale campaigns against a monster similar to Severian's own arch-enemies, Erebus and

Abaia. The tale of the mirrors underlines the shifting boundaries of reality and illusion found elsewhere. But there is not only a reinforcing of themes by these stories, a mirroring of actions in the main narrative. One of them, the Play, converges actively with the main text. It deals with the Apocalypse of Urth and is set in the Autarch's Palace; although it is a fiction, it becomes the truth by suggestion. Severian acts in the play in his own age, as a young man; he draws on it to answer questions about the destiny of Urth while he is in the past, Typhon's time. A work of fiction turned prophecy eventually becomes reality, as Severian discovers that the hints he uttered in the past have fulfilled themselves. Just before the Deluge, he hears in the throne room the enactment of 'Eschatology and Genesis' by Valeria and the prophetess:

> 'For it <u>was</u> a play, and in fact a play I had seen before, though never from the audience. It was Dr Talos' play, with the old woman on the throne in a role the doctor [Talos] had taken for himself, and the woman with the staff in one of the roles that had been mine' (<u>UNS</u>. 297).

The play has become life, first suggesting the course of events and then merging with reality. A narrative creation interacts with life; the hypo-diegetic level of narration supplies and affirms the meaning of that within which it is embedded - the primary text. This can now signify, more than before; it has a parallel.

Wolfe's final, and most consequential, means towards the generation of significance is augmentation by his narrative:

an object or person, an idea or event, is made in the short or long term to become more thematically important than before. This is, on one level, yet another system of changing appearances; but when this change involves the revealing of hitherto latent attributes, it is more a clarification than a form of ambiguity or material fluidity. Two prominent textual examples illustrate this point. In Chapter XLII of The Urth of the New Sun, Severian witnesses the Play-derived tableau in the Throne Room, from a concealed vantage. Bells in his hiding place ring as he moves. In the Throne Room, the prophetess takes the tolling to be a mystical sign, and Baldanders a scientific sign, of the New Sun's physical approach. They are both incorrect literally, but correct metaphorically, for Severian has approached, and he is the physical incarnation of the New Sun. An ordinary ringing of bells comes to symbolize the apocalyptic coming of the New Sun, and acts as ironic reinforcement of the link between Severian and his stellar counterpart. Bells, symbolizing hope or the coming of a threat, are given their symbolic impact by a narrative ploy, an irony. Earlier in the series, at Abdiesus' party, Severian speculates idly about his own unchangeable nature, as a functional executioner in the midst of costumed guests, whose assumed roles are transient social pageantry (SL, 42). Only when he speaks to Cyriaca (48) and is urged to unmask his soul does the true significance of his earlier ruminating emerge: he releases her from her ordained execution, and his disguise as a Carnifex is removed, as false as any fancy-dress costume. Idle thoughts about disguise attain sudden substance: Severian was like the guests, bearing

an appearance, as Torturer, not truly or completely accurate of him. His merciful qualities emerge.

Such progressive bestowal of meaning applies particularly in the field of characterization. Most obviously, Severian himself proceeds from Apprentice to Autarch to Messiah, from a somewhat ignorant brutality to an imperfect awareness of cosmic truths. His significance grows thematically, as he acquires knowledge and sees how limited it is. But lesser figures act as illustrations of the technique also; they gain in symbolic power, and act as parallels or contrasts with Severian, buttressing his presentation in the narrative. Some echo his struggle to overcome the limitations of being a mere 'Thesis', or creation, of the Divine. Others suggest his function as a leader and Messiah.

The first category includes negative and positive examples. Dorcas, upon discovering that she is a revenant, fails to transcend this condition, withdrawing into a nostalgic loneliness. Dr Talos, Jolenta, Sidero are all artificial beings, like Severian the Eidolon; all fail to escape the constraints of mechanical constructs, remaining lifeless and typecast. They all are augmented after the reader's first acquaintance with them; their morbid or inhuman origins are revealed, and place them in a new light. But they are trapped by their revealed qualities; they contrast with Severian's penetration of boundaries. Positive parallels with him are Jonas, a half-human who returns to Urth as Miles, a fully human being; Baldanders, who turns from brutish giant into

reasoning, if flawed scientist; Agia, who turns from a poverty-stricken member of the petit-bourgeoisie into a Valkyriesque leader of rebels. These all rise, haltingly, still bound by self-deception, from limitation to a broader awareness and potency in the reader's mind; their struggles echo Severian's.

Severian's Messianic counterparts, and his fellow rulers, are again of negative and positive kinds. Ceryx the false wizard, the tyrant Typhon, the rebel Vodalus: these show the failings and corruption of power, and are thus thematically raised above the status of colourful ogres. Vodalus is gradually revealed, over four volumes; his shifting character is significant in itself, as a symbol of weakness. On the other hand, the old Autarch, starting as an apparent brothel-keeper and ending as a monarch, and Tzadkiel, the Angel of protean appearances, unfold as exemplars of leadership and representatives of mystery. Thev demonstrate that the keys to kingship and enlightenment are, relatedly but respectively, a flexible and ubiquitous nature, and the wide experience that brings knowledge. They are augmented gradually, as their guises present themselves; Wolfe's narrative art leads them by steady stages to a climax of significance.

Wolfe thus makes the ambiguity of leaders acquire meaning and importance. This paradox is summary of his argument: meaning and uncertainty co-exist, tantalizing and frustrating, taking

on new forms. In Chapter Three another vital aspect of this dialectic is considered: the manner in which Wolfe reduces the patterns and certainties of his genre to uncertainties, even as he celebrates them.

CHAPTER THREE

THE VEILS OF GENRE: THE 'NEW SUN' CYCLE AS A METAFICTIONAL TEXT

In his brief remarks on the 'New Sun' cycle, John Clute accurately sums up how the series relates to its genre, by remarking, 'Grave, hermetic, daedal, the Book [of the New Sun] may magisterially sum up all the materials available to the modern science fiction writer (and reader), but at the same time the unremitting religious grasp of Wolfe's vision sea-changes these materials into something utterly strange, sui generis' (1). It is the objective of this chapter to indicate how and why this process operates: how the tropes and iconic symbols of Science Fiction are rendered by Wolfe devious, complex, and unpredictable; how this subverts the genre even as it augments it, creating metaphors representative of the fugacity of knowledge. Wolfe's text is metafictional, examining its own antecedents and assumptions; it analyzes, judges, and moulds anew.

This process makes of the 'New Sun' cycle a Post-modern experiment, acutely conscious of form, celebrating its conventions even as it deconstructs them (2). Wolfe utilizes the far-future or 'Dying Earth' setting for his experiment precisely because it has been used so frequently before, by Jack Vance, Michael Moorcock, M. John Harrison, and many others (3). He is able to draw upon many conventional standards used by his predecessors, ones owing much in their turn to heroic fantasy, to Space Opera, to the planetary romance, to Gothic fiction (4). The 'entropic romance', set in a dying world,

has the further advantage of liberating the author; because it traditionally involves a dramatization of decadence and the triumph of entropy, it allows unconventional style, the conflation of rational science and irrational magic, and other formal reflections of a breakdown of order. Wolfe, like Vance, Aldiss, and others before him, thus is able fully to exploit Albert Wendland's 'perceptual world of style': a fictional setting subjective, experimental, suited to the subversive programme he undertakes (5).

Wolfe's commentary upon his genre has two phases. First, he augments a convention: he reveals its nature, and in the light of this knowledge changes its significance, giving it added resonance but also confusing the reader as the latter's expectations are baffled by the addition of mystical complexities. Secondly, Wolfe makes the convention function as a symbol of his theme of cosmic ambiguity; instead of simple symbolism, of the sort customary in a simple and accessible genre, tones of concealment, uncertainty, and doubt appear. Even in terms of broad generic characteristics, the 'New Sun' cycle is conventionally unpredictable. It is Science Fantasy, mingling rational and cognitive elements typical of Science Fiction (6) with intuitive and mythical elements characteristic of Fantasy (7). Different standards and conceptions of causality mingle and blur in Severian's narrative; tropes and familiar symbols of genre cannot remain stable in such a text.

This chapter examines how Wolfe's commentary upon his materials - and their modification - proceeds in the case of a number of conventions and common Science Fictional devices. These are, in sequence of treatment: Gothically conceived and thus psychologically reflective artifacts and structures, the city, the castle, and the spaceship; aliens: figures of authority; warfare; time and its flexibility; and the distinction of science and magic. In Wolfe's hands, all are transformed, rendered subject to Clute's conceit of the 'sea-change'; in the brilliant depiction of all of these, Wolfe makes them into the fabric of his veil across the face of God; mystery and ambiguity infect them all.

In Gene Wolfe's work, Gothic ornamentation and atmosphere are common features (8). But these are merely external manifestations of a profound technique: Wolfe creates architectures and landscapes that reflect the troubled psychologies of his characters. as with the macabre house at 666 Saltimbanque Street in The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972) or Alden Dennis Weer's home, a theatre of memory, in Peace (1975). Gothic fiction frequently involves such externalized representations of the mind (9), as a direct way of expressing the evil or virtue that is the focus of this didactic literature. But in the 'New Sun' series. the standard Gothic structures, the ruinous city, the ancient castle, are much less certain of interpretation than is customary. They stand for confusion, disappointment, and inconclusiveness instead; they come to stand for mystery.

The first of the standard psychologically reflective architectures - the city - is evoked in The Shadow of the Torturer by Nessus, the capital of the realm of the Autarch. Traditionally, such imperial metropoli have stood in Science Fiction for power, often a power fallen into ruin as a symbol of the inevitable decline of proud dominion. Isaac Asimov's Trantor (10), Orson Scott Card's Capitol (11), Clifford Simak's decayed City of Earth (12), and Robert Silverberg's Vengiboneeza (13) are all grandly portrayed, even in their fall. In its tradition of direct representation, Science Fiction makes of the city both an icon of desired power and security and a mark of the vanity of overwhelming ambition. But in Wolfe's text, the urban landscape, like Aldiss' Malacia (14), is a mirror for individual states of mind. At the stage of the cycle that it is depicted, Severian is young, naive, and undirected: consequently, Nessus is not a sure symbol, but rather a concrete embodiment of disorientation. This quality of uncertainty is aptly summarized by the officer who remarks, 'The city grows and changes every night, like writing chalked on a wall' (ST, 134). Nessus is in decay, but an organic decay, not a simple morally illustrative decline; the city gradually, over centuries, shifts along the banks of the river Gyoll, occupying new land as old neighbourhoods are deserted. This sinister and surprising characteristic makes Severian's city more complex and subversive of its inhabitants' sanity than any counterpart elsewhere in the genre.

Nessus, like the shirt from which its name is derived, functions as a torment, a trap. It imprisons Severian in a

maze that baffles him, in a state of mind that warps and limits him. Like Peake's Castle Gormenghast (15), it is vast, dark, hard to escape. This is seen in the repeated symbolism of mazes, several of which are entered by Severian. One, the Library of the Citadel, consists of corridor after corridor lined with ancient books, most decayed or incomprehensible. They are a quicksand for the mind, unending; the Curator, Master Ultan, quotes an old line, 'Of the trail of ink there is no end' (ST, 59): he waited so long to become guardian of the library, reading all the while, that he 'possessed a mind suffocated beneath the weight of inutile facts' (ST, 60). This is a library that, like Wolfe's entire universe, defies understanding - the books that no one can read are 'doubly precious' for that reason; and Ultan recalls that just as a 'first general survey' of the library was to be undertaken - the organization of its knowledge - his eyes 'began to gutter in their sockets' (ST, 61). It is an irony characteristic of Wolfe that a library, repository of secrets, cannot yield them up even to its custodian.

A second maze - the Botanical Gardens - is visited by Severian as he wanders through Nessus. This labyrinthine arrangement of hothouse chambers and exotic habitats is significant both in that it affects Severian personally and directly, unlike the Library, and in that it offers potential revelations, like the Library. But as in the case of Master Ultan's books, the tantalising events and spectacles in the Gardens offer little insight into the nature of the world and Severian's destiny; they are too cryptic, and Severian is too young to appreciate

them. In Chapter XXI of The Shadow of the Torturer, Severian and Agia have the only contact the cycle affords with the present, with twentieth-century Earth. In a habitat, they meet two European missionaries and one of their expected converts, an African 'Isangoma' or holy man. Although there is no direct communication, Severian can hear and understand what is said in this prehistoric exhibit or fragment of another time. The Isangoma sees Severian and Agia as 'bad spirits' or 'tokoloshes', haunting the scenes of crimes and 'bad thoughts' until the 'end of time', when misdeeds are revealed (ST, 191). The missionary, Robert, gives this concept a Western formulation:

> '" Don't you see they are only the results of what we do? They are the spirits of the future, and we make them ourselves"' (ST, 191).

This indicates some of the text's important truths, sin and responsibility (judged by Tzadkiel much later on Yesod), the fact that Severian's world is a fictional creation of a contemporary writer ('we make them ourselves'). But Severian can only guess at the relevance of all this to his condition; Agia tells him it is all fantasy, apparent only because of the 'warped' consciousness of people who linger in the Gardens (ST, 193). Revelation can only come through madness, it is implied.

Later, in another and necropolitan section of the Gardens, Severian has his first intimation of his miraculous capabilities. Corpses float beneath the waters in this part

of the Gardens, which is thus euphemistically titled 'The Garden of Endless Sleep' (ST, 196). Severian raises a corpse - Dorcas - from the dead by touching her hand (ST. 201-202). But he is unaware at the time that he has performed a resurrection; he does not yet know he is carrying his sacramental talisman of power, the Claw of the Conciliator. To Severian and his companions, Dorcas' appearance is inexplicable, and all their speculations are incorrect (ST, 204-205). Thus, the Gardens tell little, and answers to their enigmas are delayed until later chapters and later volumes. The reader is as baffled as Severian; the mazes of Nessus perform their task of symbolic concealment well. Only escape from the City - the beginning of a quest for enlightenment - can liberate Severian from its toils of ignorance.

Throughout his presentation of Nessus, Wolfe emphasizes its deceptions and obscurities, as when Severian refers to buildings:

> 'Our destination was one of those accretive structures seen in the older parts of the city (but so far as I know, only there) in which the accumulation and interconnection of what were originally separate buildings, produce a confusion of jutting wings and architectural styles...' (ST, 87).

The city's baroque surface does not allow easy analysis of styles or meanings; the strangest example of this is the Matachin Tower, in which the Torturer's Guild is housed; in The Urth of the New Sun, it is shown to be not a building, but an earthbound spaceship (UNS, Ch. XXXVI). This secretive,

deceitful city, home to bizarre guilds and arcane hierarchies, is a powerfully conceived metaphor, a microcosm of its mysterious and impenetrable universe. Significantly, it is surrounded by a Wall, and is largely cut off from the outside; to attain contact with the broader world, Severian must depart the City, and does so at the end of The Shadow of the Torturer.

In the Sword of the Lictor, Wolfe makes use of a second variety of Gothic edifice, the Castle, and here his modification of symbols is more varied. Conventionally, the Castle in Gothic novels, beginning with Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (16) and continuing in modern manifestations in the works of Peake, Tolkien, Vance, and Lucius Shepard (17) among others, represents menace, a menace reflecting the psychology of its dweller (18). When Severian comes to the Castle of Baldanders (SL, Ch. XXXII), he meets precisely the evil caricatures and demonic semblances that the reader expects. But these turn out to be unrepresentative of any standard qualities: their true significance is more complex, highly ambiguous.

From the start, the castle has unexpected aspects; a Hierodule spacecraft hangs above its tower, making it resemble 'an immense toadstool', to Severian's astonishment (SL, 256). The monstrosities contained by the castle fall into two categories: Baldanders' slaves, and Hierodules. The latter have masks, but Severian knows they are aliens, and an uneasy impression of their appearance develops:

> 'The masks all three wore gave them the faces of refined men of middle age, thoughtful and poised; but I was aware that the eyes that looked out through the slits in the masks of the two taller figures were larger than human eyes, and that the shorter figure had no eyes at all, so that only darkness was visible there' (SL, 262).

A clue as to their true semblance emerges when another cacogen (Hierodule) passes the window of the castle, showing 'a dripping, nightmare face' (SL, 268). All is at this stage in keeping with the conventional: the Hierodules are hideous, secretive, and in league with the giant Baldanders, who is the enemy of the simple, peaceful lake-folk of Lake Diuturna. But Wolfe explodes these impressions swiftly. One of the cacogens, Famulimus, removes her mask, to reveal that the ugliness of the aliens is in itself a facade:

> 'With a quick flick of one hand, as though with relief, Famulimus stripped away the disguise. The face revealed was no face, only eyes in a sheet of putrescence. Then the hand moved again as before, and that too fell away. Beneath it was the strange, calm beauty I had seen carved in the faces of the moving statues in the gardens of the House Absolute, but differing from that as the face of a living woman differs from her own life mask' (SL, 273).

The Hierodules appear ugly in order to maintain fear of them, to keep the Autarch, humanity's protector, in power (SL, 274). They are in any case 'holy slaves', Servants of the Increate. The conventional expectation of their evil is reversed, and in their ambiguity of aspect they symbolize the protean Face of God, the cosmic inscrutability that is Wolfe's theme.

The other monstrosities of the Castle are Baldanders' experimental creatures, who join battle with Severian and his lake-people. They are 'hideous beings', with two heads, four limbs, or other bodily deformities (SL. 285). Severian admits the unsatisfactory nature of these opponents, who are after all Baldanders' victims, his enemies (SL, 285). Killing them is, to Severian's sensibility as a Torturer, no satisfying experience (SL, 286). The grotesques of the Gothic landscape, the reader must conclude, are not so much malign reflections of an evil psyche as they are symbolic of the failings of the rational mind. Baldanders is a scientist; his experiments have produced only pathetic victims. Again, a stock symbolism acquires a new emphasis; and, again, the inadequacy of human secular knowledge is argued.

Wolfe takes advantage of the scenes in the Castle to put the legend of Frankenstein and his monster (19) into a new perspective. The reader's assumption is that Dr Talos, the human-appearing inhabitant of the Castle, is the master, the figure of the evil scientist, and that the monstrous Baldanders is his creation. his servant or his nemesis. Baldanders rebuts this automatic presumption (which Severian shares): 'The doctor came afterward' (SL, 268). Baldanders created Talos. This inversion. disorienting, calls into question our definitions of the monstrous: which is more terrifying, a giant (Baldanders) or a brass, or artificial man (Talos)? A second inversion calls into dispute standard conclusions as to the provenance of just such myths as that of the demonically-

inspired inventor. Dr Talos, surveying the entire Gothic setting, asks Severian whether he recognizes it:

> 'The castle? The monster? The man of learning? I only just thought of it. Surely you know that just as the momentous events of the past cast their shadows down the ages, so now, when the sun is drawing toward the dark, our own shadows race into the past to trouble mankind's dreams' (SL, 277).

A Gothic myth can originate in the future. Severian thinks this is insane, but this simply reflects his inadequate understanding: through Dr Talos, Gene Wolfe is suggesting how Science Fiction, with its myths of the future, affects the present. Myth is not necessarily chronological in its impact; knowledge of a subconscious or archetypal sort is made less certain by the text.

In a final respect the Castle of Baldanders is a subversive device. Severian's visit to the Castle is motivated by a desire to liberate the lake-people from Baldanders' depredations. This is the action of a standard hero, and Severian acts the part, winning the beautiful Pia in the standard heroic manner (SL, 245). But Severian ultimately does not conclude his mission in the customarily noble and unambiguous manner. Wolfe invokes the stereotype of the gallant attack on a formidable fortress in order to explode it. The only victims of the attack are the innocent experimental beings; the sword 'Terminus Est' is destroyed, the Claw shattered (SL, 291); Baldanders escapes (SL, 292); and Severian wanders off into the north with little achieved. No

heroic certainties can be accommodated in Wolfe's cryptic, denying world.

Wolfe's use of Gothic architectures extends, unusually, to the Spaceship, a third object of his subversion of symbolism. The gigantic craft which conveys Severian to Yesod in the opening half of The Urth of the New Sun is fully Gothic in conception, a ship of corridors, hidden chambers, strange apparitions, and significant struggles. Through it, Wolfe appeals to many images of the Spaceship: Generation starships (20), mystically-impelled baroque vessels (21), haunted 'Flying Dutchmen' of space (22), and the like. The Spaceship stands in the iconography of Science Fiction for power, the conquest of distance and new territory; although it renders the unknown accessible, it generally engages the unknown in a spirit of conquest, of mastery. In Wolfe's text, this predictable emphasis is swiftly altered.

The starship captained (at first anonymously) by Tzadkiel is in many respects a traditional conception, manned by a disparate crew, vast in size, propelled by photon winds that catch its sails (23). But the difference in emphasis is soon apparent: this ship is transporting Severian to Yesod, which is less a physical world than a Divine emanation, one of the Sefiroth. An ascension from Briah to Yesod is a spiritual one, and many aspects of the journey reflect this inner, psychological, progression. Severian's baroque narrative is, as so often before, filled with the language of the Sublime; the wonders of space and time are more than objects of fascination: they

consistently echo Severian's exaltation, his state of religious enlightenment. For example, in his first exit from the ship, Severian sees from afar an entire cosmos:

> 'I looked there and saw, not our Urth, but a growing, spinning, swirling vortex of fuligin, the colour that is darker than black. It was like some vast eddy or whirlpool of emptiness; but circling it was a circle of colored light, as though a billion billion stars were dancing' (UNS, 9).

The tone of wonder is conventional; Briah has been left behind, a new universe will soon be entered. But soon the possibility of spiritual renewal is apparent: perhaps the 'colored' circle is Yesod. a 'new beginning', 'the scattering of young suns', 'the only truly magical ring this universe would ever know' (UNS, 10). Severian shouts for joy, not immediately aware of the full implications of Yesod, but instinctively rapturous. Later, his Sublime descriptions of Yesod make its spiritual dimension fully clear:

> 'And I drank in that air! Words cannot do it justice save by saying that it was the Air of Yesod, icy cold and golden with life. Never before had I tasted such air, and yet I seemed to know it' (UNS, 106).

Yesod's air is like the water of Life, cleansing and nourishing. Its wind is depicted as 'that glorious wind of Yesod that carries the fresh purity of its saltless sea and the perfume of all its glorious gardens' (UNS, 118). The ship has acted as a celestial chariot, carrying Urth's Epitome and Messiah to Heaven's lower levels. Severian is no temporal spacefarer; he is entering new realms of his soul.

But before this is possible, Wolfe demonstrates the difficulty of this venture. As Tzadkiel makes clear when Severian arrives before him for judgement on Yesod, Severian has been judged already (UNS, 153). His character has been probed to measure the merits of the future he will create if he brings the New Sun to Urth; his entire journey has involved testing. Wolfe has made of the Spaceship a territory where spiritual worth is guaged. In the light of this, further aspects of the ship acquire less conventional colourings. Stock events - the mutiny of the 'jibers' against the Captain, the presence of the would-be assassins Purn and Idas on board - become not simple plot-elements of an adventurous narrative, but tests of Severian. Idas dies by ingesting poison while Severian interrogates her (UNS, 53), but the second assassin, Purn, is persuaded from murder by an impression of Severian's insanity, his imposture - he does not appear the target Purn seeks (UNS, 115). Severian's moral evolution from Torturer to man of conscience is apparent, and is by implication noticed by Tzadkiel (as judge). Severian helps combat the jibers, supporting Tzadkiel's captaincy - another sign of his worth.

