

scrap

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 01 May 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1610>

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oreb — 01 May 1999, 14:57

<perches on a dark rafter, lurking in the e-shadows, cocking his head to listen to the susurruration of the discourse below.>

<spies a nice juicy rat in the corner, and mutters a muffled "Bird hungry.">

<suffers an agonizing moment of internal debate, the swoops down after it with a SQUAWK, allowing a yellowed scrap of parchment to fall from his beak. the scrap wafts back and forth in the e-space breeze, eventually settling on the table in front of your group.>

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LM: The Book of the New Sun, maybe especially The Citadel of the Autarch, deals with the nature of death and the afterlife, the role of human beings in the scope of the cosmos, all sorts of grand issues. Are the basic insights Severian eventually achieves essentially those you personally share?

GW: They're very close indeed, which is why the Citadel is my favorite of the four books. I tried to prepare the reader for some of these insights by earlier placing Severian within that immense backdrop of war. Severian is a soldier; and like any soldier in any war, he sees parts of the battlefield he's involved in as vitally important, essential, whereas he's really just a very small part of a very large picture. Having established Severian's relationship to the larger picture, in the latter part of the book I wanted to say, "Look, this is just a small, backwater planet - one of many planets - and this isn't a particularly interesting or pivotal period in its history. The solar system to which this planet belongs is part of a galaxy similar to quite a number of other spiral galaxies. And all this exists in a universe that is just one in a series of recurring universes. What any individual human being sees, no matter how broad the vista, is just a tiny corner of what is happening in creation."

There's a scene in C.S. Lewis' Great Divorce that made a lasting impression on me. The book is about a one-day bus excursion for people who are in Hell who want to visit Heaven to see what's there. Toward the end, everyone is saying, "Wow, everything here is so beautiful, look at these gorgeous trees and waterfalls and animals! But where is the infernal city that we just left?" At this point the angel who's leading them around says, "It's right there in that crack between those two rocks - \*that's\* the city you've come out of." At the end of The Citadel, I wanted my readers to experience a similar shock of recognition at their own insignificance.

LW: The outlook expressed at the conclusion seems fundamentally religious in orientation.

GW: I don't scoff at religion the way many people do when they look at anything that has to do with speculations about things we can't touch. I'm a practicing Catholic, although I don't think that designation would give people much of an idea about what my beliefs are. People tend to have a very limited, stereotyped view of what it means to be a Catholic, images taken from

movies or anti-Catholic pamphlets, but there's much more to it than that. I know perfectly well, for example, that priests can't walk on water, that they are merely human beings who are trying, often unsuccessfully, to live out a very difficult ideal. But I certainly don't dismiss religious or other forms of mystical speculation out of hand. I read it and try to make my own judgements about it. And in *The Book of the New Sun*, I tried to work out some of the implications of my own beliefs.

excerpt from an interview of Gene Wolfe by Larry McCafferty in "Across the Wounded Galaxies", (c) 1990 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. University of Illinois Press.

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<a satisfied bird exclaims "Rat good!", then wings his way back up to the rafters to resume lurking>