

Keep the mailing list focused on Gene Wolfe

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Aug 1997

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Dan Rabin — 20 Aug 1997, 15:44

I for one would prefer that the Urth mailing list remain focused on Gene Wolfe's work. That's what I subscribe for.

Since I'm an infrequent contributor, perhaps I should back up my vote with a proposal for a new Wolfe-centered discussion topic: Wolfe's craft in the small.

We are greatly struck by the quality of Wolfe's ideas and by the way he uses them to great effect. What about the small-scale details of **how** he tells his stories? I have in mind, for example, two occasions in *_The Book of the New Sun_* on which Severian ends a situation with decisive violence.

First, in *_Torturer_* at the end of Ch. 14 *`Terminus Est'*, Severian's crushing of the nerve in the peltast's neck is preceded by the reflective commentary *`The peltast was relaxed, so there was no great difficulty.'* The presence of the word *`relaxed'* contributes to the calming effect. Then--KER-POW--action!

Second, in *_Sword_*, at the end of Ch. 26 *`The Eyes of the World'*, we have a reversal in the sequence of action and reflection. This time the occurrence of the violence in the paragraph *`I struck then,'* interrupts Typhon's arrogant attempt to swear Severian to his service. OK, so he struck, but what happened? The following paragraph, beginning *`There is a way of smashing the nose with the heel of one's hand...'* forms a nice little disquisition on how Severian killed Typhon, revealing that Severian must have been carrying out the outlined reasoning during the preceding dialog with Typhon without telling us. KER-POW!, and then *`Elementary, Watson, I simply deduced that to kill a two-headed human you must exploit a reflex that can only protect one head.'*

Does anybody else have a favorite example of Wolfe's technique at the sentence-and-paragraph level?

By the way, the flinch reflex seems to be a bit of a favorite with Wolfe. Hammerstone uses it as an example explaining *`standing orders'* to Silk on p. 223 (hardcover) of *\_Lake of the Long Sun\_* (near the beginning of Ch. 9 *`In Dreams Like Death'*).

-- Dan Rabin