The ship is fully Gothic in that it reflects Severian's qualities through its crew, its occupants, its very physical arrangement; it is, like Nessus and the Castle, a mental architecture. It is the embodiment of Severian's spiritual passage; when he draws on his energies to attempt the resurrection of the murdered steward, the ship's energies are drained also, and it falls into darkness (UNS, 38-39).

Throughout the first half of The Urth of the New Sun, Tzadkiel, in the guise of the initially animal 'Zak', accompanies and mirrors Severian: the Captain parallels Severian's spiritual evolution as he grows from animal into human being, from 'shaggy creature' (UNS. 16) to 'strongly built sailor' (UNS. 92). In just such fashion has Severian risen from executioner to Messiah. Eventually, Zak assumes the guise of Severian, the Autarch (UNS. 111); his motives are never fully explained, but he is perhaps example, or perhaps another testing obstacle, an obstructive impostor, preventing Severian from arriving on Yesod in state. The crew believe Zak to be Autarch (UNS. 115).

Zak is always problematical, a shifting enigma, a quality he does not lose as Tzadkiel. Wolfe generally is affirmatory in the opening section of The Urth of the New Sun, but he always emphasizes the complications of Severian's mission. Zak is not Severian's only troublesome Doppelganger (24); in true Gothic manner, he has others: the false image of himself produced by the jibers (UNS. 89-90), and in the form of the mechanical man, Sidero. In the latter case, Wolfe makes use of a conventional idea: the suit of armour that an astronaut can wear as a protective garb in space, or in battle. But Sidero, other than being such a suit, is intelligent, his function as mere equipment long abandoned. Severian climbs into him despite this, and a struggle, bizarrely comic, ensues; Sidero says, '"Get out!"' (UNS. 63). Sidero embodies the division in Severian's mind; in one body, two wills battle, and Severian's divided nature, seen in many other places,

obtains a concrete metaphor. The colourful and exciting events of the narrative represent the complexity of inner and spiritual struggles and processes. Instead of a symbol of empowerment, the Spaceship and its appurtenances become emblematic of mystical evolutions. and of a prevailing ambiguity and division.

Beyond the realm of Gothic structures, Wolfe delivers commentary upon many other Science Fictional devices. One of these, the Alien, is represented in the text by two classes of being: the reasoning being, usually disguised as human, and the monster, the animal creatures such as the dangerous Salamander. In his depiction of aliens, Wolfe makes use of standard techniques: the evocation of strangeness (25), the use of human analogies to render the strange at least partially comprehensible (26). But as usual his intentions are unconventionally devious. The alienness of such beings as Father Inire, the Hierodules, and the Cumaean is intended as an indication of the unknowability of their master, the Increate, the veiled God. The ordinary difficulty a reader has in grasping an alien psychology or rationale is related to the much more familiar or common difficulty of grasping the Divine. A further point that Wolfe stresses, particularly through the bestial, non-sentient aliens, is that the horror we see in the unknown is a reflection of our own fears and desires; through this, we are led to understand the full extent of our own complexity.

The elusiveness of the alien, Wolfe's first pre-occupation in this general area, is aptly summarized by the figure of Father Inire. This familiar friend of the Autarch, acting as a prime minister or chamberlain, is never seen, except by allusion, one of his messages, or in memory. So indirect is his presence in the text that a direct description can only be found in Severian's narration of Thecla's reminiscences, after the latter's death. Even then he is mysterious:

> '"He wore iridescent robes that seemed to fade into gray when I looked at them, as if they had been dyed in mist"' (ST, 182).

In these recollections, Inire uses physics and metaphysics to argue that objects can be created from nothing by tricks of light (ST, 186). Inire is a vague personage, but he can be seen in a human light; Severian comments upon him shortly before his departure for Yesod:

> 'With him [the footman], no doubt, will be old, twisted Father Inire, eager to confer during the last few moments that remain; old Father Inire, alive so long beyond the span of his short-lived kind; old Father Inire, who will not, I fear, long survive the red sun' (CA, 309).

Severian has a fond regard for Inire, a servant of the Increate. Inire thus by implication should be known, open to the reader; but he is not. He symbolizes the Divine, calling for acquaintance but simultaneously denying it.

Of the Hierodules encountered in Baldanders' Castle. Famulimus best reflects this quality: she is beautiful in a 'strange',

'calm' way, but conceals her face beneath human and horrifying masks (SL, 273). To Severian, she should be known, but his imagery reveals the impossibility of this:

> 'His [Famulimus'] voice was like the music of some wonderful bird, bridging the abyss from a wood unattainable' (SL. 272).

He mistakes the female Famulimus for a male, because of her mask; and he emphasizes the remote beauty of the alien, 'unattainable'. The 'Holy Slaves', the messengers and agents of the Increate, disclose secrets to Severian at intervals (for example, in Chapters V and L of The Urth of the New Sun); but they are as reticent as their Divine master and the protean Tzadkiel, and, bizarrely, they travel backwards in time, experiencing time in reverse, climbing 'the stream of time', as Famulimus describes it (UNS, 35). So strange and disguised are they that they symbolize, like Inire, the tantalizing reclusivenes of Divine knowledge, of all cosmic information.

In Chapter XXXI of The Claw of the Conciliator, another alien, the 'Cumaean', is associated by Wolfe with mysteries of magic and time, and the effect yet again is that the alien becomes a symbol of the cryptic. The Cumaean seeks contact with an ancient, long-dead holy man, Apu-Punchau, who is later revealed to be Severian's future self, by a paradox of time-travel. A seance of a kind is organized, and Severian, as time is traversed, sees that beneath her skin the Cumaean is not human at all:

> 'Yet neither was she one of the horrors I had beheld in the gardens of the House Absolute. Something sleekly reptilian coiled about the glowing rod [which the Cumaean had swallowed]. I looked for the head but found none, though each of the patternings on the reptile's back was a face, and the eyes of each face seemed lost in rapture' (CC, 292).

Wonders occur nearby, as dead houses and people return to life, as the age of Apu-Punchau is revealed. Once more, the alien is associated with occult and heavenly mysteries; but a fresh element of the alien is its humanity. Severian sees faces on the otherwise foreign reptile that is the Cumaean; the human is part of the alien, part of the Divine, and thus human beings are drawn towards knowledge of God even as it evades them.

This association of the human with the alien, more fully explored in Wolfe's novel The Fifth Head of Cerberus (1972) (27), is a paradoxical component of Wolfe's depiction of bestial or teratoid aliens, the monsters so common in Science Fiction. He is not only reiterating the Gothic conception of the monster as an externalization of the human psyche; he is also alluding to definitions of the Grotesque, which emphasize that what appears to be a manifestation of horror may simply be a novelty or something sublime, that is not yet understood (28). In Gothic terms, Famulimus makes clear that the apparently dreadful, alien masks of the Hierodules are based upon Earthly, familiar faces (SL, 273). The notules, flying, predatory black rags (CC, Ch. XII); the Salamander, a half-vegetable creature of intense heat (SL, Ch. IX); the dark, shapeless beast that attacks the Sorcerers (SL, Ch. XXII): these may seem utterly foreign to human experience, but they

are summoned to Urth by Hethor, the malignant 'Caller', for his own, very human, purposes. The alzabo, an extra-terrestrial man-eater, speaks with borrowed human voices (SL, Ch. XVI). In short, the demonically alien is a human aspect, an upwelling of the unconscious landscape of archetypes and fears. Through this, Wolfe suggests the complexity of human psychology, the necessity of its darker, less conscious sides. In terms of the Grotesque, Severian's frequent failures of description when alluding to the alien (discussed in Chapter Two) reinforce Wolfe's philosophy of limited comprehension. We cannot grasp the alien, even if it reflects our inner selves; by this token, our potential understanding of God and the world is restricted. The equation of Grotesque and Sublime (29) makes bafflement by the Salamander identical with confusion before the veil of the Increate.

One of Science Fiction's stock characterizations, that of the authority-figure, receives from Wolfe a complex, and at times sardonic, treatment. The representatives of certain knowledge and powerful wisdom are common in the genre, as yet another affirmation of the text's simple and absolute direction, and of the author's omniscience (30). Wolfe is concerned to create characters who have access to higher secrets, and he produces them in the persons of the old Autarch and the angel Tzadkiel. In accordance with his general theme, Wolfe modifies the pattern: the figure of authority becomes so protean of aspect that his reliability is undermined or unclear and he is subject to failure, inducing in Severian and the reader a sudden

disillusionment. There is no infallible fountain of knowledge in the text, as Chapter Two has shown.

The Hierogrammate Tzadkiel's shifting appearance has been noted. While this is a test of Severian, and a display of power, it does culminate in a revelation that even angels have their mischievous and uncontrolled sides. In Chapter XL of The Urth of the New Sun, Severian comes to a mystical brook, a symbolic landscape that affords access to all times and all places - the Brook Madregot. Here he meets Tzadkiel yet again, but a Tzadkiel unlike the majestic judge he beheld on Yesod. She is small, a banished aspect:

> '"I myself am such a wild thing, Severian. You may think I've been stationed here to help you. I only wish it were so, and because I do I'll help you if I can; but I'm a part of myself that was banished long ago, long before the first time you met me"' (UNS, 285-286).

She misdirects Severian to the wrong era, one too close for his purposes to the Deluge; as he departs the Brook, he hears 'the crystal chiming of the small Tzadkiel's laughter' (UNS, 288). Severian has been mocked and duped. Not only does the fragmentation of Tzadkiel's character acquire fresh momentum here, but it becomes evident that even a senior servant of the Increate is imperfect - even wickedness serves the Divine, and none can know when it will arise. Tzadkiel's unreliability is fully manifest.

In the case of the old Autarch, Wolfe mingles an appearance that is vague with an authority that is suddenly shattered.

When Severian finally is able to speak with his predecessor (in Chapter XXIV of The Citadel of the Autarch), he wonders at the nature of their previous meetings. He first beheld the old Autarch when the latter was in the guise of a whoremaster in the House Azure (ST, Ch. IX). Later, he encountered him as an official of the court, and as an apparent agent of the rebel Vodalus (CC, 181-190). Now, the old Autarch reveals his true identity, maintaining that a ruler finds it useful to be an underling and a criminal at times, to see and hear, to act minutely in the bureaucratic sphere as a 'third bursar', to relieve 'certain needs' as a bawd (CA. 193-194). He can be Emperor and subject, like Jack Vance's Connatic (31). This makes of the Autarch an ambiguous figure; he is in addition androgynous, provoking further confusion in Severian and the reader. Furthermore, the Autarch's self-definition holds the key to another level of complexity: '"We are the thing itself, the self-ruler, the Autarch"' (CA. 188). He is known as 'Legion' to his servants (CA, 196). This is because he contains - as Severian does later - the personalities of his predecessors, their memories. His is not a unitary mind; he is a 'self-ruler' through his control of his conflicting elements.

Again the implication arises that any individual powerful and wise is so complex as to be fragmented, and so not easily understood or trusted. Wolfe is able to suggest a simple truth, that the 'great man' or being is not a God, not uniformly wise; he explodes Science Fiction's myth of the infallible leader and counsellor. To make his point even more

clearly, Wolfe emphasizes in his depiction of the old Autarch's power how suddenly such command can be lost. The old Autarch takes Severian aloft in a 'flier', in order to survey the battlefields where the Ascians are being fought. As the Autarch smilingly lectures Severian upon the mysteries of the recent past, their craft is shot down (CA, 205); they crash, and are soon captured. The descent from power is sudden and humiliating; through a characteristic reversal, Wolfe denies certainty even to those assured of it.

In converting the conventional structures of Science Fiction into uncertainties, Wolfe deals with a variety of themes: warfare, time, the division of science and magic, among others. His treatment of war is not altogether a direct subversion of generic attitudes. He is concerned to exploit, and in some respects to parody, the descriptions of war found in the works of Henlein, Poul Anderson, Gordon R. Dickson, Jack Vance, Orson Scott Card, and the like (32); but he is not writing an anti-military text as such, unlike Joe Haldeman or Lucius Shepard (33). Severian, who joins the Autarch's irregular troops in the central section of The Citadel of the Autarch, feels the camaraderie of his troop, and echoes traditional themes of courage and fear in battle (CA, 169-170). It is difficult for Wolfe's account of the war against the Ascians to assume any particular ideological perspective because the exoticism with which it is imbued obscures specifics, making the Fantastic, rather than suffering or glory, the chief emphasis of the text. Wolfe's theme here is 'the fog of war'; he makes the confusion of conflict apparent through the proliferation of exotic

terminology, baffling movements on the field, and through the uncertainty in Severian's mind as to which soldiers represent which side. The war is a metaphor for the broader obscurity of the world.

Severian joins the irregulars by accident (CA. 148), and accident is the chief form of causality in the war, other than the direction by some unknown general of the movements of the army. When the irregulars are on patrol, Severian is able to impose some order on a chaotic situation, in which the half-human elite guards of the Autarch are defending the bullion of the pay-train against deserters and bandits, a position complicated by the arrival of the troop with its Ascian prisoners. Severian arranges an alliance with the guards and the Ascian prisoners, by which they cooperate to defeat the bandits (CA. 159-161). But this intelligent action is short-lived: once the bandits are defeated, Severian's superior officers lead a massacre of the Ascians, and the Autarch's winged 'anpiels', or women-warriors, intervene (CA, 163). So many conflicting motivations are involved, complicated by incomprehension and treachery, that, although the outcome favours his side, Severian's narrative is more than usually opaque at this point.

The brilliantly-described battle (CA, Ch. XXII) that follows soon after achieves a similar effect of obscure motivation by means of a baroque exoticism. The impact of this is not unlike that of the aliens discussed earlier; the military

units are so bizarre that they defy ready comprehension or description:

> 'The savages seemed to have vanished. A new force appeared in their place, on the flank that now became our front. At first I thought they were cavalry on centaurs, creatures whose pictures I had encountered in the brown book. I could see the heads and shoulders of the riders above the human heads of their mounts, and both appeared to bear arms. When they drew nearer, I saw they were nothing so romantic: merely small men-dwarfs, in fact - upon the shoulders of very tall ones' (CA, 180).

This typical passage conveys the full disorientation of war: one unit vanishes, to be replaced with another; a flank becomes a front; the nature of the troops opposite is unclear, with knowledge derived from books unable to clarify them. Furthermore, Severian is slow to realize that these dwarf cavalrymen and their human mounts are enemies of the Autarch - 'With a horror I had not felt before, I realized that these strange riders and strange steeds were Ascians' (CA, 180). The reason for the slowness of this realization - apart from the shock of battle - is that the forces on Severian's own side are equally strange. Although he has lived in the Commonwealth all his life, Severian does not recognize the fellow-citizens who form other units; they are as colourfully remote as the Ascians:

> 'Battalions of peltasts with blazing spears and big, transparent shields; hobilers on prancing mounts, with bows and arrow cases crossed over their backs; lightly armed cherkajis whose formations were seas of plumes and flags' (CA. 172).

To Severian, they are 'these strange soldiers who had suddenly become my comrades' (CA. 172). So vast is the Autarch's territory that its inhabitants are foreign to one another; they are wonders that never cease. In this light, the war becomes stranger still: it is fought against an unknown enemy for an almost-unknown country; it is hard to tell friend from foe.

As Severian's involvement in the battle ends, the 'fog of war' becomes literal:

> 'Very soon the dwarfs' arrows and our conti had kindled scores of fires in the grass. The choking smoke rendered the confusion worse than ever' (CA, 182).

Soon after, Severian and his 'destrier' collide with a rider near their own lines, and he loses consciousness. The battle is inconclusive, a mere skirmish in a long war. Its obscurity, the fecundity of Wolfe's imagination conspiring with a natural incomprehension of so much novelty, represents the cognitive darkness of the world, in yet another of Wolfe's myriad ways. War makes nothing clearer.

Another central pre-occupation of Science Fiction and Fantasy is Time. In the genre it is usually considered flexible, so that adventurers can return to the past (34) or penetrate the future (35). This flexibility also permits the concept of alternative history - the idea that streams of time apart from ours embody variations on the history of the world, in which Nazism triumphed or the American Revolution failed (36).

Wolfe embodies all these ideas in the 'New Sun' cycle, but he does so with unusual purpose. In Severian's narrative, conventional concepts of time are infused with the numinous, with spiritual purposes. When the 'witch', Merryn, reveals the nature of time in mystical terms, she echoes a Catholic doctrine discussed in Chapter One: the timelessness of God, His ability to see all at once, and so to be served by evil and good alike. Merryn extends this notion to individual humans:

> '"All time exists. That is the truth beyond the legends the Epopts tell. If the future did not exist now, how could we journey toward it? If the past does not exist still, how could we leave it behind us? In sleep the mind is encircled by its time, which is why we so often hear the voices of the dead there, and receive intelligence of things to come"' (CC, 289).

The individual has access to past and future, as long as he is alive at the point in time he seeks (CC, 289-290). For Severian, with his perfect recollection of the past and occasional prolepsis, this is especially true. These potentialities for time-travel are always linked to the 'Abraxas', or 'Increate', with His instantaneous perception of all of time; they serve spiritual ends, uniformly.

Consequently, Severian's own excursions into past and future are exemplary, allowing a succession of Messianic missions or progresses. Yet nothing is simple or purposeful in all this: these displacements in time are not deliberately undertaken, and Severian is never initially sure of where and when he stands. Obscurity and confusion are unremitting.

Severian's return to Urth from Yesod (UNS, Ch. XXVII) is, he believes, also a return to the age when he is Autarch. His journey through the humble villages of Gurgustii and Vici (UNS, Chs. XXVIII and XXIX) is Christ-like; it is the germ of the legend of the Conciliator, for he is actually in ancient times, in the reign of the monarch Typhon. He only begins to realize this when he reaches a town familiar to him from events in The Claw of the Conciliator, Saltus. It had mines in his time; now, they are only just being started, the first shaft has just been driven (UNS, 245). Severian's ignorance of the time he has reached betrays him: not knowing that Typhon is in power, he is surprised when soldiers come to arrest him (UNS, 245). All this is necessary, so the story of the Conciliator can become a part of Urth's folklore, so that Typhon can be confronted, and a rebellion against him commence; but there is nothing masterful about this mission into the past. Its results are, from Severian's viewpoint, accidental. Even as Wolfe uses time-travel to augment Severian's Messianic role, he is removing any genre-conventional idea of human control from the process.

A similar lack of volition characterizes Tzadkiel's mischievous return of Severian to the future (UNS, 288-289); he is too late to have any effectiveness as the Deluge submerges the Palace (UNS, 307-310). His third venture through time carries him, grieving for dead Urth, into the far past. He wishes to think upon his actions as destroyer of Urth and founder of Ushas, the new, post-Deluge world (UNS, 342). He sees himself as 'Urth's executioner' (UNS, 343). Entering an Urth of the

far past, he again becomes a Messiah, as 'Apu-Punchau', or 'Head of Day', a holy man of the primitive aboriginals. Again, time-travel is involuntary, at least as far as the choice of destination; and its purpose is spiritual - repentance and holy duty to ancient people. Its religious motivation, and the uncertainty of it, take this time-travel far from the customary concerns of Science Fiction.

Wolfe's approach to the alternative world concept is similar. Severian's journeyings bring him two visions of the future: the future is represented by one time-traveller as a Utopian prospect, one of self-sufficient and improved people (CC, 27-28); but much later, Master Ash, a man from the future, tells Severian that in the future Urth is covered by 'the last glaciation' (CA, 133). These futures, mutually exclusive, are yet another product of the fluidity of time; they are possibilities given expression. Alternative futures are relatively rare in Science Fiction (37), but they are simply a variant of the alternative pasts and presents so often portrayed. One element of them, however, is distinctive: they represent the consequences of present actions, the outcomes of moral choices facing the present. This is Wolfe's reason for using them: the worlds of plenty and of ice are the products of Severian's choices as to Urth's destiny. They are thus expressions of spiritual purpose, and match Wolfe's other manipulations of Time. They also stress yet again the multiplicity of the world: its ambiguity, the fact that its nature is never certain.

Gene Wolfe's massive metafictional enterprise expresses judgement on a final and very important question in the genre of Science Fiction: the distinction of Science and Magic. In composing the 'New Sun' novels, Wolfe consciously created a work of Science Fantasy, one using 'the means of science to achieve the spirit of fantasy'; such a work 'uses the methodology of science fiction to show that these things [the Fantastic] are not only possible but probable' (38). In short, Wolfe uses the Rational to support the Fantastic, science to support religion. The logic and emphasis upon scientific method that characterize Science Fiction are subverted in the grandest manner possible; they come to argue the existence of the Increate, of Messiah and miracles (39).

On several occasions in the text, Wolfe engages in this merging of science and magic. Father Inire's explanation of the operation of his mirrors is a prominent example, because it justifies so many of the cycle's apparitions. By his argument, an experiment with light can create matter:

> '"if the light is from a coherent source, and forms the image reflected from an optically exact mirror, the orientation of the wave fronts is the same because the image is the same. Since nothing can exceed the speed of light in our universe, the accelerated light leaves it and enters another. When it slows again, it re-enters ours - naturally at another place. Eventually it will be a real being. For a reflected image to exist without an object to originate it violates the laws of our universe, and therefore an object will be brought into existence"' (ST, 196).

This is the means by which 'apports' - alien monsters - are brought into existence on Urth by Hethor, the caller. The

language of science, of elementary physics, of the engineering of which Wolfe is himself a practitioner, becomes a justification for miracles, for a universe of demiurgy and miracle-making. Elsewhere, scientific terminology supports the supernatural in lesser ways. In conversing with Tzadkiel's fragment, Severian mentions that he once saw a vision of the angel 'hanging with wide wings in the vacancy between the stars'. Tzadkiel responds that in space she can be large and can fly, because there there is 'no attraction' (gravity). Angelic flight is bound by natural laws (UNS, 283). Shortly afterwards, Tzadkiel asserts that a place between Yesod and Briah - between the dimensions - can resemble a brook and its surroundings because, as with the water in a brook,

> '"Energy gropes for some lower state, always; which is merely to say that the Increate tosses all the universes between his hands"' (UNS, 285).

The language of science is, then, the language of religion also. With great skill and consistency, Wolfe compels the rhetoric of Science Fiction to serve, to become, the rhetoric of theology and eschatology. Towards the end of The Urth of the New Sun, the ability of the 'anima', or soul, to occupy only one body at a time is summed up in a metaphor of two currents flowing through one conductor, and so becoming one current (UNS. 361). The 'spirit of fantasy' is indeed achieved by the 'means of science' in the 'New Sun' Cycle. A genre that is 'cognitive' (40) is transformed, to generate a text spiritual and void of customary certainties. It is with

some irony that Severian says '"I didn't understand all of that"' after the Autarch's long explanation of the mechanics of the Flier (CA, 198). Although Urth is a world of the far future, she is divorced by time and her creator's intention from the age of technology, as the Appendix to The Citadel of the Autarch demonstrates. When Vodalus dreams of progress and 'mastery' (CC, 84), he is out of step with his times and the text of which he is part; his demise is certain, and comes at the end of the tetralogy. The 'New Sun' cycle is Science Fiction in its intellectual rigour (41), in the inexorable logic of its narrative and thematic purposes; but it is Fantasy in meaning, in its elaborate dramatization of the search for faith and of that quest's myriad difficulties.

Wolfe's introduction of the Fantastic into his text is all-pervasive: magic usurps science, the ambiguity of Severian's quest informs narrative, theme, every genre characteristic of Science Fiction. Wolfe's art is, for Science Fiction, a realization of Eric Rabkin's definition of the subversive process of the Fantastic:

> 'One of the key distinguishing marks of the fantastic is that the perspectives enforced by the ground rules of the narrative world must be diammetrically contradicted. The reconfiguration of meanings must make an exact flip-flop, an opposition from up to down, from + to -' (42).

