

More about Wolfe / Book of the New Sun

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Stef Jones — 15 Aug 1992, 05:42

I'm posting this on behalf of someone without Usenet access. Please send a copy of any replies via email to Don (0004371469 at mcimail.com).

Author Gene Wolfe commented on his "Urth" books in an interview by Darrell Schweitzer in "Weird Tales" Vol. 50 No. 1 (Spring, 1988) Here are some excerpts:

Schweitzer: Could you tell us something about "The Urth of the New Sun"?

Wolfe: It begins ten years after Severian's story in "The Book of the New Sun."*...

*(in referring to "The Book of the New Sun", Wolfe means, collectively, the "Shadow of the Torturer", "The Claw of the Conciliator", "The Sword of the Lictor", and "The Citadel of the Autarch").

Wolfe (continuing): ...If you've read "The Book of the New Sun" carefully, you know that it's being written just before he (Sevarian) leaves to go and bring the New Sun. This is his last act on Earth before he boards the ship and takes off to leave our universe, which is Briah, and enter the universe of the Hierogrimates, which is Yesod. So "The Urth of the New Sun" is the story of what happens to him immediately after he has finished writing The Book of the New Sun, in the time-frame of the novel, if you see what I mean. Now what we're skipping is about ten years in which Severian was the Autarch of the Commonwealth - and also Autarch of Earth in the sense that his title give him a titular rulership over the planet, which he cannot actually exercise.

Schweitzer: It seems to me that the document Severian has produced will be remembered in his world not as an autobiography or historical memoir but as a great myth. It will become like Homer's works and might even be the basis for a religion. Is there any sense of this in the sequel?

Wolfe: Oh, yes. First of all, what you say is absolutely true, and that's why, Dr. Talos's play, "Eschatology and Genesis," deals with this sort of thing. For example, if you'll look at the beginning of the play (in Chapter XXIV of "The Claw of the Conciliator"), you'll see that the New Sun is listed as one of the characters in the cast. And of course you never get the complete play because Baldanders goes wild and terrifies the audience and gets shot a little bit and breaks up the show. But what you say has happened, and there's a great deal more in "The Urth of the New Sun" of how it happens and why it happens. You see Severian not only as the New Sun but also as the Conciliator.

Schweitzer: I am fascinated by the vaguely historical models in the series. The Commonwealth, for all that it's set in the Southern Hemisphere, reminds me somewhat of Byzantium during one of its four-hundred-year declines, maybe toward the end of the Comnenus period. That is, it is clearly declining and will continue to do so, but it will just as clearly go on well beyond any one's

life-time. Did you have any on this specifically in mind?

Wolfe: Yes, absolutely. I was very happy to hear you say that, because people look at "The Shadow of the Torturer" and they say, "The Torturers' Guild - Ah, this is Medieval Europe." And it isn't. It's Byzantium, and that's where the model for it comes from. " ...

(There follows a discussion Wolfe's specific use of Byzantine Latin in the books, as opposed to classical Latin) ...

Wolfe (continuing):

" We tend to think of the classical world as ending with the sack of Rome, and it simply didn't. It continued in the eastern Mediterranean for hundreds and hundreds of years after that. As you've just said yourself, Darrell, it went on lifetime after lifetime. People lived their entire lives in the Byzantine Empire, and their great-grandchildren lived their entire lives in the Byzantine Empire and t h e i r great-grandchildren lived their entire lives in the Byzantine Empire. It was only when Constantinople fell to the Turks that the ancient world came to an end.

End of excerpt.