Rationalism becomes transcendent quest, science becomes a metaphor for the metaphysical arguments of a heterodox

Catholicism. This is the objective of all Wolfe's inversions and reversals, his labyrinths and provocative conundra. His metafictional text ensures the full literary impact of his vision of Fallen seekers for a veiled God.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VEILED SELF: THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS (1)

Wolfe's theme of the cognitive impenetrability of the universe, best and most complexly explored in the 'New Sun' Cycle, has been a central preoccupation of his writing since early in his career. The Fifth Head of Cerberus, a novella cycle first published in 1972 and Wolfe's first major work, prefigures many of the concerns of the later masterwork. With the techniques and arguments of Wolfe's mature texts examined, the similar, cruder, but still masterful art of his initial effort at the presentation of ambiguity can be analyzed fruitfully. This chapter investigates the three novellas of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, in the full complexity of their varied perspectives.

In these linked narratives, Wolfe's inquiry extends again to the nature of those identities that define the world, but in this case it is the self, not God, that is central to the questioning. The protagonists of the three novellas - 'Number Five', 'Sandwalker', and 'John V. Marsch' - all seek to discover their own selves, selves obscured by veils as complicating as those that conceal the Increate in the 'New Sun' volumes. They are baffled by their own blindness, by the imperfect nature of their narrative vehicles, by the realities of cultural, political, and colonial conditioning that have governed their lives, as well as by the inherent impossibility of true discovery, whether it be of one's own identity or of the true character of the cosmos. Each character's life

involves the death of a genetic or symbolic counterpart; in two cases, murder is overt and acknowledged, in the other case it is only hinted; but whatever the circumstances, the loss prevents any certainty as to the self's qualities, as the corroborating mirror of another - a twin, a brother, a friend from another world - is abruptly taken away. Wolfe's three examples of self-blindness, their narcissism bitterly ironic and endlessly frustrated, stand among the bleakest figures ever conceived in Science Fiction; and as they fall, the clear rationality and technophilic optimism of their genre fall with them.

The novella-cycle's formal arrangement and setting hint at the harrowing uncertainties of the text. The novellas have as their background two colonized planets, ones orbiting each other as part of a binary system - Sainte Croix and Sainte Anne. Approximately two centuries before the events described in the first and third novellas, the two worlds, which mysteriously had been neglected by colonists before, were settled by the French, who on St. Anne either subjugated and then exterminated a humanoid aboriginal race, or did not. There is no clear historical evidence that the aborigines existed, or of what they were like; but rumours and imperfect recollections suggest they could alter their shape. This causes a scientist on St. Croix, Dr. Veil, to suggest that the aborigines exterminated and replaced the colonists. From the viewpoint of the colonists' (or the aborigines') descendants,

> 'We might in fact be the natives of Sainte Anne, having murdered the original terrestrial colonists and displaced them so thoroughly as to forget our own past' (FHC, 26).

The French, or pseudo-French, were later conquered by a fresh wave of human invaders, who on St. Croix established a tyranny based on a Utopian lie reminiscent of Kafka (2), employing slavery and police-state tactics, and who on St. Anne constructed a military regime with less defined characteristics. These different governments exist in potentially warlike rivalry. Consequent on this background, all conclusions pointed by the text are - and this is Wolfe's design - unreliable. If the inhabitants of the two worlds are alien, their fates, their impressions and conclusions, are of no direct human application. They are imitative illusions. Furthermore, the language and practices of a Dystopian police-state, relying upon propaganda, concealment, and distortion of the truth, infect many sections of the narrative; no information is trustworthy. Additionally, the fact that the worlds are sister-planets, raped by outsiders and now at odds, suggests a prevailing motif of the book - the divided and warped family, a schism unnatural and insane. There is no accessible core of truth in such a situation. Narrators and readers confront numerous devices and obstacles, all generating confusion.

Compounding this is the narrative composition of the novellas. The first - 'The Fifth head of Cerberus' - is similar to the 'New Sun' cycle: it is narrated in simple chronological

sequence by 'Number Five', and tells of his life in an old Gothic house in the city of Port-Mimizon on St. Croix. But it is complicated by the blindness, egotism, and doubtful sanity of its teller, who is a clone, an experimental subject who turns on his maker. It is full of gaps, owing to Number Five's faulty memory, and its setting is oppressive and disturbing. Its symbolism and logic are circular and bizarre. But complication increases in the second novella, '"A Story", by John V. Marsch'. This purports to be an account of life among the aboriginals of St. Anne just before the arrival of the first French invaders. Its mode and language are mythical, evoking a lost and alien time of communion with spirits and the heavens. This is unfamiliar already; but the reader has to consider further: the apparent author of the tale is Marsch, an anthropologist who appeared in the first novella. If this is correct, the narrative is artificial, a haphazard reconstruction based on fragments of dubious oral evidence concerning a dead race. But suspicion already exists (FHC, 53) that Marsch is an aboriginal, an imitation of a terrestrial anthropologist, a shape-changer. If so, the tale is genuine. A third possibility is suggested by the third novella - that the 'Story' was written to create just such uncertainty as the first two possibilities engender, in order to secure Marsch's release from prison. This insoluble puzzle of hypotheses makes the text suspect, utterly ambiguous in any conclusions it suggests. The third novella, 'V.R.T.', longest in the sequence, takes a form as unlike that of the first two as they are unlike each other. A collection of documents - diaries, essays, reveries, taped conversations and interrogations - is

presented, in the sequence in which they are examined by a political or prison officer of the government of St. Croix. They tell, in the random order the largely disinterested officer chooses, of John V. Marsch - of his anthropological field-work on St. Anne, in search of the 'abos'; of the apparent death of his guide, who may in fact have replaced him; of his long imprisonment on St. Croix by authorities who think he is an assassin or spy. The appearances and suspicions mentioned indicate the difficulty of this novella for the reader: it is unclear whether Marsch writes as an anthropologist or as an aborigine, whether his documents and conversations reveal a social scientist from Earth, an 'abo' pretending to be such a person, or an Earthman who wishes to seem an aboriginal in order to escape the prison. He may even be an assassin pretending all of the aforementioned conditions, in order to perplex his interrogators. The jumbled sequence of the documents and the cold opacity of the examining officer in the framing narrative only exacerbate the resulting uncertainty.

This narrative maze makes the situations of Science Fiction, normally open and subject to ready analysis, indeterminate. Wolfe, as is so common with Science Fiction writers, engages the intellect of his reader, presenting riddles and puzzles - who is the alien, who committed the murder of Number Five's father and Sandwalker's brother, and the like. But the analytical certainties, the cognitive guarantees, of the genre, here point to one definite conclusion only: that answers are not easily obtained, or are impossible. The reader is

perplexed; and so are Wolfe's characters. They seek knowledge of their own nature, but are embedded in texts defined by the indefinite.

This chapter examines each novella in turn and in detail. Wolfe uses many techniques and themes to emphasize the difficulty of self-analysis - Gothic architecture and symbolism, narrative obstructions, sub-texts of the distorting influences of colonialism, authoritarianism, patriarchalism, rationalism, and other governing ideologies, indications of the folly of narcissism and self-replication. The tropes of Science Fiction mingle with these, influencing and being subverted. Wolfe's application of this complex mixture, in three novellas which echo and reflect each other despite radical differences, reveals his beliefs and techniques in much detail.

'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' presents the problem of identity in terms unique to Science Fiction: its protagonist and narrator, known simply as 'Number Five', is a clone of his 'father', and finds himself consequently unable readily to define himself. Wolfe raises a question common to other works in the genre (3): if a person is a precise reproduction of another individual, genetically and in respect of nurture, how can he or she have full free-will, any ability to remain independent of destiny and character? Number Five's account articulates the impossibility of such self-direction, by examining the motivation of cloning.

Well into his memoir, Number Five describes a dream - a vivid, memorable, and conspicuously symbolic dream - that he has while under the influence of his 'father's' drugs. He is aboard a white ship, one motionless, 'heeled-over', in a sea of stars, and with a dead man at the wheel - indicative of the dead and static condition and direction of the family of clones. Number Five's aunt is present; she informs him that her brother - Number Five's clone-father - is cause for worry, because he is trying to find out why the ship does not move. The answer to that question is obvious: the ship has been heeled over. The father's search for the reason is circular: '"It doesn't move because he has fastened it in place until he finds out why it doesn't move."' (FHC. 38) In reality, the father is seeking to discover the reason for his own sterility, for the failure of his blood-line to achieve any meaningful status in the society of St Croix:

> 'We end at this level ..... after how many generations? We do not achieve fame or the rule of even this miserable little colony planet. Something must be changed, but what?' (FHC. 52)

For this reason - 'we wish to discover why we fail' - the father has produced his own clone, the fifth such (Number Five), as a subject of observation and experimentation, one that will explain its genetic 'failure', that of the entire family. This search for 'self-knowledge' has been in progress for generations; the father tells Number Five,

> '"I seek self-knowledge. If you want to put it this way, we seek self-knowledge. You are here because I did and do, and I am here because the individual behind me did."' (FHC, 52)

That individual had another, this time original, progenitor. As in the dream, the quest is circular, as is obvious from the fact that it has yielded no answers in many decades. All that these succeeding genetic scientists discover in their self-replication is the desire to go on. They do not genuinely reproduce; there is no addition to their lineage of fresh blood, and so there is no progress. Theirs is the ultimate narcissism.

The narrator's description of the manner in which he is forced into his father's mould expresses both his alienation and the brutality of one mind's domination of another. As a boy, he is subjected to drugs, hypnotic sessions, and long exposure to facts and images from his father's own upbringing. The results traumatize and efface his personality; the drugs affect his health:

> 'I often wakened in the morning with a headache that kept me in agony all day, and I became subject to periods of extreme nervousness and apprehensiveness. Most frightening of all, whole sections of days sometimes disappeared, so that I found myself awake and dressed, reading, walking, and even talking with no memory at all of anything that had happened since I had lain muttering to the ceiling in my father's library the night before.' (FHC, 20)

Later he loses volition for 'an entire winter and the spring'. (FHC, 47) Another assumes control of his actions, thoughts, and memories: his father, so that Number Five may resemble him

exactly, and may eventually continue his work. This process takes further forms as Number Five grows older: he is trained in the genetic arts, he takes responsibility for aspects of his father's business, which includes the management of a large whorehouse - perhaps another reflection of the barrenness of the establishment.

The result of this is suitably circular. The father is aware that Number Five will respond to the realization that he is a clone by attempting his murder, which is both an act of revenge and a result of a desire to take charge of the house. The father knows this because he has led an identical life, and intended to kill his 'father' at the same age. (FHC, 51) Each life echoes the other, with a hollow, repetitive sound: Number Five kills his father, and, already his double in appearance, skills and tastes (each has a small pet monkey), he returns from prison to occupy the same house and pursue the same trades of geneticist and bawd. (FHC, 57) Soon he produces his own clone, and begins the cycle anew. Like his father, he wishes to probe his own inadequacies, and says at the end of his narrative, 'Someday they'll want us.' (FHC, 57) But 'they' (the world) will not.

The cycle of actions leads uniformly to death, disappointment, and repetition. Number Five and his 'father' are highly intelligent men; but they are blind to the futility of their course. Thus Wolfe suggests the depth of narcissism, its ability to enthrall; one form of self-regard is infinitely perilous, and one path to self-knowledge is exposed as futile.

But this message extends much further than just the confines of the house in Port-Mimizon. In a conversation with Number Five and Marsch, the father mentions the many replicas of himself who have proven unsuccessful, and whom he sold as slaves. (FHC,51) On St Croix, slaves are numerous, and are often modified physically, so as to perform their functions better. While robbing a large warehouse (he is a criminal long before he murders his father), Number Five mentions to his friends and acccomplices that 'surgery' and 'chemically induced alterations in their endocrine systems' render these slaves less intelligent than 'normals' - in fact, animal. (FHC, 40) He kills a four-armed slave that is standing guard, but while he is nearby he sees 'my own face reflected and doubled in the corneas of his eyes'. It seems to him that their faces are very much alike. (FHC, 46) He and the slave are genetically identical; only accident separates Number Five from a similar animality. The self-regard practised by father and son, in its reproduction of the self, has lowered the human to the level of the brute; this indicates the ultimate stupidity of their actions. Port-Mimizon is full of casualties of their programme: slaves, dehumanized castoffs. How far their heritage extends is not clear, but in 'V.R.T' Marsch notices a strange resemblance between the agents who arrest him - 'all three with pointed chins, black brows and narrow eyes, so that they might have been brothers.' (FHC, 133) If the entire society of Port-Mimizon is composed of such sterile doubles, its lack of progress and its oppressive, self-loving political order acquire some explanation. (4) Conceivably, genetic

narcissism is global; in Wolfe, the mere hint of this suggests the magnitude of his theme.

The process of fanatical self-regard, even in the microcosm of the old house inhabited by the clones, has implications for the ideology of Number Five and his father. Both are scientists, believing (excessively) in the efficacy of experimentation, obeservation, logical deduction. Number Five's 'brother' David was produced as an experiment in contrast with the direct clone, as an 'outcrossing' . (FHC, 53) But to discover the nature of the self, as many versions and variations as possible ought to be generated; however, obsessively, those that diverge are discarded as slaves. The clone masters are too human to carry their experiments through; they are affected by insecurity, and so abandon most of their replicas, and kill each other. Any improvement on the original, any rival, is intolerable. No results are attainable. Wolfe subverts the scientific method: human imperatives overpower it, and once again the basis of conventional Science Fiction is undermined. In human terms, Number Five might come to know himself if he would let his father live, if he would sire children, have contrasting mirrors to assist him in self-definition. But, as with Sandwalker and Marsch in the succeeding novellas, he murders another who is a part or a complement of himself, and so is left incomplete, ignorant and in darkness. His intellectual and psychological purposes are thwarted.

The central metaphor of this novella is a significant one - the reference to the mythical dog with three heads, who guarded

Hell's gate. If the house where Number Five dwells - a place of physical and psychic distortion, as well as prostitution - is equivalent to Hell, it is ironic that a statue stands guard outside its front entrance, 'an iron statue of a dog with three heads'. (FHC, 10) Not only does its presence suggest the resemblance of the house, the 'Maison du Chien', to the underworld, but it points to the nature of its inhabitants. Number Five describes the heads of the dog:

> 'The three heads were sleekly powerful with pointed muzzles and ears. One was snarling and one, the centre head, regarded the world of garden and street with a look of tolerant interest. The third, the one nearest the brick path that led to our door, was - there is no other term for it - frankly grinning..... ...' (FHC, 10)

The people within - the father, the tutor 'Mr Million' who is a robotic simulation of the original geneticist, Number Five, the old aunt known as Dr Veil - are all the same genetically, and no matter how their expressions vary, they are heads of the same dog, versions of the same original. Number Five is the fifth version, and so he is the fifth head. His is the Hell of ultimate monotony, of a stale repetition. Number Five mentions that patrons of the house pat the iron dog's grinning head when they arrive - 'Their fingers had polished the spot to the consistency of black glass'. (FHC, 10) The condition of the heads is old, familiar; it is, metaphorically and actually, unending.

The significance of the statue indicates a major characteristic of this novella - its reliance upon the Gothic. (5) As in the 'New Sun' cycle, Wolfe employs descriptive techniques

emphasizing the grotesque: Port-Mimizon is conspicuously similar to Nessus. It also has a labyrinthine Citadel, aged and sinister buildings, much arcane social stratification. The antiquity of its dwellings seems strange to the visitor, Marsch; he asks Number Five 'why this house, on a planet that has been inhabited less that two hundred years, seems so absurdly old.' (FHC, 28) The response, that a lack of congestion has occasioned little demolition and fresh construction - causing a general air of changelessness and age - is only a part of the answer. The truth is that in a Gothic text architecture reflects the character of its inhabitants (6); the circularity and senescent aspect of the 'Maison du Chien' are confirmation of the sterility and paradoxical age of its owners, who are one unchanging man endlessly reborn. The statue implies this condition; so do Number Five's images of his home. In his first paragraph he recalls how the 'hard' sunlight streamed into his room 'while we lay staring out at my father's crippled monkey perched on a flaking parapet.' (FHC, 1) The eccentricity of the house is apparent in the monkey; the self-truncation or crippling of the family is reflected in the pet; and the antiquity and closed nature of the household is seen in its neglected, fortress-like parapet. Shortly afterwards, Number Five mentions that 'our window had a shutter of twisted iron which we were forbidden to open.' (FHC,1) A sense of imprisonment - both a literal incarceration of the boys and a bondage to an ancestral repetitive course - is at once implied, and this impression is sustained by the brooding atmosphere of the entire narrative.

The characterization of Number Five's father is Gothic in a direct sense; he is the psychotic scientist who breeds knowledge in the midst of decay; Number Five describes his library, behind a 'huge carved door', a 'forbidden place':

> 'Of seeing it [the door] swing back, and the crippled monkey on my father's shoulder pressing itself against his hawk face, with the black scarf and scarlet dressing gown beneath and the rows and rows of shabby books and notebooks behind them, and the sick-sweet smell of formaldehyde coming from the laboratory beyond the sliding mirror.' (FHC,4)

It is almost too obvious to the reader that the father is being compared with an undertaker ('formaldehyde'), that the books represent the shabby and antique state of his knowledge, and that the mirror is a comment on the self-reflecting and secretive nature of his research. But there is an irony to this: Number Five remarks that the library is 'now in my possession'. (FHC,4) The characterization of the father is also that of the son, his precise heir. Every detail of the text reflects Number Five, persons and objects alike; but the self-knowledge he seeks is not thus reflected, but rather the image of what he has been designed to become - his 'father', his 'grandfather'.

The literal and figurative maze, later used to great effect in the 'New Sun' cycle, is found in the house. As a boy, Number Five comes upon hitherto unfamiliar sections of the 'Maison du Chien', such as 'a stairwell far toward the back of the house, a corkscrew, seldom-used flight, very steep, with only a low iron banister between the steps and a six-storey drop into the

cellars'. (FHC, 15) The devious design of such architectures, with their hidden recesses and dangerous traps, symbolizes the perilous intricacy of the search for self-knowledge, its obscurity and unreliable enigmas. As in his novel Peace (1975), Wolfe makes the house an elaborate and systematic metaphor for the complexity and harrowing dilemmas of the protagonist's mind.

Wolfe's application of the Gothic is not restricted to such general evocation of his character's psychology. He also makes use of a variety of characterization that is typically Gothic: the hero whose activity and passivity conduce to the same result, whose struggles to defend his own personality ensure his own destruction. (7) In terms of William Patrick Day's formulation, the masculine character in a Gothic romance is active in the sense that he is victimized by his own desires (8); his struggle by implication is delimited by the pressures his own pysche places upon him, and he is thus the agent of his distress and the one that combats his distress, simultaneously. This is true in an especially ironic way of Number Five: his previous selves dictate to him, his heritage conflicts with his potential individuality, and he is at war with himself. The search for self-knowledge, his only desire, is the cause of his pain. Again in Day's terms, the Gothic hero is thus essentially passive; his actions inevitably lead him on a circular course to his destruction. In a manner strikingly reminiscent of the genetic quest of the succession of clones, Day summarizes the case of Dracula, whose '"life" consists of the endless repetition of the act of vampirism, to no end but

the ceaseless and meaningless replication of himself'. (9) Wolfe consciously creates in Number Five a personality that is sensitive and intelligent, reflective and aware of symbolism; a personality able to strive and wonder in the Gothic sense, but also Gothically passive and doomed, self-preoccupied and so a victim of himself. It is an irony typical of Wolfe that even as the text argues the need for different imperatives than these, he leaves his character no choice but to play out his circular course, by binding him to Gothic formulas and destinies. The author is as merciless as Number Five's father; his point must be made, and the son or creation is required to make it. Thus is the necessity for another road to self-knowledge emphasized.

The later novellas in the cycle develop the theme of the alien; and although 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' does not directly address the dilemma posed by the aborigines, it begins the text's treatment of the 'Other'. The Gothic embodies this in the "Döppelganger"; as Day argues, the Gothic hero and heroine create and protect their identities against the Other through an assertive action and a virtuous passivity respectively, these courses forming a pattern of the infliction and suffering of pain that is never adequate to its mission and is soon internalized. It is a dichotomy of sadism and masochism that is not easily contained; this can be seen in the combination of suffering undergone by Number Five and that which he inflicts on others (as in his murder of the slave and his father). The rival aspects of sadism and masochism fragment the self, so that 'the Other resolves itself into a version of

the self, a fragmentation and externalization of identity that destroys the self as fully and as surely as the overt attacks of its nemesis'. (10) Thus houses and surroundings mirror the self; boundaries of self and Other vanish, and menacing doubles appear, embodying in an image of the protagonist the threats to him. His defences are infiltrated, and cannot stand. This shifting of subjective and objective realities is central to the doubts as to identity later in the book, as aliens may be human, and humans alien. But here it already suggests Number Five's position: the Other, the menace to his integrity, is himself, in the person of his father, his twin. Everywhere, he encounters Doubles in the simulations of his genetic original: the slave, his aunt, the robot tutor 'Mr Million'. By using this aspect of the Gothic, Wolfe declares one major difficulty on the road to self-knowledge: the near impossibility of deciding what pertains to the self, and what is of outside origin. In Number Five's case, this uncertainty if fatal: the Other invades his mind, and he ends up a mere replica of his father, however active and purposeful he may be.

'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' develops other motifs that characterize the later novellas: ones pertinent to colonialism. Although the primary emphasis is upon the domestic and inner life of Number Five, the fact that Port-Mimizon is a colonial town is also often evident. It is the cause of the father's anguish: why cannot his family rule 'even this miserable little colony planet?' (FHC. 52) The world of St. Croix is unlike St. Anne; it had no alien population for the colonists to dispossess and destroy. But the second wave of arriving

Earthmen had the French as their natural victims; the consequence is slavery, as is seen in the slave-market and its wares, the genetically or surgically adjusted slaves:

> 'There were sedan chairmen, their legs knotted with muscle, and simpering bath attendants; fighting slaves in chains, with eyes dulled by drugs or blazing with imbecile ferocity; cooks, house servants, a hundred others.' (FHC, 5)

As Number Five, his 'brother' David and Mr Million, the tutor, pass the slavemarket, the two boys are 'bored', their sympathy and sensibilities unaroused by what they see. Only Mr Million is interested - a robot shows the most emotion. A similar indifference towards the slaves is seen when Number Five, David, and Phaedria rob the slave warehouse in the city. Phaedria asks, '"They aren't people, are they?"', when she sees the chained gladiatorial slaves. (FHC, 40) She expresses idle interest in seeing the erotically modified girls owned by Number Five's father. (FHC,40) This state of moral numbness is understandable: the children are accustomed to slavery, the slaves are of low intelligence (through treatment) and in many respects the children are themselves slaves, subject to experimentation or, in the case of Phaedria and Marydol, sale. A society of slaves breeds indifference to a condition that is universal. But to the reader the effect is disturbing: Number Five's narrative has no moral centre or direction. The civilization it portrays is monstrous, brutal, tyrannical, callous. This suggests the alienation and cruelty of the colonial process, more directly but no more tellingly than the later novellas. The all-pervasiveness of the process is

evident; its destruction of the humanity even of those in power is fully implied. This is what makes 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' a grim and dark narrative; the attitudes of its narrrator have been distorted; Number Five's blindness and tragedy are microcosms of a universal malaise.

As the 'Fifth Head of Cerberus' begins Wolfe's portrayal of colonialism, it provides anthropological information necessary to an understanding of the second novella. Sitting in the library when young, Number Five and David are made to debate the 'abos' of St. Anne by their tutor. (FHC, 7-9) Number Five argues that stone tools were unimportant to the aboriginals, unlike primitive humans; their alienness is further emphasized by David, who indicates their important cultural signifiers:

> '"They killed their sacrifical animals with flails of seashells that were like razors, and they didn't let their men father children until they had stood enough fire to cripple them for life. They mated with trees and drowned the children to honour their rivers."' (FHC, 8)

The true nature of the aboriginals is concealed by myth, mysticism, and mystery; David repeats rumours. This is one reflection of the colonial tragedy: the original population is extinct, or hidden - obscure. Later, David remarks that the 'abos' are 'human because they're all dead'. (FHC, 9) This is the most telling observation of all.

> '"If they were alive it would be dangerous to let them be human because they'd ask for things, but with them dead it makes it more interesting if they were, and the settlers killed them all."' (FHC, 9)

Conquerors attribute humanity as it suits them. In the context of this colonial cruelty, and of the question of what is human, the second novella assumes great significance.

'"A Story" by John V Marsch', the shortest of the novellas, is one of the most remarkable of Wolfe's narrative experiments. It is presented as a reconstruction, or at least this is the reader's assumption, as the John Marsch who appeared in 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' was an anthropologist, and the 'Story' deals with the 'abos' who interested him. Superficially, the tale of Sandwalker and his adventures must have been based by Marsch upon the same fragments of information available to Number Five and his brother on St Croix. It must be highly speculative, as it deals on an apparently familiar basis with how the aborigines of St. Anne lived, behaved, spoke, thought and died, aspects Marsch could not know directly or in such detail. With the idea in mind that the 'Story' is a re-assembled mythic narrative, akin to twentieth century anthropological reconstructions (11), the reader can trace the artificial and hypothetical elements of the tale.

These are conspicuously placed. In accordance with theoretical assumptions about the nature and function of myth (12), Sandwalker's tale performs functions of ritual, symbolism, affirmation, and explanation of the world. It is

told in the manner of a myth, simply, and emphasizing common, accepted truths:

> 'A girl named Cedar Branches Waving lived in the country of sliding stones where the years are longer, and it came to her as it comes to women.....When her thighs were drenched her mother took her to the place where men are born, where two outcrops of rock join. There there is a narrow space smooth with sand, and a new-dropped stone lying at the joining in a few bushes; under there, where all the unseen is kind to mothers, she bore two boys.' (FHC, 59)

The ritual location of birth and the practices surrounding it, the suggestion of kind natural forces, and the emphasis upon set phases and events in life, are all predictable features of a mythic story; an anthropologist would naturally use them.

The religious beliefs of the aborigines acquire support from Sandwalker's experiences. His people believe in the procreational power and influence of trees; Sandwalker behaves accordingly when entering a valley containing a tree:

> 'Such a place was of great significance, but it was possible to drink there, and even to stay for a few hours if one dare. And it was less offensive to the tree, as Sandwalker knew, if one came alone - an advantage for him.' (FHC, 70)

He approaches the tree 'with an expression of studied courtesy', and later greets it 'ceremoniously'. In this way the narrative again follows theoretical requirements of myths, that they affirm the beliefs of their audience. Elsewhere, further deliberate biases and patternings can be detected, such

as the symbolic pairing of brothers (Eastwind and Sandwalker), binary oppositions of hills and lowlands (13), the association of water with time.

The reader's assumption of Marsch's scholarly and sympathetic creation of a possible myth-tale of an exterminated race - distant from any original, genuine narrative - has strong implications. The 'Story' is fiction in this light - appealing, with elements of truth, but pure speculation. It says much about Marsch and the paradigms of his profession, but is a mere codification of fragments of lore and archaeological gossip. The narrative is unreliable, however studied and scientific its structure and conclusions may be. In the context of this reading, Wolfe is simply implying yet again the limitation of knowledge.

But when the reader has perused the third novella, 'V.R.T.', another reading - or several - is suggested. Marsch may be an aborigine posing as an anthropologist, in which case the 'Story' is correct in its details, or at least close to truth. Perhaps much genuine insight into the aborigines is attainable by means of a re-reading of the text. The evidence of artificial or second-hand composition alters, becoming natural, suitable to oral folklore being set down for the first time. Unfortunately, Wolfe is never so obliging to his readers. It remains in doubt whether Marsch is human or aboriginal, and this complicates the text into unresolvable ambiguity. No deductions from the 'Story' are certainly valid. In this manner, by means of a devious narrative ploy, Wolfe suggests the existential and cognitive confusion of his characters.

The text in which they are embedded allows no definition, of the world or the self.

In 'A Story', the character who seeks to define himself is Sandwalker. His quest is more conventional than Number Five's: it is a simple, linear progress across the wilderness, and into foreign territory. He is a member of a society of hunter-gatherers, whose survival, in small groups, is precarious. At the age of thirteen, he is sent on a ritual journey to 'the priest' (FHC, 61) who is dead, and whose spirit will instruct him by means of dreams. His travels bring him into contact with elusive and magical wanderers, the 'Shadow-Children'; finding that the marshmen of the lowlands have captured his mother and tribespeople, he goes to their rescue, is captured, and participates in a remarkable and violent revolution in the situation of St. Anne. The quest is literal, active; it begins as an initiation into the world, in a time-honoured manner. But its specific focus, and its resolution, are far less conventional.

As an infant, Sandwalker had a twin brother, who was stolen by the marshmen. (FHC,60) These dwellers near the sea adopt hill-people as holy men, known as 'starwalkers' (FHC, 103), who commune with the heavens by means of the water in which they are reflected. The lost twin, Eastwind, is trained as a mystic of this kind; Sandwalker becomes aware of this because of dreams in which he vicariously lives his brother's life. (FHC, 62-63) The implication is that, like so many other mythic twins, Sandwalker and Eastwind are linked, mystically or psychically; they are aspects of one self, although this is

not initially clear. Sandwalker's quest leads him to the marshland and 'meadowmeres', to his own brother, as if to his destiny; he can thus confront the other half of his self and achieve self-knowledge, perhaps unity. But after conflict with the marshmen, and the actions by which they are baffled and defeated, Sandwalker desires revenge on Eastwind:

> '"And why should I let you live? You would have drowned our mother. You are no man, and I can kill you."' (FHC, 103)

The Old Wise One of the Shadow Children warns him that

> '"if he [Eastwind] dies, something of you dies with him."' (FHC, 103)

By his magic the Old Wise One ensures that neither brother will ever be certain of which identity - whether that of Sandwalker or that of Eastwind - is his. Sandwalker, disregarding warnings, drowns Eastwind. By this fratricide, he loses a half of his self; in addition, because of the magic and his sharing of Eastwind's experiences in dreams, he can never be sure who he is, which half has been lost. (FHC, 104) Like Number Five, Sandwalker sacrifices his chances of knowledge and completeness by murdering his mirror image. He is left incomplete, fallen, and ignorant; his plight is all the worse because of his uncertainty as to who he has lost, and what he has retained. The latter is never constant.

The quest again ends in disaster; and, as in the previous novella, it has a larger dimension or implication. The loss

of integrity is mirrored in that of society itself. Just as Number Five's plight can be seen in reflection in that of Port-Mimizon as a whole, so also does the fate of St. Anne match that of Sandwalker. From an early stage of 'A Story', St. Anne is referred to as the 'world where the ships turned back'. (FHC, 60) This is cryptic, until the Old Wise One of the Shadow Children explains that the ships are those of star-wanderers, which the Shadow Children turn back by means of telepathy - 'we bend their thinking then, making them go back.' (FHC, 90) The ships are those of Earthmen, and the only means the aboriginals and other indigenes have of preventing their invasion is this mystical repulsion. The primitive, timeless peace and innocence of St Anne is fragile and easily violated - the brutal colonialism hinted in 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' is always near at hand. Near the end of 'A Story', with the majority of the Shadow Children and some of Sandwalker's tribesfolk massacred by their captors, the marshmen, the surviving Shadow Child naively postulates the basis for an escape from death. If the telepathic barrier is dropped, the humans will come, and the marshmen will sacrifice them in place of the prisoners:

> '"We have sung to hold the starcrossers back. We desired to live as we wished, unreminded of what was and is; and though they have bent the sky, we have bent their thought. Suppose I now sing them in, and they come? The marshmen will take them, and there will be many to choose from. Perhaps we will not be chosen."' (FHC, 101)

This sudden selfishness is condemned by the Old Wise One as 'evil'; he is the 'Group Norm' or epitome of his people, a

ghostly consensual expression of their minds, and so represents community and the long view. He quite clearly speaks wisely, in the light of the reader's knowledge of what colonialism brings:

> '"For very long we have walked carefree in the only paradise. It would be better if all here were to die."' (FHC, 101)

But in a selfish impulsiveness much like that which drives Sandwalker to kill Eastwind, the last Shadow Child, stating that '"nothing is worse than that I should die"' (FHC, 101) lowers the barrier. Innocence and peace, being original and natural, had not been visible before; the 'something that had wrapped the world' is now gone; 'Sandwalker had never seen it because it had been there always'. (FHC, 101) In short order, the ships of the colonists arrive, as red sparks falling; scenes reminiscent of the first landings by Europeans in America and Australia occur. The humans hold out their hands to show they have no weapons, but this is incomprehensible, as Sandwalker's 'people had never known weapons'. (FHC, 104) Whatever initial good intentions may exist, the process of imperialism corrupts at once.

At the end of the 'Story' Sandwalker and his world, through linked and similar errors of judgement, are left depleted, broken, and forlorn. Sandwalker sought himself in Eastwind, and killed his twin, sacrificing all self-knowledge. The last Shadow Child asserted his individuality, striving for the survival of the self, and so betrayed the community of which he

was an integral part: extinction apparently follows. A second path to self-definition is invalidated. On St Anne, the life of spirit, natural communion, and tribe created identity; now, it is lost, and the 'long dreaming days' are over. Sandwalker knows that in every vital respect he is dead: he dreams of this. (FHC, 104)

In Wolfe's text, the 'long dreaming days' become a representation of wholeness, a state lost through egotism and the impact of colonial history. The self had a place in the lost age, a place not to be discovered again. The Old Wise One describes some aspects of this Golden Age, such as the protean, transformative capability of its people:

> '"You come of a race of shape-changers.... When we came some of you looked like every beast, and some were of fantastic forms inspired by the clouds - or by lava flows, or water."' (FHC, 90)

This suggests the spontaneity and imagination, as well as the power, of the inhabitants of Eden (116). In somewhat Biblical language, the Old Wise One indicates how the Golden Age continues, in the unreflective prosperity and power and natural communion of his own folk, who had technology but discarded it:

> '"It is true that we no longer have the things of flame and light, but our glance withers, and we sing death to our enemies. Yes, and the bushes drop fruit into our hands, and the earth yields the sons of flying mothers do we but turn a stone."' (FHC, 91)

St. Anne is 'the only paradise'. (FHC, 101) 'A Story' is not an uncritical panegyric of natural life; the murderous

superstition of the marshmen and the poverty and cannibalism of nomadic life are emphasized. Further, much of the vision of paradise is likely a product of an anthropologist-narrator's sentimentalization of primitive existence (as in Rousseau) or an aborigine-narrator's nostalgia for the bygone days of freedom. But Wolfe often qualifies an ideal in this way; the ideal remains.

The construction of this ideal of innocence owes much to specific examples from Earth's past, and so has considerable resonance. The most obvious parallel is with ancient Australia (15), where the aborigines - significantly sharing the designation of Wolfe's shape-changers - led lives much like those of Sandwalker's people. The similarity of belief and terminology, most notably regarding 'the dreamtime', can be seen in the words of Richard Broome:

> 'It was a view of the world in which humans and the natural species were all part of the same ongoing life force. In the Dreamtime when the great ancestors had roamed the earth, they were human, animal and bird at one and the same time: all natural things were in a unity. The ancestors still existed in the here and now. The life-creating powers were as great as before.' (16)

The parallelism with St Anne is clear: Wolfe's aborigines are as protean as the 'great ancestors', the Old Wise One is a visually apparent spirit like the ancestors, and the unity of the realm of nature and people is reflected in the 'abos's' reverence of trees and the "Shadow Children's" command over the

plenty of their territory ('the bushes drop fruit into our hands'). The 'long dreaming time' of the aboriginals is much like the 'Dreamtime' of the aborigines, in its emphasis upon the correctness and significance of the realm of dreams: Sandwalker's dreams of the life of Eastwind are literally true. (For example, FHC, 62-63). Other parallels with the ways and fates of indigenous peoples can be traced, for example with the pre-Columbian Indians (17); and the similarity of the Golden Age of St Anne to the primordial 'Great Time' so often seen as a universal tradition (18) is clear: St Anne is Eden, it is like Severian's Ushas, the time of dawn, plenty, and communion with the Divine.

All of this is lost by Sandwalker, and the seeming extinction of his people is the result: it appears that they suffer a worse fate than their Australian counterparts, as the colonists annihilate them - 'they're all dead'. (FHC, 9) First, the self is lost; then, all is lost. This may perhaps explain the grim atmosphere of 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus' - the cultures of St Croix and St Anne, succeeding the Golden Age, are by definition fallen, a part of an Iron Age. The doomed nature of Number Five is Wolfe's manner of indicating the depth of the world's loss; the colonists sinned through genocide, and a general Fall is the price.

A complication of the text is its suggestion that the pertinence of the 'Story' to humanity is greater than that provided by mere historical parallels. The Old Wise One, in his disquisition on the blessedness of the abandonment of technology and on the glories of primitive living, remembers a

lost home, Earth - supposedly, the Shadow Childen are humans, who long ago came to St. Anne; there they regained primitive virtues:

> '"Long ago in our home, before a fool struck fire, we were so - roaming without whatever may be named save the sun, the night, and each other. Now we are so again, for [we] are gods, and things made by hands do not concern us."' (FHC, 93)

He goes on to declare that the aboriginals are humanoid because, as shape-changers, they imitate the Shadow Children. (FHC, 93) The way the Shadow Children can have come to St Anne in Earth's pre-historic time is vaguely given - they originated in a lost star-faring civilization called 'Atlantis or Nu - Gondwanaland, Africa, Poietesme, or The Country of Friends'. (FHC, 90) They were, then, an early wave of colonists, who adapted to a simple life on St Anne. This implies that the 'Story' is of even greater significance to the human condition that is at first assumed. Even the behaviour of the aboriginals is human in the sense that it imitates human activity. The 'Story' is no mere alien fable, but a crucial human document. If the Shadow Children could regain their innocence after achieving high technology and space flight, perhaps Number Five's people, and all humans, can do so as well. This, however, is left as only a possibility. Later in the narrative, the Old Wise One concedes that he is 'confused': he is not certain that his people did not always live on St Anne. (FHC, 98) Perhaps the idea of the earthly origin of the Shadow Children is a conceit of Marsch, in order to explain the allegedly human appearance of the aboriginals

whom the colonists exterminated. Perhaps it is a superstition only. The reader can come to no conclusions, like Sandwalker, who tells the Old Wise One,

> '"I am no longer sure of what it is you're saying."' (FHC, 98)

The precise significance of '"A Story" by John V Marsch' can never be ascertained, like the identity of its narrator.

Wolfe makes a characteristic point in this second novella: the Other, the alien or the external, invades and permeates the individual. In the end, Marsch, Sandwalker, the Old Wise One, and many others become unable to verify or define their identities. Their world allows no easy cognitive certainties, no easy self-knowledge; and the hegemony of lies, deceptions, and mendacious and distorting ideologies like those of colonialism makes understanding near-impossible. An alien may have slain and impersonated Marsch; the marshmen indoctrinate Eastwind and so influence Sandwalker; the aboriginals imitate others and so become them in every respect; the Old Wise One is a phantom creation of other minds. The conquering settlers violate the integrity of the Annese, who either massacre and replace the invaders or vanish. In this pattern of intrusion and alteration, the Gothic Double or Other may be recognised at work, subverting the hero and all others, as it did Number Five. Ambiguity undermines the Self, which changes or disappears. This is illustrated further in the final novella - 'V.R.T'.

'V.R.T' is V R Trenchard, his name abbreviated by John Marsch in his recording of dialogues on St. Anne. (FHC, 148) This novella concerns the cycle's most problematical relationship, that of the anthropologist Marsch and the alleged 'abo' youth, V.R.T. By creating a narrative whose fragments can be read as the products of either character, Wolfe generates an ambiguity of a new kind: if the Self is to be discovered, whose Self will it be? The mystery of this novella is challenging to the reader, who must assimilate a multitude of clues, both logical ones and ones implicit in the flow of the narrative. If the reader cannot solve the puzzle of Marsch's true nature - and any conclusion is tenuous - the problem of self-knowledge is made yet more intractable.

'V.R.T.' is made up of documents, which are being examined (in an italicized framing narrative) by an officer of the government of St. Croix. The items are excerpts from Marsch's journals, composed on St. Anne; transcripts of interrogations of Marsch during his imprisonment on St. Croix; and notes and reminiscences that he has written while in the prison, which is the citadel in Port-Mimizon described by Number Five in the opening novella. The officer is casual and sometimes impatient in his perusal of the evidence; he moves from one set of documents to another with little regard for their proper sequence. This is confusing, the first stage of Wolfe's complication of this portion of the text. Nevertheless the reader is able to develop an approximate impression of the circumstances behind the journals and Marsch's incarceration in the Citadel.

Evidently Marsch visited St. Anne before coming to St. Croix. His objective there was anthropological: he wished to gather such evidence of the aboriginals as he could, such evidence as remained after colonization by the French and the later, second invasion. Some of his journal entries relate his impressions of Frenchman's Landing, which is the apparent site of the first landfall by the colonists. Other entries record conversations, most unsatisfactory, with local inhabitants who remember remnant 'abos' or who claim knowledge of their lore. This accomplished, Marsch made the acquaintance of a drunkard and mountebank who claimed to be of aboriginal descent, calling himself 'Twelvewalker' (FHC, 139) and justifying his assertion in terms of his lack of manual dexterity - a universal trait of the 'abos'. His son - V.R.T. - accompanied Marsch on a field expedition, acting as guide, assistant, and informant; their aim was to explore aboriginal sites, such as a holy cave. The journal entries for this period tell of the death of V.R.T. in a fall, after long pursuits by wild animals and other strange incidents. When Marsch left St. Anne, he came to St. Croix and sought university employment, only to be arrested on accusations of being an Annese spy, or an assassin. The transcribed interrogations show Marsch denying these charges; the notes he composed in prison suggest a less clear picture. Some indicate simple passing of time, or reflection; but others imply that he is no anthropologist, but rather an aboriginal masquerading as Marsch.

This is the centre of the novella's literary mystery. Did V.R.T. die in the Annese wilderness, by falling among the rocks, as Marsch's journal claims? (FHC, 185) Or did he survive to assume Marsch's role, after the anthropologist died or was murdered? If the latter is true, V.R.T. wrote the final field expedition diary entries, and all the essays and ramblings of prisoner no. 143. There is considerable evidence for the idea that V.R.T is an aboriginal, in both sets of writings; if he is mimicking Marsch, he does so imperfectly. He confesses to lying about journal dates. (FHC, 185) In the closing field journal entries, he often used 'abo' terms, calling the Annese aboriginals 'the Free People', speaking of 'meadowmeres'. (FHC, 187) The latter word is used to describe the marshlands by the hill-people in the 'Story', the second novella. He no longer calls St. Croix by its French name, but instead by the traditional 'Sisterworld'. (FHC, 188) He also displays native knowledge with suspicious familiarity: when talking of the nutritional qualities of 'the roots of the salt reeds', he says:

> 'It is best to eat them by Ocean so the white part can be dipped into the salt water after each bite.' (FHC, 185)

He observes native customs, leaving meat hanging from a tree 'for those who hunger'. (FHC, 185) Most convincing of all is the testimony of the handwriting in the last entries; the diarist claims his hand has been injured (FHC, 184) but as many other comments in the text attest, the aboriginals cannot handle tools well, and this explains the deterioration of the handwriting, in the entries from 'April 23' onwards. If

V.R.T. was involved in Marsch's death, the impersonation would be an ideal way of concealing the crime; in any case, he wishes to be an anthropologist. (FHC, 176)

The hints of alienness in some of the prison writings are even more conspicuous. In a particularly melancholy entry in his cell, Marsch or V.R.T. remembers his mother, who apparently had little connection with human civilization:

> 'How could my mother have taught me to become a man? She knew nothing, nothing. It may be that my father never allowed her to learn. She did not think it wrong to steal, I remember..... If she had eaten she wanted nothing.....' (FHC, 171)

This unworldliness and ignorance would be typical of the innocent mentality of the aboriginals in the second novella. The diarist acknowledges a similar 'animality' in himself; he declares that he is at least half animal, praises the animal grace of the 'Free People' (the 'abos'), and denies the humanity of his own face and voice. Finally, he wishes that in the event of his death he be buried in an Annese holy cave, 'high in one of the cliffs that overlook the river'. (FHC, 172) The evidence that V.R.T. speaks is apparently overwhelming.

If this is the case, the highly detailed and intimate reflections of the imprisoned 'Marsch' are significant and clear; they identify the writer, probe his psyche, tell the reader the nature of an alien, and of the connections between alien and human that it makes in the course of its

impersonation. But Wolfe, as is his habit, clouds this open prospect with alternative hypotheses, subtracting all certainty from the knowledge offered. Other clues in the text suggest a variety of explanations for the seemingly aboriginal nuances of the ambiguous writings.

The foremost possibility is that, just as the anthropologist Marsch could write 'A Story' with an aboriginal setting, he could also construct the imaginary perspective of an alien youth trying to be human. He might do this out of simple interest, or, more likely, as a way of arousing the attention of his captors and so escaping prison as an alien celebrity. He attempts to conceal the 'alien' writings when be becomes aware that his pages are annoying and not intriguing the prison authorities; he plans to destroy the sheets, and claims the references to V.R.T's parents were mere 'imagination', parts of a plan for a 'novel'. (FHC, 182) But, of course, V.R.T. might wish to hide his alien nature for the same reason, to avoid antagonising the interrogators and warders. The reader's confusion increases, and there are further possibilities as to the truth. Perhaps the man in prison is insane; his closing field journal entries contain a description of a conversation with a cat. (FHC, 188) Perhaps the views of St. Croix are correct, Marsch is an assassin, and the entire journal and all the prison notes are an ingenious subterfuge: in one interrogation, the questioner produces evidence that the journal was bogus, and that Marsch's story is a lie. (FHC, 162) The evidence is tenuous, but the situation is so fantastic that it might be substantive. A final

hypothesis is that Marsch murdered V.R.T, and wrote the 'alien' passages as a concealment of the deed, as an implication that V.R.T. still lives. On the field expedition, Marsch suspects V.R.T. has a lover, and declares that if he came upon them together, 'I think I would shoot them both'. (FHC, 178) Jealousy might explain the text as a deception, nothing more.

By creating this elaborate labyrinth of speculations, Wolfe addresses two major, and related, concerns. The first is individuality, the Self. The insoluble riddle of who 'Marsch' in fact is already problematizes the second novella, questioning any of the reader's assumptions about the 'Story's' validity. Now the reader is prevented from any sure association or sympathy with the third novella's primary character, making the text opaque, the reader disoriented. Thus Wolfe suggests to the typical reader of Science Fiction, who assumes the accessibility and moral constancy of a character, the difficulty of defining identity, of finding the Self. The Fifth Head of Cerberus defines character as indefinable, subverting both personal quests for self-knowledge and the complacent certainties of the act of reading. Wolfe's subversive purpose extends to a second concern, the relationship of human and alien. Again in the conventional terms of Science Fiction, the alien is either a simple menace or a standard of strangeness subject to the ingenious if gradual comprehension of the standard, competent hero. (19) Most experimental writers who portray the alien - such as Ursula Le Guin (20) - modify this, making of the act of understanding the alien a sentimental and moral triumph rather

than an affirmation of human resource. But Wolfe proceeds a step further. In his text, there is a frank acknowledgement that the alien is a human construct, for there is no standard on which we can base the depiction of a true alien. Thus, the 'abos' may be human, just as the humans may be 'abos'. V.R.T. and Marsch merge psychologically, whether through imitation or idealism; and in the indistinguishability of human and alien the reader can perceive how integral the latter is to the former. The 'Other' again intrudes on a human mind, and, as for Sandwalker and Number Five, the distinction is not apparent, as the 'Other' is a 'Double', a mirror-image of the self. Wolfe is one of the few writers who directly demonstrates the psychological utility of the alien for human beings, the affirmation provided by its contrast and its challenge. He shows the alien as a human device, collapsing the challenge. The easy antagonist is gone, and character is deprived of its facile supports. The conventional competence of the generic hero undermined, the true uncertainty of the human conditon is revealed. Wolfe's attack on readerly certainties underlines his themes powerfully.

'V.R.T.' contains many impressions of the consequence of the loss of integrity and innocence. If the arrival of the French colonists on St. Anne constituted the Fall, the loss of Eden, the third novella, by means of a pervasive Dystopianism, represents the iron age that follows. Drawing on the experience of colonization on Earth, and emphasizing elements of brutality, callousness, and the ideology of ownership, Wolfe hints at the reverse of the alien intrusion on the human - the

human extermination of the alien. (21) If V.R.T. replaced Marsch, the human standards he had to learn to obey were a difficult enough imposition; the settlement of St. Anne is far worse. Wolfe again implicitly criticizes conventional Science Fiction for the reticence it often displays about the impact of interplanetary settlement. (22)

The reader is familiar with the extermination in a general sense from the first pages of the book, as Number Five and David debate the aboriginals and their extinction. (FHC, 8-9) Marsch extracts details among the people of St. Anne, and their fragmentary quality only serves to emphasize the indifference of the colonists and their descendants to the 'abos' fate, the casualness of their recollections. (The similarity of this to the indifference to slavery in the first novella is deliberate.) An old woman, Mrs Blount, calls all Annese 'the abos or wild people'. She denies their humanity:

> '"They weren't really people, you know, just animals shaped like people."' (FHC, 112)

She however mentions that she played with 'abo' children when she was a child - they were human enough then. Her indifference to their fate is remarkable: her father killed three aboriginal young for stealing 'with his gun'; Mrs Blount dismisses her own crying after this as the ways of a child only. (FHC, 112) She dismisses the disposal of the bodies similarly:

> '"No, I don't know where he buried them or if he did; just dragged them out back for the wild animals, I'd suppose."' (FHC, 113)

The view that the 'abos' are animals is an instinctive reaction of the colonial population; a Dr Hagsmith declares that the native's inability to use tools designates them as 'animals', despite their special abilities. (FHC, 116-117) This is perhaps a way of evading the guilt of genocide. The past has a few, neglected monuments still to be seen, like the splendid aboriginal 'temple' or 'observatory' 'ruined by the settlers' need for timber.' (FHC, 147) There is pathos in the beggar who pretends to be an 'abo' prince, and who manufactures false artifacts from their time (FHC, 142-149); there is little left to be found of an entire race.

Wolfe is however never wholly committed to even a righteous cause. The aboriginals may have survived, if V.R.T. is indeed one of them. This modifies but does not invalidate the message of outrage; the parallels with Earth are clear, and even if the native Annese live on in the outback, their condition is much reduced from former glories, as the loss of their 'temple' and their access to sacred 'Ocean' shows. Of course, 'Veil's hypothesis' that the aboriginals killed and replaced all the settlers remains, but 'Marsch' dismisses it. (FHC, 180-181) It is a fanciful rumour, suggesting perhaps that crimes can be committed by all, and that colonialism justifies such a response.

More important than the colonial theme is the Dystopian one, represented by the totalitarian regime which operates the prison in which Marsch is confined. In this relatively conventional tyranny, already viewed to some degree in 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus,' can be seen the results of the Fall from Paradise brought by colonialism and its associated evils. Significantly, Wolfe associates freedom with innocence, wildness and primitivity; in deliberate contrast, tyranny is corrupt, intellectual, marked by an infinite cynicism. 'Marsch' holds the aboriginals, or Free Poeple, up as examples of freedom:

> 'The Free People are wonderful, wonderful as the deer are or the birds or the tire-tiger as I have seen her, head up, loping as a lilac shadow on the path of her prey; but they are animals.' (FHC, 172)

The irony of the term 'animal' is clear; where the colonials of St. Anne used the word as one of dismissive contempt or self-acquittal of genocide, 'Marsch' - as a sentimental anthropologist or as a native - used it as one of praise. It appears that only as an unreflective being - a child - can the individual be free, self-assured and whole. Civilized guilt, the assumption of which placed Marsch in prison, should not be charged to a child or animal, he argues in an essay written in prison: he is a child legally, and is treated as an animal, so he should be freed. (FHC, 128-129) Marsch longs for a state of primordial animal liberty, as an ideal, as an escape from prison; whether this is a result of his nostalgic idealism as Marsch or his inherent primitiveness as V.R.T. is of course unclear. This ambiguity both indictates the breadth of this

conception of freedom and the pathos surrounding Marsch - however interesting his case and his ideas, he is ignored.

His expressions of his belief in liberty are cogent, witty - but he can tell of them only by beating out messages on a pipe, so communicating with a fellow prisoner in cell 47:

> 'I believe government should be let alone. We of the laissey-faire treat officials as dangerous reptiles: that is, we give them great respect, but as we cannot kill them, we have nothing to do with them. We never attempt to obtain a civil service post, or tell the police anything unless we are certain our neighbours have told them already.' (FHC, 157)

This pacific libertarianism, echoing that of other Science Fiction writers (23), but with uncustomary tranquillity, is, as the other prisoner soon points out, problematical: it allows Marsch, who is unresisting, to be tyrannized. Although he rejoins skilfully that prisoner 47 has, for all his active resistance, also been imprisoned, Marsch cannot escape reality: he is helpless. Freedom will not be regained. Immured in a dungeon indefinitely, he is at the mercy of tyrants - guards, interrogators, the rulers of a world of slaves who lack even liberty of thought, which is taken away. (FHC, 40)

In Wolfe's text there are echoes of other literary prisons - those of Orwell, and many others. (24) This is purposeful; he draws on a tradition depicting the breakdown (or attempted breakdown) of the individual identity through imprisonment and planned demoralization. The Citadel of Port-Mimizon is emblematic of a tyranny which breaks the ego, which not only

denies the search for self-knowledge, but destroys the Self that is sought. This is the concrete form, the physical embodiment of the obstacles to self-discovery that Wolfe presents throughout The Fifth Head of Cerberus; its operations are correspondingly formidable. As a prison officer remarks, the prison authorities set out to destroy Marsch

> 'by pursuing the usual policy of alternatively lenient and savage treatment to produce a breakdown.' (FHC, 190)

The prison is labyrinthine, with different levels and qualities of cell; Marsch is transferred from one variety to another, as part of his psychological torture. His captors are devious; when he is being transferred to a dungeon, the guard is accompanied by a man dressed as an executioner, so that Marsch remembers, 'naturally I thought I was going to be killed'. (FHC, 137) His fears of death are exploited, as are any expectations of release: he is allowed a visit by a woman who had been his neighbour, which seems the height of good treatment. (FHC, 182-183) The consequence of these tactics may be an insanity causing the writings which confuse Marsch's identity; that is left hypothetical. But the general impact of the regime can be seen in the description of other inmates:

> 'I saw any number of miserable dirty faces like my own staring at me through the tiny glassed Judas windows in the doors of the cells." (FHC 137)

The nature of the prison reduces its inhabitants to a brutalized uniformity, a complete effacement of identity.

This is typical enough of a totalitarian system; Wolfe also allows glimpses of the ideology of the rulers of St. Croix. According to the official doctrine propounded by Marsch's succession of interrogators, there is an absolute rationale for their rule: truth.

> 'Truth is something to be had from us, not from you. Ours is the most remarkable government in the history of mankind; because we, and only we, have accepted as a working principle what every sage has taught and every government has feigned to accept; the power of the truth. And because we do, we rule as no other government has ever ruled.' (FHC, 153)

Supposedly, this means a perfect system of administration:

> 'We are the only government upon whose word every man may rely absolutely, and because of that we command infinite credit, infinite obedience, infinite respect.' (FHC, 154)

In effect, any promise made by the government will be fulfilled. But the results of this policy are not ideal. The woman, Mademoiselle Etienne, whom Marsch expected would visit him, could come, as was promised by the officers who arrested Marsch; but she did not, because she was also warned of 'unpleasant consequences' (FHC, 154), a promise which would also not be broken. The rulers of St. Croix use promises and truth as lies and threats, to manipulate and enforce their wishes; they have in fact perfected untruth.

This practical form of 'doublethink' (25) has an effect on its practitioners that is easily predicted. They are uniform, unspontaneous, inflexible; their appearances are nearly identical (FHC, 133), one indication of their loss of

individuality; and they enact bureaucratic charades of a classic sort. The arresting officer informs Marsch's landlady, Mme. Duclose, and his neighbour, Mlle. Etienne, of their duties towards Marsch and the state in terms of exact schedules, appointments, and procedures, in the language of an ordinance or official memorandum. The landlady may inspect Marsch's sealed room

> 'on the day following Christmas - or in the event that Christmas falls on a Saturday, on the following Monday.' (FHC, 135)

Celestine Etienne may visit Marsch

> 'on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month between the hours of nine and eleven p.m..' (FHC, 136)

In this savage burlesque on bureaucratic behaviour, Wolfe intimates fully how individuality and selfhood crumble in the presence of rote and system.

The framing narrative of 'V.R.T.' confirms the nature of the Dystopia that dominates St. Croix; it also speaks implicitly of the triumph of the system over Marsch and the freedom for which he longs. The officer who peruses the documents of Marsch's case is preparing a report and recommendation as to his disposition. Wolfe's description of his behaviour confirms the inhumanity, bureaucratic indifference, and unfeeling social attitudes of the ruling class. At the start of his work, the officer can quite readily open the box of records with his knife, but orders a slave to perform the

action instead. (FHC, 105) The officer takes pleasure at the pleading of Marsch in the interrogation sessions: 'He had enjoyed the eagerness in A's voice'. (FHC, 107) This is a man who relishes the humiliation of prisoners. Later, the officer slaps a slave, when the latter suggests an alternative to the use of 'Cassilla', a slave girl, by the officer; currently, she is being used by 'the major'. The slapping and the slave's consequent sobbing are 'mechanical'; such scenes are so common as to be a ritual. (FHC, 110) The tableau of mastery and submission will never end, repeating and repeating. As his duty proceeds, the officer tries to shoot a cat (FHC, 117); when Cassilla comes to him, he listens to the taped interrogations while copulating with her:

> 'We shall listen while we enjoy ourselves.' (FHC, 151)

As he finishes his duties, he considers kicking the male slave. (FHC, 189) The sordid atmosphere of these scenes, their suggestion of a mindless automatic cruelty and callousness, is oppressive. Ultimately, the officer's reaction to Marsch's writings and statements is a brief recommendation that his imprisonment continue. (FHC, 191) All the implications of his case will be ignored, and his plight will continue until he dies. The final note of the framing narrative confirms the conspiratorial and brutal operations of the regime: the slave agrees to a ploy to advance his own status and the officer's career; he collaborates in his own servitude. The officer throws a left-over spool of the Marsch tapes through the window (FHC, 192); the evidence will never be complete again, and will

never be considered again. The quest for self-knowledge, the reader's desire to define Marsch's identity: these will remain unresolved, as their subject is abandoned to obscurity and madness, in the Citadel of Port-Mimizon.

In constructing the concluding novella, Wolfe perhaps deliberately makes of the framing narrative an enclosure, an impersonal veil around Marsch's personal statements and narratives. The final manifestation of Wolfe's narrative art symbolizes the barrier confronting any inward quest, any progress along the road of being.

In The Fifth Head of Cerberus Number Five, Sandwalker, and Marsch represent different forms of the veiled self. Their true nature is disguised, even to themselves; their personal narratives blur them with others, as the Other manifests itself in many ways, as father, brother, alien, and tyrant. In the end there is little opportunity for resolution, as the principle of uncertainty pervades the text. Identity is hidden, and is never constant. Wolfe's narrative art, as in the 'New Sun' Cycle, allows a monumental ambiguity, confounding conventional inquiry and comprehension by the reader. The foremost symbol of all this is the dog Cerberus, seen as 'snarling', 'tolerant' and 'grinning' all at once (FHC, 10); a single being has many heads, many aspects, no fixed character or intent. All the protagonists are many-faceted, many headed, as father and Number Five, Sandwalker and Eastwind, Marsch and V.R.T, human and alien, all at once. The recurrence of the letter 'V' indicates this correspondence of qualities: it is present as a number in the title of the first

novella, and as an initial in those of the last two. Just as Number Five is the 'Fifth Head of Cerberus' or of the same genetic root, Sandwalker and Marsch are parts of twinned or even more multiplex systems, ones confusing, encrypted, impenetrable. Their world is Gothic, dark, sinister, and obscure, and escape from it is not in prospect.

This novella cycle, an early but skilful work, may on occasion overplay its hand, creating mazes that are more elaborate than necessary and presenting its Dystopian elements less subtly than other, opposing elements. But this work established Wolfe's themes and techniques brilliantly, and laid the basis for later masterpieces. One of these - Soldier of the Mist (1986) - develops the promise of its predecessor fully, and is the subject of Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VEILS OF THE PAST;

THE QUEST FOR GOD AND SELF IN

SOLDIER OF THE MIST (1)

Soldier of the Mist (1986), the first segment of a series that Gene Wolfe has not yet completed (2), is not conclusive in itself; but it intimates the same opinions about identity and belief that Wolfe debates in the works already discussed, developing them and placing them in new perspectives. In its depiction of a man of intelligence and action crippled by amnesia and the fragmentation of his consciousness, it echoes the 'New Sun' cycle's Severian, but inversely: now the hero and narrator has no memory other than in the shortest term. Furthermore, the archaic languages, social organization, symbolism, and atmospheres Wolfe utilized in his earlier masterpiece are here examined in their original, true, and pristine form, in their ancient Greek location. It is thus appropriate, despite Soldier of the Mist's status as a fragment, to consider it here: it and its sequel, Soldier of Arete (1989), are the evolving expression of the styles and beliefs of Gene Wolfe's mature writing.

The pre-occupations of the 'New Sun' series and The Fifth Head of Cerberus - the search for God and the search for self - are both central to the narrative of Latro, Wolfe's mysterious new protagonist. His mystery stems from his amnesia; he has only dim recollections of his childhood and none of his adulthood, and forgets his most recent experiences within a day of their

occurrence. Consequently, he constructs a journal of his travels through ancient Greece; this reminds him regularly of his identity and his present situation. But the full recovery of his past, much of which is unrecorded, can only be achieved by means of the fulfilment of oracular prophecies, by the agency of the gods. The implication is quickly made that Latro's memory has been stolen by the Earth-Mother, and that only she can restore it. In his text, Wolfe thus associates Latro's quest for self-knowledge with the quest for knowledge of the Divine. In an elaborate narrative experiment, the difficulty of these searchings is suggested once again: they are impeded by faulty memory, by the innate ambiguity of all things, by the deviousness and protean aspects of the gods themselves. This chapter sets out to examine the derivations and inspirations of this experiment, its embodiment of Wolfe's characteristic uncertainties, and its presentation of the Greek pantheon of deities in their full power and fallibility. In their paradoxical mixture of omnipotence and human failing, they demonstrate the strange inconsistency and unknowability of the world.

Soldier of the Mist is set in approximately 479 B.C., commencing immediately after the victory of the Hellenes over the Persians at Plataea, to the north of Athens. (3) At this time, King Xerxes, or Kshayarsha, had left command of his land army to Mardonius, returning to Asia; the depleted Persian forces had been badly defeated. This was followed by a period of less spectacular warfare between the Greeks and Persians, involving naval expeditions and laborious sieges in Thrace and on the Hellespont. In this time of reduced urgency, the

tension between two of the leading Hellenic allies, Athens and Sparta, naturally grew; the Spartan regent, Pausanias, became involved in intrigues with the Spartan helots and, allegedly, the Persians. (4) These complex events are very specifically evoked in the text. Hypereides tells Latro of the battle of Salamis in detail (SM, 55-54) and Latro has fragmentary recollections of the battle of Plataea (SM, 281-2). In the closing chapters of the novel, the siege of Sestos is described by Latro himself, as it occurs. Thus, Soldier of the Mist is strongly concerned with historical verisimilitude: the terminology of the period is often used, in details of weapons and military preparations, clothes, religious observances, and architecture. An extensive glossary explains names and allusions; as the note at the book's opening states, the narrative is 'based on actual events'. (SM, vii) The Foreword is intent in its emphasis upon the accuracy of the text's details of the psychology and customs of the ancient Greeks. (SM, xii-xiv) It seems on first examination that Soldier of the Mist is an historical novel: it is closely researched and firmly based in the actuality of the times it depicts. Several features of Latro's account, however, swiftly contradict this impression.

Although many of the people and situations encountered by Latro are indicative of historical realities - apart from details of battles, the status of Kalleos and her whores (SM, Ch XIII) corresponds to known rights of women in Athens (5) and the enslavement of Latro and his friends by Hypereides and Pausanias matches Hellenic laws (6) - the mode of the narrative and its perspective take unexpected courses. It is perhaps

significant that Latro's account begins after the well-documented campaigns of Plataea and Salamis; his experiences fall into more obscure and politically complicated times, and are thus less historically accountable, more open to speculative manipulation by Wolfe. Latro is not a Hellene; his scrolls are supposedly written in 'archaic Latin' (SM, xi) and his position as an outsider is often the subject of comment among Greeks. That he is a warrior from a Latin (Italian) warrior-tribe or state is obvious from the names he and his follow soldiers bore prior to his amnesia: for example, 'Cassius' (SM, 282) and 'Lucius.' (SM, 326) The result is that he sees Greece from an unconventional and sometimes mistaken perspective: the names 'Athens, 'Sparta', 'Argos', 'Corinth', and 'Thebes' become in his narrative 'Thought', 'Rope', 'Hundred-Eyed', 'Tower Hill', and 'Hill'. The Spartans are 'Ropemakers', Egypt is 'Riverland', Laconia is incorrectly assumed by Latro to mean 'The Silent Country'. (SM, xii) Wolfe, supposedly acting as the modern translator of Latro's recently 'discovered' scrolls, admits that Latro's meanings as to places are not always certain to the reader. (SM, xii) The result is that the novel's verisimilitude and reliability are never definite. Soldier of the Mist contains perspectives not confirmed by historical records; it is not so relentlessly factual as its Foreword claims. Furthermore, gods, ghosts, and other magical beings appear to Latro from very early in his narration (SM, 5); however accurate the novel's description of the events at Plataea and Sestos, it contains much of the supernatural and inexplicable as well.

Even though other historical novels set in antiquity involve visitations by other-wordly beings and successful prophecy (7), Soldier of the Mist is too thoroughly pervaded by such elements for it to be merely an historical novel. It is in fact an historical fantasy, revising and re-interpreting, as in so many other works of this kind (8), the past through the myths and religious symbolisms of the age in question. Wolfe's source material is an indication of why his text functions in this manner. One source is the 'Histories' of the fifth century B.C. Greek historian Herodotus - much of Wolfe's characterization of the Persian governor of Sestos, Artaÿctes, (SM, Ch.XLII), is based upon Herodotus' portrait of this slippery politician. (9) Herodotus' manner of narrating history was anecdotal and credulous; Wolfe takes his scandalous and often illogical details at face value along with his more reliable, broader annals. Consequently, fantasy mingles with fact. Another prominent source, the early Hellenic poet Hesiod (10), told of the supposed genesis and nature of the gods and the mortal heroes who served and challenged them; from this, Wolfe draws his portraits of Gaea, Artemis, Hades, Apollo, and many other deities. Wolfe obeys closely the historical truths not only of how the Hellenes lived and fought, but also of how they believed:

> 'Modern skeptics should note that Latro reports Greece as it was reported by the Greeks themselves. The runner sent from Athens to ask Spartan help before the battle of Marathon met the god Pan on the road and conscientiously recounted their conversation to the Athenian assembly when he returned.' (SM, XIV)

In order that Greek religious belief be reflected by his novel, Wolfe makes its convictions literally true. The gods walk, scheme, and converse with Latro quite as freely as historically concrete characters such as Pausanias. In Latro's travels, one of his companions is the great poet Pindar, known to his contemporaries as Pindaros Pagondas; his conservative piety sets the tone of the narrative, which makes the gods genuine and powerful. (11) In this situation, few assumptions are justified; secular certainties are utterly lacking; Wolfe's veils are fully evident.

Latro's story is one that oscillates between myth and reality: the plot of Soldier of the Mist illustrates this, as purposes of worldly figures such as Hypereides and Pausanias conflict and mingle with those of the goddesses Enodia, Gaea, and Kore. Latro and his fellow Latins were evidently part of Mardonius' army, and shared in its defeat at Plataea. Latro suffered an injury to his head, which caused his amnesia. This is interpreted as a judgement by Gaea, the Earth-Mother, whose temple was close by the battlefield; a prophecy by the oracle of Apollo sends Latro on a pilgrimage to the goddess' shrine, at an uncertain location. But this mission to recover his memory is interrupted: he and his companions are captured by a party of helots; a god is encountered by the road; Latro is seized and imprisoned by Corinthians. Rescued by the Athenian shipmaster Hypereides, he travels to Athens by sea, meeting with werewolves and Hades en route. In Athens he is sold to a whoremistress, Kalleos, by Hypereides; he sees a resurrection of a dead woman by a supposed charlatan, Eurykles; he goes to

the temple of Gaea at Advent and meets the goddess Kore (Persephone), receiving from her a promise of reunion with his lost countrymen. Subsequently, he is abducted on the orders of the Spartan regent, Pausanias, who believes, rightly, that Latro has the ear of the gods: Pausanias wishes for their favour. Latro is involved soon in plots from all sides: by rebellious Spartan helots; by the rival goddesses Enodia and Gaea; by Pausanias himself. As the regent sees Latro as a token of victory, he sends him with a force of Spartans led by Pasicrates to facilitate the siege of Sestos. There, Latro escapes the Spartans, meets Kore again, is involved in the attempted escape of the Persian garrison, and ultimately finds his countrymen, as Kore promises - but his fellow Latins have died in the battle. A divine promise is shown to have little real worth.

This plot, with its many apparently random turnings, is indicative of the fragmented quality of Latro's narrative. The confusion of the realms of the mortals and the gods is only one consequence of Latro's amnesia. Others abound, disturbing, distorting, preventing simple comprehension by Latro and his reader. (They are in one respect the same, as Latro writes the scroll as a reminder to himself of his own past.)
Latro makes use of a recurrent metaphor for his forgetfulness: the mist. As he says in the final chapter of this volume:

> 'Lost in the night and its shifting vapours am I. Already I have nearly forgotten how this night began.' (SM, 322)

Latro's inability to recall any but the events of the past few hours is an expression of Wolfe's theme of the unattainability or fugacity of knowledge. Latro confronts this in its most literal and extreme form; his life, excepting his childhood, has vanished, and his scroll, his diary, is his only store of information, his one sure reference, as the healer on the battlefield tells him. (SM, 3) But because each entry in the scroll is written from a standpoint of innocence, confusion, or halting acquaintance with the events before, the narrative is complicated by error, naïvete and other dislocations.

The fragmentation of Latro's account is the first indication of the obstacles he faces on the road to discovery of his identity and of the gods. Aside from lacunae that deny the reader information about certain days and minor interludes, the text contains major gaps, where Latro did not write, out of indisposition or inability. All the events surrounding the seizure of Latro by the Corinthians and his rescue by Hypereides are omitted - at the end of Part One, Latro is still in the hands of Cerdon and the Spartan helots, and at the beginning of Part Two he is sailing to Athens. The intervening period is intimated by subsequent conversations with others. At the end of Part Two, a smaller gap separates Latro's first conversation with Kore and his employment as a bouncer by Kalleos; the conclusion of Part Three, set in Sparta, is followed by an abrupt transition to the lands close to the underworld at the start of Part Four. Although comprehension is always regained in passages further into the narrative, the scroll does not properly serve its function as

Latro's reminder of the past; as he meets the gods with regularity, what such encounters does he leave unrecorded, lost in the gaps in the chronicle of his life?

A more widespread difficulty for Latro is the disorientation induced by his mnemonic lapses. He does not always have time to re-read his scroll each day, despite the written instruction to do so placed upon it. This affects his relations with others, his textual characterization of them; he must strike up acquaintance with his friends every day anew. Thus, aboard Hypereides' ship Latro mistakes his friends Pindar the poet, Hilaeira the Corybant and Io the slave girl for a family, - 'The prisoners from Hill are a man, his wife, and their daughter'. (SM, 56) This they are not. Indeed, his confusion extends to his own identity here, because of the pejorative connotations of his name:

> 'When I came to them, they called me Latro. At first I thought they believed me such a one - a hired soldier or a bandit. But they have nothing to steal, and who has hired me? Then I understood that Latro is my name and they knew me.' (SM, 56)

Latro's interrupted sense of his own character and of that of others means that he at times awakens to a situation so unfamiliar that he must explain it to himself by painfully simple stages:

> 'I am Latro, whom Kalleos calls her man slave. There is a girl slave too, Io, but she is too small to do heavy work. There are also Labos the cook and another cook whose name I have forgotten, but they are not slaves; tonight Kalleos paid them, and they went home.' (SM, 155)

Latro here is compelled to define himself in terms of the difference between observable conditions, those of servitude and freedom - this is very basic deduction, and painful as well. He must reason like a child or an innocent, as he did on the ship in deciding he was not a bandit.

Inevitably, the process of discovery is slow, if so many fundamental realities have to be reconstructed daily. The result is frustration, and an easy manipulation by others. Latro is enslaved by Hypereides, Kalleos, and Pausanias; he is directed on courses by the gods Kore, Apollo, Gaea, Artemis; he is deceived by the serpent-woman Drakaina; his prophesied journeys are interpreted for him by Io, Pindar; he is used as a political and military pawn by the Persians, by Pausanias and Pasicrates, by Artaÿctes, even by the helots under Cerdon. Latro's passivity is not unlike that of Severian in the 'New Sun' cycle; memory hinders him, but not in this case by its plenitude. He needs information desperately, but the vessel that contains it leaks, and his scroll is no certain aid.

Another narrative sign of Latro's uncertainty and anchorlessness is the inconsistency of his writing. There are suggestions of great perception in some passages rich with allusion, images and understanding; elsewhere, the narrative is sparse and mostly circumstantial. This extreme variability perhaps reveals how Latro responds to the stimuli of his environment; he is like a tablet impressed alternately by the mundane and the sublime. But even striking, extraordinary

events can be told in a manner purely factual, as when Latro's party is captured and abused by Cerdon's helots:

> 'Me they beat more than Pindaros or the black man until we found the old man sleeping. Now they do not beat me. They do not beat Hilaeira or her child much, either; but both weep, and they have done something to the child's legs, so that she can scarcely walk. When my hands were freed, I carried her until we halted here.' (SM, 28)

Great stress is described, but its impact barely suggested. Shortly afterwards, Latro has his first meeting with Drakaina, the serpent-woman; in a similarly toneless manner, he states simply that 'her teeth are long and hollow. She says she draws life through them, and she has drunk her fill'. (SM, 28) Even the supernatural does not excite Latro to greater eloquence. This may be because he lacks the necessary art; it may be explained by his amnesia, which deprives him of any points of reference by which to judge the events on the road. But elsewhere, Latro uses a language of a sensuous richness, as if he is fully literate and quite able to assess the wonders that he sees.

For example, Latro describes his liaison with Aphrodite at Kalleos' establishment in Athens:

> 'I know that for me tonight she was the first - that no other would have been real beside her, that our joy endured while cities rose and fell, and that while I clasped her the breezes of spring blew perpetually.' (SM, 158)

To Latro, she is 'half woman and half child, her cheeks and all her flesh rose-tinted in the roseate light from the dove,

slender yet round of limb, her breasts small but perfect, her eyes like the skies of summer, her hair like fire, like butter, like night, ripe with myriad perfumes'. (SM, 158) This sublime language may be excessive, even a form of self-mockery; but it demonstrates enough knowledge for the generation of poetic metaphor. Suddenly Latro can write in the manner of Pindar or Hesiod. Elsewhere, he shows imagination that is remarkable for an amnesiac slave, as he swims deep in the ocean, and sees the submarine realm from the perspective of its inhabitants:

> 'When I opened my eyes, it was as though I were suspended in the sky like the sun; the blue water was all about me, a darker blue above, a paler, brighter blue below, where a great brown snail with a mossy shell crawled and trailed a thread of silver.' (SM, 273)

The 'snail' is the ship from which Latro has been thrown by Pasicrates in a wrestling match. Latro can adopt a foreign viewpoint, in which the land and ships are distant and alien, and in which the bottom of the sea becomes the sky. His ensuing description of a nereid is rich and strange, appropriately so.

The truth behind Latro's narrative inconsistency may be that he is not simply stimulated differently by different sorts of events, but rather that he has faculties submerged by his forgetfulness, faculties of eloquence, imagination and allusion which periodically defy the amnesiac mists and emerge onto his scroll. They cannot be relied upon; the narrative thus makes clear the complexity of Latro's psychology, the unpredictable

manner in which it finds expression and reacts to outside influences.

The style of Soldier of the Mist can at times rebut Latro's general passivity, as when he assumes an heroic role as leader at Thermopylae, toppling Pasicrates and leading the sacrifice to the Spartan dead. (SM, 276-8) The style here is heroic, exultant. This holds hope for Latro: he may regain his freedom and his country. But in this first volume of a series, this is a distant prospect; for now, inconsistency, the confusion of a masked and uncertain mind, is the dominant impression in the text. Latro can attain great heights, but he remains a slave to amnesia, the gods, and other men, and this attaches pathos to his most heroic descriptions.

A final narrative ploy by Wolfe renders the uncertainties of Latro and the reader very profound indeed. As in the 'New Sun' cycle, the act of translation is placed in some doubt. Supposedly, Wolfe has translated the scroll into English on the request of its owner. (SM, xi) In the 'Foreword', Wolfe declares that Latro

> '...had a disastrous penchant for abbreviation - indeed, it is rare to find him giving any but the shortest words in full; there is a distinct possibility that some abbreviations have been misread. The reader should keep in mind that all punctuation is mine; I have added details merely implied in the text in some instances and have given in full some conversations given in summary.' (SM, xii)

This is not mere authorial playfulness, the suggestion of imaginary sources and apocrypha to give a fiction a realistic veneer. Rather, Wolfe is undermining the text's historical solidity, subverting its integrity by the implication that it is erratic, at times imaginary or reconstructed. The reader is left ignorant of what details are supposedly invented, which original and which added. With nothing certain, the quest for enlightenment is yet darker than before.

Soldier of the Mist handicaps its narrator and reader in remarkable ways, furthering the narrative experimentation Wolfe commenced in earlier works. But it contains other elements analogous to those of preceding texts: speculation about the Divine, and explorations of the nature of Paradise and primitive innocence. In the light of these, Latro's amnesia and his flawed and fallen state become the keys to his enlightenment, the marks of divine favour. Latro is halting and uncertain for good reason; the ultimate ambiguity of Soldier of the Mist, its ultimate irony, lies in the fact that to know, Latro must forget.

Just as he does in the middle segment of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, Wolfe evokes in Latro's narrative the Golden Age, the primitive time before the beginning of history when the gods supposedly lived among men, speaking to and communing with them. In Mircea Eliade's formulation, this is a 'paradise of archetypes' which persists beyond the Golden Age, the ideal state in which men are uncorrupted by the fickle and changing processes of History and are yet attuned to the processes and

heroisms of cosmogony and the symbolic, ancestral past. (12) Even with the Golden Age long past, even in the 'Iron Age' of dishonesty and degeneration which the Hellenes believed they inhabited (13), conformity with the pure example of gods and heroes can induce a timeless happiness, even a contact with beings divine and supernatural. Wolfe's purpose in making Latro an amnesiac is not only to emphasize cognitive obstruction; it is also to frame a narrator who can partake of the presence of the gods through his own lack of consciousness of Time.

The emphasis upon History in Soldier of the Mist stresses the pressure of change upon the Greeks. Athens is seen in ruins in Part Two; the impact of exotic experience upon the isolated Spartans is notable in the schemings of Pausanias, who in Chapter XXVII is dazzled by the novel possibilities of a wider world, one containing riches and the stuff of intrigue. He is enticed, as are other Greeks in other ways. To retain pure spirituality and a constant link with the divine past, a blindness to novelty is necessary, consonant with the distrust of the processes of History seen by Eliade as the means by which many peoples expunge the sins and corruptions brought by Time. (14) The irony that Wolfe's reader must always bear in mind is that the Hellenic victories over the Persians were the seeds of the downfall of Athens and Sparta, the beginning of a phase of expansion and rivalry that culminated in fratricidal warfare, outside manipulation, and the exhaustion of Greek enterprise. The heir of the glories of Marathon, Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale was Alexander the Great of Macedon, a

'barbarian' only half Hellenic, if at all. History betrayed the Greeks as a whole; as an individual example, Wolfe's Spartan whose discipline is undermined by contact with the foreign, Pausanias, may be mentioned again. He ended his life accused of treachery and sedition (that is, treasonable dealings with Persia and others) and was starved to death in his own city, resisting the 'justice' of his own people. (15) The temptations of the world outside violated his integrity, the rigorous integrity of a Spartan aristocrat. Wolfe has the goddess Kore summarize the process of history and the choices that constitute it as 'the flood that whirls us to destruction' (SM, 150); Latro is 'one additional drop' therein.

Pausanias assumes that Latro is an 'idiot' because he is unable to remember (SM, 204); not too much later, he regards him as quite incisive, enough to ask his opinions and beg his aid in gaining the favour of the gods. (SM, Ch XXXIV) This is simple acknowledgement of the paradox: Latro converses with Apollo, Gaea, Kore, Artemis, and many other deities despite his forgetfulness - this seems wasteful, as he cannot even recall the meetings later. Why should an anonymous foreign soldier, penniless, enslaved, passive, have this ability to extract confidences from beings whose reclusiveness had grown since the time of Homer, whose physical influence and existence were increasingly being denied? Kore admits that the gods do not often meddle 'in the wars of men' any longer. (SM, 309) Why, then, should they interfere so frequently in Latro's deeds? A hero like Pausanias they ignore, excepting, as Gaea proclaims,

when it is convenient to their own purposes (in this case, her own) to do so. (SM, 235-236) The answer to this conundrum is in all probability that Latro lives yet in the 'paradise of archetypes'. He knows History and change only vaguely, in the sense of his general condition: he has been exiled from Italy, he is a slave where once he was a warrior. He lives in an eternal present, like one of the ancient, innocent men of the Golden Age; like them, he can see the gods, speak with them, know the realm of ghosts and spirits. He is in a sense pure, incorruptible; he is reborn every day, and is childlike in his receptivity. He cannot command the supernatural to appear before him; but when it is present, he beholds it. To regain his memory and the company of his compatriots, he must know the gods; his amnesia allows this. The paradox of his condition is that he must forget to know, and then he forgets when he knows. His position is cruel, but is blessed with revelation even as it seems hopeless.

Whether Latro's amnesia is a mere punishment by the gods, or a device of theirs, is left a mystery at this stage of the series. How or whether Latro will gain his desired freedom and power to recollect is not indicated. Thus, the text of Soldier of the Mist remains complicated by enigmas; speculation is offered to fill the gaps in the design behind Latro's life, but is never satisfactory or complete. Pasicrates, the Spartan messenger, offers such an hypothesis near Thermopylae:

> '"You'll forget, but I've begun to think that's because you're the ear of the gods; they hear,

instead of you, or they take the memory of what you've heard from you."' (SM, 280)

In this instance, Pasicrates hopes to use Latro to relay information to the gods; but whether he succeeds in this cannot be guessed. Conceivably, Latro is himself a god, exiled from Olympus and condemned to wander the world as a mortal; his resemblance to Ares, the god of war, is often notable, as when he explains siegecraft at masterly length and in detail to Pasicrates and some Athenian engineers. (SM, 297-8)

His knowledge is surprising, even without account being taken of his amnesia. Whatever the case, Latro's function as an inhabitant of a more numinous realm of mind and spirit than the ordinary, as a communicant and communicator of the Divine, is clear.

Latro is not only able to see and hear and feel the supernatural; he can, by touching the unearthly phenomenon, make it substantial to other mortals. When the magician (or conjuror) Eurykles is seeking to resurrect a dead woman in an Athenian cemetery, Latro touches the woman, and she at once sits up. (SM, 120) Eurykles assumes he is himself responsible, and rejoices in his new-found power; but Thygater is a revenant by Latro's agency only. Elsewhere, Latro is able to bring the Golden Age, the 'Great Time' of harmony with the gods, to his companions and to Cerdon's helots. He touches an old black man sleeping beneath a tree; this person turns out to be a minor divinity, 'the King of Nysa', tutor to

Dionysos, the god of pleasure and of the Corybantes. The god plays the flute while Latro sings, inspired by a holy wine tasting either 'as earth, rain, and sun must taste to the vine' or 'as the vine to them'. (SM, 31) The song suggests the Golden Age; its words tell 'of the morning of the world, when the slaves of the Rope makers had been free men serving their own king and the Earth Mother'. (SM, 31) Harmony and innocence grip even the rather harsh helots, who wave their weapons, 'skipping and hopping like lambs in the field'. (SM, 31) The knots binding the prisoners fall away, because in the presence of a god they are like knots tied by children. These events inspire Pindaros, the poet, to explain to his friends how the gods once ruled men as earthly, temporal rulers, even cohabiting with mortals and so siring or giving birth to 'heroes greater than men - but not wholly gods'. (SM, 33) The reader is thus reminded of a condition of the world, a condition sublime and perilous, which may return if the gods so will, if they desire to resume the earthly thrones currently occupied by mortal men. (SM, 34)

This suggestion, coming early in Soldier of the Mist, implies a Messianic aspect for Latro: perhaps he is the forerunner of such a return by the gods, hinting not only at the glories of the Golden Age but also at the nature and will of the divinities that direct it. He conveys to the Greeks intimations of paradise, but has power to show the grim intensity of a goddess, her horror, as well. His touch, as mentioned before, reanimated the corpse of Thygater; later in the novel, he touches Gaea:

> 'The terrible goddess of the slaves appeared last night. I touched her and everyone saw her. It was horrible.' (SM, 225)

Specifically, the appearance of Gaea, her materialization before a large number of her worshippers, is described in terms of awe, of wonder at her power: she is physically huge; the eyes of her followers stream with tears; her voice is poetically 'like the singing of a bird in the sun, in lands that are drowned forever'. (SM, 235) She directs the sacrificial emasculation of a helot (which is undertaken voluntarily), from which she draws nourishment and power (SM, 235); she then indicates her plans to overthrow Sparta, either by means of the manipulation of Pausanias or by way of a massive helotic rebellion. (SM, 236) Her physical manifestation, and the use she makes of it to influence the history and politics of the phenomenal world, are all made possible by Latro's touch. He has, consequently, a remarkable power, to bring back the gods in their full potency and majesty, so splendidly evoked by Wolfe's prose. Whether his path is to be Messianic or not in the sequence of 'Soldier' novels is not obvious; but, like Severian in the 'New Sun' cycle, Latro shows the dreadful as well as the wonderful aspects of the Divine to his reader.

The facility Latro possesses, to re-enter the Golden Age as the mists of his mind conceal the distracting realities of the mundane world, is mixed, revealing intoxicating joys (as in his meeting with Aphrodite, Ch XX) and dire monstrosity (as in the frightening apparition of the Dark Mother, Artemis, SM, 168-

169). Wolfe is emphasizing once more the ambiguity of the Divine, its deviousness, one more obstruction for Latro's quest for enlightenment and himself. Before proceeding to a consideration of the specific portraiture of the gods in Soldier of the Mist - the details of which reveal the reasons for Latro's frustration, for the disappointment of his questing - it is important to examine how Wolfe interprets mythic structures, how he renders them in his text. They are the keys to his arguments about religious experience and its pitfalls.

Wolfe emphasizes two characteristics in the mythical content of his work - the physical reality of the mythic types portrayed, and their flexibility. Because the God of Nysa and Gaea appear to others as well as to Latro, it is obvious that the Olympian pantheon is substantial, constituted literally of personalities who embody functions of nature and the human mind. Wolfe conforms to the opinions of Joseph Campbell (16), who emphasized the utility of myth, its role as spiritual support and reinforcement. When the helots respond worshipfully to Gaea, when they dance to the piping of the god of Nysa, when Pindar eagerly interprets the oracular pronouncements of Apollo in a literal manner (SM, 16-17), when Pausanias goes to the verge of the underworld to consult his ancestors (SM, 247-9), it is clear that myth and religion operate together, affirming and informing mortal minds. The figures of the Hesiodic and Olympian tradion, Jove, Gaea, Apollo, Artemis, Hades, Kore, all have followers, all guide and nurture these worshippers in direct ways. Wolfe interprets

myth in a basic way, ignoring largely its ideological and customary components. He is concerned with its direct response to the human desire for revelation and transcendence. In accordance withh this, he adheres to Campbell in another respect, as well as to Jung: he makes his mythic figures flexible. When Campbell speaks of 'the hero with a thousand faces' (17), he refers to the fundamental myth of the hero, one which finds a thousand forms but retains the same essence no matter its shape or origin. When Jung refers to the 'collective unconscious' and to the near-universal archetypes to which it gives rise (18), he also implies the mythic figure who is to be found everywhere, no matter the cultural pattern of any specific locality. Wolfe's gods and heroes, embodying the aspirations and fears of their worshippers, are entities with many aspects but a single essence. Artemis is also known as Cynthia, the moon goddess, the Dark Mother, Enodia, and by other names. To demonstrate how many forms she can take, depending on the expectations of her worshippers in any one place, Enodia shows Latro first the appearance of a grim huntress with hounds (SM, 168) and then that of a 'lovely virgin'. (SM, 169) Gaea, Enodia's rival for power in the Peloponnese, seems aged and even decrepit among the helots, but says that she has millions of devotees 'in other lands ....and some for whom I am not yet bent and old'. (SM, 235) Even as great and fundamental a divinity as the Earth Mother has a variable aspect, her title and attributes determined by what role believers expect her to play in their lives.

This flexibility or variability is explained by a priest of Dionysos early in the text. He takes the example of a citizen of Thebes, who can be either a shieldman, a son, a husband, a father, or a potter, all at once; he is addressed in terms of which function he serves at the time - '"if you meet him on the drill field, you will say 'shieldman'. In his shop, you will say, 'Potter, how much for this dish?"' (SM, 22) The priest then presents the case of Gaea to the girl Io:

> 'You see, my dear, there are many gods, but not so many as ignorant people suppose. So with your goddess, whom you call the Lady of the Swine. When we wish her to bless our fields, we call her the Grain Goddess. But when we think of her as the mother of all the things that spring from the soil, trees as well as barley, wild beasts as well as tame, Great Mother.' (SM, 22)

He sums up the situation of the gods, who must be able to appeal to all manner of peoples and cults: '"A god - or a goddess - must have a name suitable for the tongue of each nation."' (SM, 22-23)

The gods represent a consistent personality and set of qualities in each instance. But because they take so many shapes, many - like Io - are confused by them, assuming each aspect to be a separate deity. By stressing this confusion, Wolfe makes much the same point about the Divine as he adumbrated in the 'New Sun' series: that however unitary and absolute the Godhead, the core of God's Being, may be, the manifestations of it in the phenomenal world are protean, shifting, insusceptible to ready analysis. Mortal minds cannot grasp the Divine, which in any case must meet so many

requirements that it shows a thousand faces. The Greek gods are, furthermore, represented by Latro as only the servants and agents of a greater, unseen God, whose nature is wholly unclear. Thus Wolfe's theology: gods who are real, tangible, a pantheon substantial and assertive, yet who can never be certainly known, never bound, never trusted. Latro's quest for answers to his questions and his plight is very difficult indeed, for all that he can converse with the epitomes of earth, sea and sky. Their guises, and perhaps their words, are subjective fictions, as much the results of their worshippers' desires as of their own abiding characters.

The Corybantes, the worshippers of Dionysos, who engaged in revels and mystical ceremonies in celebration of their patron deity, are summatory of the nature of Hellenic religion as it is reflected in Wolfe's text. They are ecstatic, filled with the spirit of the bacchanal:

> 'They leap and whirl, splashing in the shallows, watering the grass with their flying feet and with the wine they drink and pour out even as they dance. The shrilling of the syrinx and the insistent thudding of the tympanon seem louder now. Though masked men leap among them, the dancers are mostly young women, naked or nearly so save for their wild, disordered hair.' (SM, 19)

They are like creatures of the Golden Age, forgetful of past and future, sharing the jubilant qualities of Dionysos in a direct inspiration or communication from him. They know him while they dance. But as Latro notes, they urinate or vomit up the wine of Dionysos (or Bacchus) even as they are in their frenzy. Wine is the sacred fluid and agency of Dionysos, but

they cannot retain it, and their trance will end. Similarly, one of the Corybantes, Hilaeira, sleeps with Latro following the revels, in a sacred copulation, a product of the frenzy. (SM, 20) When it is over, when diurnal normality has returned, she is no longer Latro's lover. The people's awareness of the gods does not last; it is transient, and no abiding knowledge or exaltation is transmitted to the mortal mind. Just as Latro cannot remember beyond a day, so ordinary people feel their contact with the supernatural only briefly. With the gods so fluid, untrustworthy, evasive, the act of religious devotion becomes toilsome and complex.

And yet it must proceed. In Wolfe's depiction of the Greek pantheon, there is much indication of the power of the gods, their majesty and their allure, as well as of their deceptiveness and mystery. They do offer knowledge, which Latro must have if he is to be Lucius the Italian warrior (SM, 326) instead of Latro the wandering amnesiac. Unfortunately, this knowledge comes in a frustratingly cryptic form: the language of the oracle. In the temple of Apollo in Thebes, just after Latro has sustained his head wound at the battle of Plataea and so begins his journey and forgetting, the god provides him with instructions through an oracle. This is in the form of twelve lines of opaque verse, which must be understood correctly if Latro is to make the correct pilgrimage and placate the Earth Mother properly. As Pindar realizes at once, the verses are 'divine poetry' mediated by the oracle (SM, 115); they have become 'doggerel'. Even when a deity speaks, a fallible human must express, and another interpret,

the resulting revelations. Pindar has difficulty already dealing with the oracular distortion; he must also confront Apollo's meaning. He offers a full explication, or exegesis, of the 'doggerel' (SM, 16-17), which appears satisfactory, even authoritative; Latro's quest can begin. But the poet realizes much later - to his chagrin - that he misinterpreted a vital element of the verses, mistaking one shrine for another. (SM, 132-133) Understanding the gods is not easy; still, they proffer some truths, and Latro has some success in assessing these, starting, however haltingly, his redemption from the mists of ignorance and forgetfulness that beset him. Sometimes, the Olympians speak more directly to him than did Apollo, as does a higher deity.

The structure of the Divine revealed in Soldier of the Mist is quite similar to that of Severian's Urth: where the 'New Sun' series suggest an Increate of omnipotent reclusion, acting through agents in the phenomenal world, Latro's narrative intimates a major God acting through a multitude of mundane minor deities, among whom even Gaea and Hades may be reckoned. When Latro unveils this conception to Pausanias, he does so speculatively and metaphorically. He asks the regent to imagine that Latro is a beggar boy in a great city like the capital of the Persian king. This boy sees the servants in the palace, and because they are well-dressed and generous to him, he regards them as

> '"....the lords of the palace. Once a cook gave me meat, and a scullion, bread. I've even seen the steward, Highness, with my own eyes. The steward's a very great lord indeed, Highness."' (SM, 260)

By comparison with a beggar, they are lords; by analogy, the gods of Olympus seem supremely powerful not because they are so, but because they are so much more potent and splendid than ordinary men. When Gaea hears the prayers of her worshippers, her responsive generosity is like that of a palace servant to a beggar in the street. The beggar assumes this is ultimate largesse, because he has never known better. But if he could see the master of the palace - the Supreme God, or Ahuramazda in Zoroastrian terms - his impression of the servant would immediately be modified. If the Greeks could see the God above Jove, they would worship Jove himself much less. Pausanias, an ambitious politician and general, responds to Latro's disquisition predictably: he wants Latro's assistance in attracting the notice of the Supreme God. (SM, 261-262) Jove and the Olympians are not sufficient as deities when a higher being is merely hinted.

Significantly, one of the Olympian gods, Kore, in passing acknowledges the existence of a more elevated God. She tells Latro of an 'Unseen God', who is presently waning, but in whose 'light' the gods have in the past been 'lost'. (SM, 309) This is all the corroboration Latro obtains for his conception of God, but it is enough. Whether the 'Unseen God' corresponds to 'Moros', the embodiment of Destiny that overrode even Zeus or Jove in Hellenic mythology (19), is not clear; but some conclusions can be reached. One is that Wolfe succeeds in reconciling Greek religion with the structures of his own Catholicism. He moulds a monotheism out of the

polytheistic multiplicity of Greek myth. Religious belief in the novel can have conviction. Further, he embodies the Catholic principle of mediation in the text: the gods become like the saints and talismans of Roman worship, potent only in their transmission into the world of divine information and energy. It is with a trace of arrogance that Wolfe has his Catholic truths of a single god and mediation occur to Latro spontaneously in Pausanias' tent, supreme over more natural polytheistic assumptions; but Latro does think in terms of Zoroastrianism, which was contemporary with him. No matter the tone of revelation in the text, the truth of the Unseen God is clear to Latro. This is a very hopeful sign; despite being a 'beggar boy', he can speculate beyond the lordly 'servants' of the 'palace', Revelation is possible. But a second conclusion must not be ignored - the 'Unseen God ' exists, but he is remote. In the world, it is the Olympian gods who matter actually and physically. If they are fallible, subordinate deities, their words and actions are yet more untrustworthy than is initially assumed by the reader. They are like the wilful children of a wealthy and indifferent father, toying with humanity wickedly and pointlessly. Their fallibility is clear. One of the most significant of them, Gaea, in planning the future of the helots with Pausanias as her tool, admits, '"Still he, and I, may fail."' (SM. 236) The beings on whom Latro relies for guidance and release may be quite unhelpful, even if they seem benevolent and concerned for him.

It is with this unreliability, and all the other forms of ambiguity discussed before in mind, that Wolfe portrays the gods of Greece. It is remarkable that despite this Latro persists in his quest, and achieves some progress. Other than his insight into the 'Unseen God', he is able to characterize the gods with an intuitive accuracy. Alertness and intelligence are perhaps his antidotes to the veil concealing the gods.

When Latro deals with the older of the gods, a sense of senescence, even of senility, is conveyed, hinting at an indifference to humanity born of sheer age. In Gaea's (Demeter's) temple at Advent, Latro acquires an impression of her presence:

> 'There is nothing - or rather, there is only the sense of age. It is as if I sit with a woman so old she neither knows nor cares whether I am real or only some figment of her disordered mind, a shadow or a ghost. A fly may light upon a rock; but what does the rock, which has seen whole ages since the morning when gods strode from hill to hill, care for a fly, the creature of a summer?' (SM, 144)

Later, Latro sees that his assessment of Gaea was correct: physically she is 'a goddess indeed, but aged and crazed, her gown torn and gray with dirt'. (SM, 229) Although Jove never appears to Latro, his presence is intimated also, in the natural processes of the world over which he supposedly rules - in the wind:

> 'I heard the wind muttering among the oaks, and I knew it - though I do not know how - for the thought of Jove, the god who rules the gods and cares little for men. It seemed to me that he was mad, black

> thoughts repeating one or two words again and again as they brooded upon revenge.' (SM, 307)

Latro's accurate reading of the psychology of these two gods indicates both their exclusion, their indifference, and the fact that the only information they will vouchsafe is involuntary, inherent in their natures. They are old and withdrawn: this is revealed by their aspects, not by their own acts of communication. Latro must look elsewhere for knowledge of himself and his destiny (although Gaea's intervention in the affairs of the helots in Chapter XXXI shows a more active side to her, a greater interest in the world, perhaps stimulated by Latro's presence.)

Latro must meet younger deities to gain enlightenment, and, appropriately, those most active in his quest are Zeus or Jove's daughter Artemis and his son Apollo, perhaps representing their father, and Kore, daughter of Gaea and Queen of the Underworld, who acknowledges that she acts on her mother's behalf. (SM, 147) In confronting this second generation of Olympians, Latro must always take account of his own expressed distrust of the gods. To him, they seem inherently, even unconsciously, malicious:

> 'I think that even the best act in some twisted way, perhaps. There's malice even in those who would be kind, I think even in Europa. In the serpent woman [Drakaina] it burned so hot that I felt it still when I read what I had written of her.' (SM, 127)

The deviousness of the gods - their automatic reliance on deception, subterfuge, the obliqueness of oracular language -

is a serious obstacle to Latro's progress, and is made worse by the interference of the younger deities in his own destiny. They play games with him, intriguing and deploying people and other beings as pawns, in a web that cannot be fully explained or penetrated.

Latro depends upon these beings for guidance. This is implicit in his acceptance of the oracle of Apollo (SM, 15), in his obsequious obedience to Enodia's (Artemis's) commands with regard to her snake and its ingestion by Eurykles (SM, 170-174) and in his similar compliance with Kore's demands for the sacrifice of a wolf. (SM, 310) His tone is eager in each case: to Enodia he says '"You are too generous, too merciful!"' (SM, 310) and '"I will do just as you've said, Maiden."' (SM, 310) He begs Enodia to take him with her on her journey home (SM, 170); he places himself at her service on the same page. This effusive submissiveness is the product of fear or awe or perhaps a genuine desire to serve and obey; but whatever its motive, it indicates the extent of Latro's dependence on these uncertain benefactors. In Soldier of the Mist, the eventual outcome of his dependence is not revealed, but the behaviour of the gods in the interim does little to inspire trust.

When Latro encounters Apollo in a temple in Thebes, the god appears as a young warrior with golden arrows, a traditional semblance of this 'god of divination, of music, of death, and of healing'. (SM, 11) He does not seem evil or treacherous, but Latro does remark on a suave manner which may hint at deception: 'His words were fair and smooth, like those of a

seller who tells his customer that his goods have been reserved for him alone'. (SM, 11) Apollo offers Latro both the oracular pronouncement in verse, and a direct outline of his future. This is not satisfactory, because of its opacity; it contains teasing clues only, such as 'you will find what you seek in the dead city' and 'though you will wander far in search of your home, you will not find it until you are farthest from it'. (SM, 11) Apollo does not provide much genuine information, even when he does not speak with the mediation of his oracle. This is hardly fair if he means Latro well; the prophecy, being a divine formulation, is a determinant of Latro's future, but it is not practically useful. It is for reasons such as this that Latro attributes 'malice' even to Apollo, the 'Shining God'. (SM, 127)

Apollo's sister Artemis, the Dark Mother and Huntress, is much more actively malign. Her meeting with Latro 'at the crossroads' is an occasion for her to display menace. She threatens Latro with her gigantic hunting hounds (SM, 168); she emphasizes her darkest qualities:

> 'I am the woman of poisons, Latro. Of murder, ghosts, and the spells that bring death. I am the Queen of the Neurians; and I am three.' (SM, 169)

As the bowman Oior explained to Latro earlier in his journey, the Neurians are sinister sorcerers and werewolves, whose patroness Enodia proclaims herself. (SM, 74) The 'three' aspects of Artemis - those of Dark Mother, Huntress, and Moon (SM, 171-172)-are all nocturnal, dark, threatening. She is in

opposition to the Earth (SM, 169) but is easily as terrible as Gaea. More concretely, Artemis is manipulative - as is seen in her use of Eurykles the sorcerer and of Oior.

On Enodia or Artemis's instructions, Latro gives to Eurykles a goblet of wine containing a small serpent (SM, 173-174). This serpent is in fact Drakaina, a reptile-woman who serves the Huntress. Eurykles presently becomes a woman, as Drakaina usurps his being. Drakaina schemes, serving Enodia's ends and her own by seducing Latro and Pasicrates, murdering the helot Cerdon and the wrestler Basias with her venom, and intriguing with Artaÿctes, the Persian satrap at Sestos. The plots and sleights that typify Enodia, the 'woman of poisons', are seen fully in her wayward servant. For Eurykles, his fate is harsh; he loses his identity, his ghost leaving his own body. (SM, 248, 253); when Drakaina dies, his voice pathetically cries out to his 'mother', saying 'it's Eurykles!' (SM, 326) Enodia violates one of her own worshippers, transforming and torturing him. Another one of her servants, Oior, kills a fellow bowman under the pretence that his victim is a werewolf; the lycanthrope is in fact Oior, as Latro begins to infer when he sees Oior's private response to his own deed of murder: Oior has the

> '....face of a scholar of the worst kind, of the sort of man who has studied many things hidden from common men and grown wise and corrupt. He smiled to see the dead bowman, and he stroked the livid cheek as a mother strokes her child.' (SM, 84)

Artemis is by nature untrustworthy; in his obedience to her, Latro accomplishes little. The opposing side in the quarrels of the gods - the side of Gaea - is little more inspiring of confidence.

Kore, or Persephone, or the Maiden, as she is variously known, behaves in a manner not unlike Enodia's. As the wife of Hades and Queen of the Dead, she is 'terrifying' to Latro when they first meet. (SM, 146) She plays a mocking game with Latro, first menacing him with death and then suggesting a liaison. (SM, 148-149) She talks of how all the world will in the end revert to the land of the dead; and when she turns, Latro sees that 'her back was a mass of putrefaction where worms and maggots writhed.' (SM, 150) She is youthful, but old and corrupt also. Her mischief is plain in the closing section of the novel, when she again appears to Latro, who reminds her of her promise, that she will return him to his people. She swears to fulfil the pledge. (SM, 309) But this is fulfilled only in an underhand way: Latro's fellow Italians are all slain in the flight from Sestos, and he is reunited with them too late. Kore's promise is true in its concrete details, but not in spirit. A dying Latin soldier justifiably gasps '"How strange are the ways of the gods! ...How cruel!"' (SM, 326) That these deities are merely being true to their archetypal functions, Enodia's of poison and death, Apollo's of oracular prophecy, and Kore's of the reuniting of souls in death, is of course correct. The gods are probably incapable of doing other than they do in Latro's account. However shifting in appearance, their identities are fixed at the core. They must

always conspire, prophesy, and slay. In Latro's world, there is no recourse to the better nature of the gods, because they have none. This is a tragic conception of divinity, binding the gods and Latro to a path of deceit, slaughter, limitation, and incomprehension. The plot of Soldier of the Mist derives from the characters of its chief players, whose pawn, Latro, must follow their lead.

Latro's course through a labyrinth of lost memory and deceiving symbols continues, in Soldier of Arete (1989), towards an uncertain close; but some supernatural figures in the text of Soldier of the Mist are more forthcoming to him than the major gods already mentioned; they hint at a resolution more favourable than the attention of Kore and Artemis might portend. The 'Swift God', the deity of the river, blesses Latro's sword Falcata, making it invincible. (SM, 7) The King of Nysa grants a taste of the wine and music of the gods. (SM,Ch.V) Great Hades, King of the Dead, wishes Latro justice, even though he, as Death, cannot understand mercy. (SM, 82) Aphrodite takes Latro as a lover. (SM, Ch.XX) Heroes come to Latro's assistance in time of need: the legendary Herakles helps him in his wrestling contest with Basias the Spartan. (SM, 180-181) In Sestos, two warriors invisible to all but Latro aid him against three opposing fighters; one identifies himself as 'Odysseus', Homer's hero. Latro triumphs in the combat. (SM, 315-317) Possibly all of these beings are acting as forces of good, as fixed in their archetypal functions as Artemis, Apollo, and Kore. Unfortunately for Latro, there is no pattern to their succours;

where the manipulative goddesses appear and act often, these others are not closely involved in the text, and appear without pattern or purpose. At this stage of the 'Soldier' series, the queens of night and death seem the representatives of Latro's fate; but only Gene Wolfe can decide the issue. His text is rife with deceptions and inversions, and it may yet turn full circle.

Soldier of the Mist is, then, an inconclusive and ambiguous text. This quality pervades its form, its characterizations and descriptions, its themes and conclusions. Latro is representative of all searchers for truth and identity; he searches within himself by writing his scroll, he searches outside himself by consulting the gods and the natural world they symbolize. Wolfe reveals the pitfalls of the quest, internal and external: the shortcomings of reflection, character, and memory, the deceit and unquantifiability of a world too complex, too vast, too mysterious for ordinary comprehension. That these obstructions exist on so many levels, textual, mythic, poetic, and thematic, is the measure of Wolfe's mature art. Soldier of the Mist is a fragment of a longer work, but its very inconclusiveness reflects the unending ambiguity of Wolfe's universe of veiling obscurities and tantalizing darknesses.

CONCLUSION

From this investigation of the major works of Gene Wolfe, a conclusion as to his themes and achievements - and their implications - can be reached. He has continued the transformation of Science Fiction into Literary Science Fiction, into something subtle and deeply meaningful. This process, begun in the Nineteen-Sixties by J G Ballard, Brian Aldiss, and Michael Moorcock in England, and by Harlan Ellison, Samuel R Delany, and Ursula Le Guin, among others, in the United States, has succeeded in linking Science Fiction with the mainstream of Literature, modifying its naive and insular attitudes and manner, injecting into it profundity, feeling, a consciousness of art and the power of style. Wolfe is the major writer that the genre has required, to formalize its higher possibilities, to make the revolution in the field real and permanent.

Wolfe has altered the standard world of Science Fiction in a manner prefigured by the novels of his predecessors, Thomas M Disch, Brian Aldiss, J G Ballard, and others. The old world of the genre was a place of raw affirmatory certainties, where the enabling technology of the spaceship and the laser overcame all doubt and, often, all moral inhibitions. The introduction into this environment of the Tragic hero by the writers of the Nineteen-Sixties and beyond was an appropriate antidote to these fantasies of Power; in Science Fiction, the protagonist has

capabilities like those of the kings and princes of Classical Tragedy, power and dominion; when his flaws emerge, his fall is all the more spectacular. Wolfe continues the development of the Tragic hero in his major novels; he makes of him a person eloquent and perceptive but flawed, fallen, broken, his perceptions clouded by the infirmities of hand and brain, his ability to confront his plight retarded, near-fatally hampered.

Wolfe makes the hero and the world not the measures of power, but those of weakness. His protagonists, instead of conquering, struggle falteringly even to know themselves. Thus the emphasis in every Wolfe text on obscuring veils: these are seen in relentlessly problematized narratives, deceptive founts of knowledge, unreliable appearances, systematized falsehood, the madness of the hero, the subversion of the signs and symbols that promise and affirm. These are presented with an art and intensity new to Science Fiction. But, lest his texts degenerate into catalogues of despair and emptiness, Wolfe, by characteristic inversion, remains true to some of the ideological precepts of his genre. He allows the retention of faith, his heroes strive in an environment that is religious, that points to the existence of some stable theocenter, some absolute Godhead. Behind the veils of Maya, and the phenomenal world, must be truth, and redemption, and the end of existential pain. His heroes, Severian and Latro, do not find that end, but at least,

like the old hero of Science Fiction, they can aspire; and be a little more than they formerly were.

Wolfe's texts combine black pessimism with a theological conviction. This is, however, not simple, not consistent in any way. Hope exists in the depths of despair; and the road to God is littered with thorns and eternal incorrect turnings. No answers, no certainties are presented, other than the reality of an utter ambiguity. In Wolfe, the hero does not fall, unlike his Tragic original; he has no dramatic collapse; instead, the Fall is implicit in his condition from the beginning, and the might of an Autarch cannot overcome blindness and limitation. It can only try, without end, in hope and in the conviction of doom at one and the same time.

Wolfe has made the rules of quantum rather than Einsteinian physics govern the world. The Uncertainty Principle, the laws of probability and possibility, supplant the old Newtonian conceptions of fixed nature and stable relationships. This means that Wolfe's work is still Science Fiction, but a fiction of a science quite different from that previously obeyed in genre writing. This is a science that admits all possibilities, laws and their violations, strict science and the practice of magic.

In this Wolfe assists in the transformation of Science Fiction into Science Fantasy, into a genre capable of ambiguity,

subtlety, an escape from blind positivism into a new flexibility, an admission of the existential, physical, and moral complexity of the world. His new experiments with Magical Realism, in his brilliant newer novels There are Doors (1988) and Castleview (1990), point further in this direction. Wolfe's abiding achievement is his bringing to the conventions of a facile popular literature a vista of endless artistic possibility. This is already being taken up, by Wolfe and many other writers of the 1980s and 1990s.

NOTES

Introduction

1. See Orson Scott Card, Wyrms (London : Century, 1988) and his 'Alvin Maker' novels, Seventh Son (New York : Tor, 1987), Red Prophet (New York : Tor, 1988), and Prentice Alvin (New York : Tor, 1989). David Zindell, Neverness (London : Grafton Books, 1988). Elizabeth Hand, Winterlong (New York : Bantam, 1990). Dan Simmons, Hyperion (New York : Bantam, 1989) and The Fall of Hyperion (New York : Bantam, 1990). Pat Murphy, The Falling Woman (New York : Tor, 1987). Ian MacDonald, Out On Blue Six (New York : Bantam, 1989). Lucius Shepard, The Ends of the Earth (Wisconsin : Arkham House, 1991) and Kalimantan (London : Century, 1990) - Shepard's later work.
2. Gordon, Joan, Gene Wolfe (San Bernardino, California : Borgo Press, 1986), 1 - 2.
3. Gordon, Ibid, 4.
4. Characters mentioned here but not covered in this Thesis are, respectively, Tackman Babcock, from 'The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories' in The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories and Other Stories (London : Arrow, 1981); Alden Dennis Weer, from Peace (London : Chatto and Windus, 1985); and Adam K. Greene, from There Are Doors (New York : Tor, 1989).
5. Gordon, Ibid, 4.
6. Gordon, Ibid, 6.
7. See Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past, 3 vols, tr. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and T. Kilmartin (New York : Random House, 1981); Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1986); and Robert Graves, I, Claudius (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979); Claudius the God (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979); and Count Belisarius (London : Cassell, 1938).
8. See C.N. Manlove, 'Gene Wolfe : The Book of the New Sun', in Manlove, Science Fiction : Ten Explanations (London : McMillan, 1986), 198 - 216, and Colin Greenland's review of The Shadow of the Torturer and The Claw of the Conciliator in Foundation 24 (February 1984), 82 - 85.

Chapter One

1. Gordon, Joan, Gene Wolfe (San Bernardino, California : The Borgo Press, 1986), 74.
2. The abbreviations used in this and the following two Chapters indicate : in the case of ST, The Shadow of the Torturer (London : Arrow, 1981); CC, The Claw of the Conciliator (London : Arrow, 1982); SL, The Sword of the Lictor (London, Arrow, 1982); CA, The Citadel of the Autarch (London, Arrow, 1983); UNS, The Urth of the New Sun (London : Gollancz, 1987).
3. Clute, John, `Science Fiction Novels of the Year' in Garnett, David, The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook (London : Orbit Futura, 1987), 312.
4. Scholem, Gersham G., On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism tr. Ralph Manheim (New York : Schocken Books, 1972), 73 - 74. See the section of this chapter pertaining to The Urth of the New Sun.
5. Clute, John, `New Found Lands', in Interzone 30 (1988), 61.
6. See similar techniques in Frank Herbert, Dune (New York : Berkley Books, 1984), and its sequels; Paul Park, Soldiers of Paradise (London : Grafton, 1988) and Sugar Rain (New York : Morrow, 1989), Jack Vance, Emphyrio (New York : DAW, 1978); and in David Zindell, Neverness (London : Grafton, 1988).
7. For the origin and utility of this term, see Wagar, Warren W., Terminal Visions : The Literature of Last Things (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1982), 92 - 96.
8. See Jack Vance, The Dying Earth (London : Grafton, 1985) and its sequels, The Eyes of the Overworld (London : Grafton, 1985), Cugel's Saga (London : Grafton, 1985), and Rhialto the Marvellous (London : Grafton, 1985). M. John Harrison, The Pastel City (London : NEL, 1971) and A Storm of Wings (London : Unwin, 1987). Robert Silverberg, Nightwings (London : Sphere, 1983). Michael Moorcock, An Alien Heat (London : Granada, 1982), The Hollow Lands (London : Granada, 1977), and The End of All Songs (London : Grafton, 1984).
9. See Gevers, Nicholas, `Myths of the Far Future : A Study of a Science Fiction Sub-Genre,' (unpublished paper, University of

Cape Town : 1987).
10. Lewis, R.W.B., Trials of the Word (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1965), 196 - 197.
11. Kermode, Frank, The Sense of An Ending : Studies in the Theory of Fiction (England : Oxford University Press, 1968).
12. Kermode, Ibid, Ch. 1.
13. Nalbantian, Suzanne, Seeds of Decadence in the Late Nineteenth Century Novel : A Crisis in Values (London : McMillan, 1983).
14. Ketterer, David, New Worlds For Old : The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature (Bloomington and London : Indiana University Press, 1974), 7 - 8; and Lewicki, Zbigniew, The Bang and The Whimper (Westport, Connecticut : Greenwood Press, 1984).
15. Robinson, Douglas, American Apocalypses : The Image of the End of the World in American Literature (Baltimore and London : Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), Preface.
16. Robinson, Ibid, xiii.
17. Kreuziger, F. A., Apocalypse and Science Fiction (Chico, California : Scholars Press, 1982) Ch. 2.
18. See Frye, Northrop, The Anatomy of Criticism : Four Essays (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1957) and Denham, R.B. (ed.), Northrop Frye on Culture and Literature (Illinois : University of Chicago Press, 1978), Introduction.
19. Writers most strongly upholding Science Fiction's tradition of the powerful and efficacious hero include Robert Heinlein, as in I Will Fear No Evil (New York : G.P. Putnam, 1970) and A. E. Van Vogt, as in The World of Null-A (Ace : New York, 1953) and in The Weapon Makers (New York, Digit Books, no date; original publication 1947).
20. Ketterer, New Worlds For Old, 13.
21. Ketterer, Ibid.
22. Gene Wolfe, quoted in Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 95.
23. McBrien, Richard P., `Roman Catholicism' in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), The Encyclopaedia of Religion (New York : McMillan, 1987), Volume 12, 444. See also L.S. Cunningham, The Catholic Experience (New York : Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985).

24. Mc Brien, Ibid, 429.
25. See Suvin, Darko, Metamorphoses of Science Fiction : On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre (New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 1979), Ch. 1 for a discussion of `cognitive estrangement.´
26. See Kievitt, F.D., `Walter M. Miller´s A Canticle For Liebowitz as a Third Testament,´ in Reilly, Robert (ed.), The Transcendent Adventure : Studies of Religion in Science Fiction\Fantasy (Westport : Connecticut : Greenwood Press, 1985), 169 - 175. See the attitudes to knowledge in C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet (London : Pan, 1983), Perelandra (London : Pan, 1983) and That Hideous Strength (London : Pan, 1983); in Blish, James, A Case of Conscience (London : Arrow, 1971) and Black Easter and The Day After Judgement (London : Arrow, 1981); and in Miller, Walter M., A Canticle For Liebowitz (London : Corgi, 1979).
27. Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 84.
28. Mc Brien in Eliade (ed.) 436.
29. Mc Brien, Ibid, 437 - 9.
30. Mc Brien, Ibid, 437 - 8.
31. Mc Brien, Ibid, 438.
32. Gene Wolfe quoted in Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 96. See the next section of this chapter for the dark Messiah in the `New Sun´ cycle.
33. Mc Brien in Eliade (ed.), 438 - 9.
34. Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 93 - 94.
35. See `Time and Timelessness´ in Richardson, A., and Bowden, J. (eds.), A New Dictionary of Christian Theology (London : SCM Press, 1983), 571 - 574.
36. Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 94 - 5.
37. Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 95.
38. Gene Wolfe, quoted in Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 96.
39. Hyam Maccoby, The Sacred Executioner : Human Sacrifice and The Legacy of Guilt (London : Thames and Hudson, 1982), 7.
40. The divinely-guided or infallibly inspired Christ-figure is common in Science Fiction : see Orson Scott Card´s `Alvin Maker´ novels, cited in Introduction, note 1; Gordon R. Dickson´s

`Hal Mayne´ in The Final Encyclopaedia (New York : Tor, 1984) and in The Chantry Guild (London : Sphere, 1989); Frank Herbert´s `Paul Atreides´ in Dune (New York : Berkley Books, 1984); and all of Robert A. Heinlein´s heroes. The more crass and simplistic of these figures avoid the Passion, but have godlike powers anyway, power without tempering or responsibility. Wolfe´s Severian counters this tendency in the genre.

41. For general details of Christ and the New Testamental tradition see Smart, Ninian, The Religious Experience of Mankind, 3rd edition (New York : Charles Scribner´s Sons, 1984), Ch. 8; O´Collins, Gerald, `Jesus´ in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), The Encyclopaedia of Religion (New York : Mc Millan, 1987), volume 8, 15 - 28; Mackey, James P., Jesus : The Man and The Myth (London, SCM Press, 1979); and Kasper, Walter, Jesus the Christ (London : Burns and Dates and New York : Paulist Press, 1977).

42. See Chapter Three of this Thesis for more commentary upon the Gothic characteristics of the `New Sun´ cycle.

43. See Cohon, Beryl D., Judaism in Theory and Practice, revised ed., (New York : Bloch Publishing Company, 1968) ,68; Alan Unterman, `Judaism´ in Hinnells, John R. (ed.), A Handbook of Living Religions (Harmondsworth and London : Penguin, 1984), 27; and Smith, Margaret, An Introduction to Mysticism (New York : Oxford University Press, 1977), 15.

44. Chan Matt, Daniel, `Introduction´ Zohar : The Book of Enlightenment tr. and introd. by Daniel Chan Matt (London : SPCK, 1983), 34.

45. Scholem, Gershom G., On The Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, tr. Ralph Manheim (New York : Schocken Books, 1972), 13.

46. Leo Schaya, The Universal Meaning of the Kabbalah, tr. Nancy Pearson (London : George Allen and Unwin, 1971), 56.

47. See `Mysticism´ in Werblowsky, R.J.Z. and Wigoder, G., The Encyclopaedia of the Jewish Religion (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1966), 279; and Idel, Moshe, `Kabbalah´ in Eliade, Mircea (ed.), The Encyclopaedia of Religion (New York : McMillan, 1987), volume 12, 118 - 19. For another Science Fictional treatment of the Cabbalistic potential for transcendence, see Greg Bear, Strength of Stones (London : Gollancz, 1988).

48. In this respect, Wolfe is as close in his work to the sinsiter Providence portrayed by Lucius Shepard as he is to Orson Scott Card's confidence in the goodness of God.
49. See Deutsch, Eliot, `Introduction' to the The Bhagavad Gitu (New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 16 - 17.
50. Dimmitt, Cornelia and van Buitenen, J.A.B. (eds.), Classical Hindu Mythology : A Reader in the Sanskrit Puranas (Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 1978), 10.
51. See Bancroft, Anne, Religions of the East (London : Heinemann, 1974), 13 - 15; Zaehner, R.C, `Introduction' to Hindu Scriptures (London : Dent, 1952); Deutsch, Eliot, `Introduction' to the Bhagavad Gita, 12.
52. Bancroft, Ibid, 83 - 85; Humphreys, Christmas, Buddhism (London : Penguin, 1976), Introduction; and Robinson, Richard H. and Johnson, Willard L., The Buddhist Religion : A Historical Introduction, 3rd ed. (Belmont, California : Wadsworth Publishing, 1976).
53. In terms of the Hindu concept of Brahman, a single self underlying all things, all people.
54. Bancroft, Ibid, 83 - 85.
55. Bancroft, Ibid, 188 - 191.
56. Bancroft, Ibid, 191.
57. Welch, Holmes, Taoism - The Parting Of the Way, revised ed. (Boston : Beacon Press, 1966), 21 - 25.
58. For Taoism's radical rejection of social conventions and limitations, see Girardot, N.J., Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism (Berkeley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1983), 2 - 3; in this respect, it is quite unlike Confucianism, with its formality and etiquette; see Eber, Irene, Confucianism : The Dynamics of Tradition (New York : McMillan, 1986).

Chapter Two

1. The use of narratological concepts and terms in this chapter is owed chiefly to Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith, Narrative Fiction : Contemporary Politics (New York and London : Methuen, 1983). A

debt is also owed to Holloway, John, Narrative and Structure : Exploratory Essays (London and New York : Cambridge University Press, 1979), to Bal, Mieke, Narratology (Toronto, Buffalo, and London : University of Toronto, 1985), and to Chatman, Seymour, Story and Discourse : Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca and London : Cornell University Press, 1978).

2. Graves, Robert, I, Claudius (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979) and Claudius the God (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979); Yourcenar, Marguerite, Memoirs of Hadrian, tr. Grace Frick (London : Secker and Warburg, 1955).

3. Peake, Mervyn, Titus Groan (London : Methuen, 1987), Gormenghast (London : Methuen, 1987) and Titus Alone (London : Methuen, 1987).

4. Proust, Marcel, Remembrance of Things Past, 3 vols, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and T. Kilmartin (New York : Random House, 1981).

5. For examples, see the direct narrative modes of Robert A. Heinlein, in The Puppet Masters, The Door Into Summer and Double Star, in A Heinlein Trio (Garden City, New York : Science Fiction Book Club, Doubleday, no date). In Asimov's case, his robot novels (The Robot Novels, New York : Doubleday, Science Fiction Book Club, no date), despite their structure as mysteries, are narrated in a predictable and linear way, without variation or experiment. This is true also of the works of Arthur C. Clarke and those of many other traditional writers.

6. Manlove, C.N., Science Fiction : Ten Explanation (London, McMillan, 1986), 216.

Chapter Three

1. Clute, John, `Science Fiction Novels of the Year' in Garnett, David (ed.) The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook (London : Orbit Futura, 1988), 312.

2. For general analysis of Post-Modern and metafictional concerns and techniques, see Scholes, Robert, Fabulation and Metafiction (Urbana, Chicago, and London : University of Illinois Press, 1980). For Post-Modern experiments in Science

Fiction, see Everman, Welch D., `The Paper World : Science Fiction in the Post-modern Era' in Mc Caffery, Larry (ed.), Post- modern Fiction : A Bio-bibliographical Guide (New York, Connecticut, and London, 1986), 23 - 38. Patrick Parrinder discusses usefully the operation of conventions and genres in self-aware (and unaware) texts within Science Fiction in Science Fiction : Its Criticism and Teaching (London and New York : Methuen, 1980).

3. See the list of `entropic romances' in Chapter One, note 8.

4. For this tradition, see Gevers, Nicholas, `Myths of the Far Future : A Study of A Science-Fiction Sub-Genre,' unpublished paper, University of Cape Town, 1987.

5. For the different varieties of `World' a Science Fiction writer may imaginatively generate, some useful for experimentation and others conventional only, see Wendland, Albert, Science, Myth, and the Fictional Creation of Alien Worlds (Ann Arbor, Michigan : UMI Research Press, 1985), Part II.

6. For the analysis of the rationality - the `cognitive estrangement' - that distinguishes Science Fiction from Fantasy, see Darko Suvin's Metamorphoses of Science Fiction : On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre, cited in Chapter One, note 25; and Chapter One of Parrinder's Science Fiction, cited in Chapter Three, note 2.

7. For reflections on the irrational or mystical traits of Fantasy, see C.N. Manlove's comments in the opening chapter of Science Fiction : Ten Explorations (London : McMillan, 1986); Don D. Elgin sums up the anti-rational and non-acquisitive characteristics of Fantasy in his The Comedy of the Fantastic : Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel (Westport, Connecticut and London : Greenwood Press, 1985), Ch. 1.

8. Noted also in Aldiss, Brian and Wingrove, David, Trillion Year Spree (London, Gollancz, 1986), 422 - 23.

9. See McAndrew, Elizabeth, The Gothic Tradition in Fiction (New York, Columbia University Press, 1979). Concrete examples of external mental architecture can be found in the Castles in Horace Walpole's 18th Century The Castle of Otranto (London : The Scholartis Press, 1929) and the later nineteenth-century

Dracula by Bram Stoker (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1978).
10. In The Foundation Trilogy (originally published 1951 - 3; omnibus edition The Foundation Trilogy, New York : Doubleday, Science Fiction Book Club, no date).
11. In The Worthing Saga (New York : Tor, 1980).
12. In City (Garden City, New York : Nelson Doubleday, Science Fiction Book Club, no date; originally published 1952).
13. In At Winter's End (New York : Warner, 1988) and The Queen of Springtime (London : Gollancz, 1988).
14. Aldiss, Brian, The Malacia Tapestry (London : Panther, 1979).
15. For Peake's `Gormenghast' Trilogy, see Chapter 2, note 3.
16. For The Castle of Otranto, see Chapter 3, note 8.
17. See Peake's `Gormenghast' Trilogy; Tolkien's fortresses of Mordor in The Lord of the Rings (London : Unwin Hyman, 1987); Vance's depiction of the castle as a symbol of social decline and collapse in `The Last Castle' in The Best of Jack Vance (New York : Pocket Books, 1976); Shepard's Bayou manse in Green Eyes (New York : Ace, 1984).
18. See McAndrew's analysis of this phenomenon in her first chapter (see Chapter 3, note 8).
19. From Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, the classic Gothic novel (edition used : Oxford University Press, 1969, edited by M.K. Joseph).
20. As portrayed in Robert Heinlein's Orphans of the Sky (London : Gollancz, 1963) and (very differently) in Brian Aldiss' Non-Stop (London : Pan, 1976).
21. As in David Zindell's Neverness (London : Grafton, 1988), Robert Silverberg's Star of Gypsies (London : Orbit, 1988) and Melissa Scott's Five-Twelfths of Heaven (London : Gollancz, 1988), and its sequels.
22. See Arthur C. Clarke's 2001 : A Space Odyssey (London : Arrow, 1986) and George R.R. Martin's Gothic novella `Nightflyers' in Nightflyers (New York : Tor, 1987).
23. This principle is explored (at tedious length) in Arthur C.Clarke (ed.), Project Solar Sail (New York : ROC, 1990).
24. For the Gothic phenomenon of The Doppelganger or Double,

see McAndrew's first chapter (see Chapter 3, note a) and Day, William Patrick, In The Circles of Fear and Desire : A Study of Gothic Fantasy (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1985), 19 - 20.

25. Wolfe's best co-practitioners of this are Jack Vance, as in The Dragon Masters (London : Panther, 1967); C.J. Cherryh, as in Serpent's Reach (New York : DAW, 1980) and Hunter of Worlds (New York : DAW, 1977); and Sheri S. Tepper, as in Grass (New York : Doubleday, 1989).

26. Many writers use historical analogy, to make depicted aliens comprehensible in the light of human history. See Gordon R.Dickson's The Alien Way (London : Corgi, 1973); and many works by Poul Anderson, such as Fire Time (New York : Doubleday, Science Fiction Book Club, no date; originally published 1974). For a recent example, see Gentle, Mary, Golden Witchbreed (London : Century, 1983) and its sequel Ancient Light (London : Century, 1987). Gentle uses Jacobean motifs to realize her aliens, the Ortheans.

27. See Chapter Four of this Thesis, dealing with that novel.

28. See Harpham, Geoffrey, On the Grotesque (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1982), Ch.1.

29. Harpham, Ibid, Ch.1.

30. See such authority figures as Tolkien's `Gandalf', in The Lord of the Rings; Asimov's Hari Seldon, in his `Foundation' series; and the many sages in the works of Gordon R. Dickson, Robert Heinlein, and Poul Anderson (Anderson's `Van Rijn,' for example.)

31. Jack Vance's `Connatic,' the ruler of the Alastor Cluster, wanders incognito, like Haroun Al-Raschid, assuming beggarly as well as princely roles. See Wyst : Alastor 1716 (New York : DAW, 1978).

32. See Heinlein, Robert, Starship Troopers (New York : Doubleday, Science Fiction Book Club, no date; originally published 1962); Anderson, Poul, The People of the Wind (New York : Signet, 1974); Dickson, Gordon R., Three to Dorsai (New York : Double day, 1976); Vance, Jack, The Dragon Masters (London : Panther, 1967); and Card, Orson Scott, Ender's GAme

(London : Arrow, 1988).
33. See Shepard's Life During Wartime (London : Grafton, 1988) and his short stories in The Ends of the Earth, (Wisconsin : Arkham House, 1991); see also Haldeman, Joe, The Forever War (London : Orbit, 1984).
34. For three excellent examples, see Powers, Tim, The Anubis Gates (London : Grafton, 1986); Aldiss, Brian, Frankenstein Unbound (London : Grafton, 1985); and Robert Silverberg, Up The Line (London : Gollancz, 1987).
35. See Isaac Asimov's Pebble In The Sky (London : Sphere Books, 1972) and Stableford, Brian, The Walking Shadow (New York : Carroll and Graf, 1989) - two representative examples.
36. Major examples of this sort form the basis of Dick, Philip K., The Man In The High Castle (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1962); Gibson, William, and Sterling, Bruce, The Difference Engine (London : Gollancz, 1990); and Stableford, Brian, The Empire of Fear (London : Simon and Schuster, 1988).
37. Only Mary Gentle's Golden Witchbreed (London : Century, 1983) and the volumes of Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Pacific' Trilogy are ready examples - The Wild Shore (1984), The Gold Coast (London : Orbit, 1990) and Pacific Edge (New York : Tor, 1990). The latter represent alternative outcomes of current geo-political choices.
38. Gene Wolfe quoted in Joan Gordon, Gene Wolfe, 97.
39. For other works of Science Fantasy, see the works of Jack Vance, such as The Dying Earth (London : Grafton, 1985). See also Elizabeth Hand's Wolfe - influenced novel, Winterlong (New York : Bantam, 1990) and the early work of Ursula Le Guin.
40. See Chapter One, note 25.
41. See C.N. Manlove's first Chapter in Science Fiction : Ten Explorations.
42. Rabkin, Eric, The Fantastic in Literature (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1976), 8.

Chapter Four

1. Throughout this Chapter, FHC stands for The Fifth Head of

Cerberus (London : Arrow, 1984). This Chapter owes a debt to two previous essays on this novella cycle : Gordon, Joan, Gene Wolfe (San Bernardino, California : The Borgo Press, 1986), Ch. IV; and pages 130 - 138 of Wendland, Albert, Science, Myth, and The Fictional Creation of Alien Worlds (Ann Arbor, Michigan : UMI Research Press, 1985).

2. See the excellent analysis of Kafka's thought in Gray, Ronald, Franz Kafka (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1973).

3. See such discussions of cloning as are contained in Vance, Jack, The Palace of Love (New York : DAW, 1979) and Cherryh, C.J., Cyteen (New York : Warner, 1988), as well as Frank Herbert's characterization of Duncan Idaho in his `Dune' cycle of novels.

4. See the discussion of the politics of St. Croix in the section of this chapter devoted to `V.R.T.'

5. As noted by Brian Aldiss and David Wingrave in Trillion Year Spree (London : Gollancz, 1986), 422 - 3.

6. See Chapter Three, note 9.

7. See Day, William Patrick, In The Circles of Fear and Desire : A Study of Gothic Fantasy (Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press, 1985), 16 - 18.

8. Day, Ibid, 17 - 18.

9. Day, Ibid, 18.

10. Day, Ibid, 20.

11. As undertaken by Joseph Campbell, Claude Levi-Strauss, and countless others; see Dundes, A. (ed.), Sacred Narrative : Readings In The Theory of Myth (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1984).

12. See the summary of theoretical mythological assumptions in Honko, Laurie, `The Problem of Defining Myth' in Dundes (ed.), Sacred Narrative, 41 - 52.

13. For the concept of binary oppositions, see Levi-Strauss, D., `The Story of Asdiwal' in Dundes (ed.), Sacred Narrative, 295.

14. This freedom from limitation was the basis of the Cabbalistic vision of the primordial Adam (see Chapter One of this Thesis); for the universal myths of Edenic harmony and

power, see Eliade, Mircea, The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History, tr. W.R. Trask (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1971).

15. For the history of the Aborigines - their traditions and their contact with the Europeans - see Blainey, G., Triumph of the Nomads : A History of Ancient Australia (Netley, South Australia : McMillan, 1975) and Reynolds, Henry, Frontier - Aborigines, Settlers and Land (Sydney : Allen Unwin, 1987).

16. Broome, Richard, Aboriginal Australians : Black Response to White Dominance (Sydney, London, and Boston : Allen Unwin, 1982), 14 - 15.

17. See Lockhart, James and Schwartz, Stuart B., Early Latin America : A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne; Cambridge University Press, 1983), Chs. 1 - 4.

18. See note 14 this Chapter.

19. This formula is clearly visible in numerous works of Jack Vance, Gordon R. Dickson, Poul Anderson.

20. See Le Guin's The Word for World is Forest (London : Granada, 1983) and her Rocannon's World (London : Star Books, 1983; published with Planet of Exile). C.J. Cherryh's The Faded Sun Trilogy (London : Methuen, 1987) uses a similar approach.

21. See the colonial parallels cited in Chapter 4, notes 15 - 17.

22. This reticence is visible in the works of most traditional Science Fiction writers, such as Asimov, whose `Foundation' universe is conveniently free of any aliens to constitute a problem for humans. It might be argued that works such as Mike Resnick's Paradise (New York : Tor, 1990) and many novels by D.J. Cherryh, which present the accomodation of human and alien, are idealistically avoiding the issue of conflict just as does Asimov, even as they attempt to meet it.

23. See the ideologically outspoken works of Poul Anderson, Robert Heinlein, and Jerry Pournelle.

24. See Orwell, George, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1975), in its later stages.

25. See the use of the term in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Chapter Five

1. Throughout this Chapter, SM is used to designate Soldier of The Mist (London : Orbit, 1987). For general information on Greek myth and religion, this chapter relies upon Robert Graves' The Greek Myths, Volumes 1 and 2 (New York : George Braziller, 1957), Kirk, G.S., The Nature of the Greek Myths (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1985), and C. Kerenyi, The Gods of the Greeks (London and New York : Thames and Hudson, 1951).
2. Soldier of Arete, not discussed here, appeared in 1989; the third volume has yet to be announced.
3. For descriptions of these events, see Robinson, Cyril E., A History of Greece (London : Methuen, 1976) Part I and Sealey, Raphael, A History of the Greek City States ca. 700 - 338 B.C. (Berkley, Los Angeles, and London : University of California Press, 1976), Chs. 7 - 9.
4. Sealey, A History of the Greek City States, 242 - 3.
5. See Just, Roger, Women in Athenian Law and Life (New York and London : Routledge, 1989).
6. See Finley, M.I., Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology (London : Chatto and Windus, 1980).
7. See the works by Robert Graves and Marguerite Yourcenar, cited in Chapter Two, note 2.
8. See White, T. H., The Once and Future King (Glasgow : Collins, 1987), as a famous example.
9. See the correspondences in Herodotus, The Histories tr. Aubrey de Selincourt (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1965), 597.
10. See Hesiod, Theogony tr. M.L. West (Oxford and New York : Oxford University Press, 1988; published with Hesiod's Works and Days.)
11. For Pindar's views on gods and their affairs, see Norwood, Gilbert, Pindar (Berkley and Los Angeles : University of California Press, 1945), Lectures I - III, and Bowra, C.M., Pindar (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1964), Chs. 2, 7.
12. Eliade, Mircea, The Myth of The Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History tr. W.R. Trask (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1971), 73 - 5.

13. See F. Guirand, 'Greek Mythology' in New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology (London and New York : Hamlyn, 1982), 93.
14. Eliade, The Myth of The Eternal Return, 74 - 5.
15. Sealey, A History of The Greek City States, 243.
16. See Campbell, Joseph, The Hero With a Thousand Faces 2nd ed. (New Jersey : Princeton University Press, 1973).
17. Campbell, Ibid.
18. See especially Jung's The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious tr. R.F.C. Hull, 2nd ed. (London : Routeledge and Kegan Paul, 1975)
19. Guirand in Larousse, 95 - 97.

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7. The Claw of the Conciliator (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1981; London : Arrow Books, 1982).
8. Gene Wolfe's Book of Days (Garden City, New York : Doubleday, 1981).
9. The Sword of the Lictor (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1981; London : Arrow Books, 1982).
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