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THREE : THE SYMBOLISM OF MESSIANISM

The stories of Gilgamesh, the Fall, Oedipus and Medea are never 'over' for us.

Shirley Park Lowry

Since a great deal of fantasy and science fiction is concerned not so much with personal fate, but with the relationship and destiny of mankind within the cosmos, it is unsurprising that the messianic figure of the saviour and redeemer of mankind is one that is frequently encountered within these two genres. This figure has a long history in the literature of fantasy and sf, ranging from the most naïve and crude of appearances - as in the figures of comic-book heroes such as Superman and Batman - to the most sophisticated and ambiguous, as in Gene Wolfe's tetralogy The Book of the New Sun (1980 - 1983).

The concept of messianism seems to be one that is uniquely linked to the Judeo-Christian world and which appears to separate into two somewhat differing manifestations. Although the Old Testament saviour originates in the concept of a figure consecrated or anointed in some way by God, he is essentially a charismatic force, divinely inspired to lead an oppressed people. The messiah is, therefore, often very much the leader in a physical sense. He is a figure of great vigour, one who wields the flaming sword. He prophesies deliverance from bondage and promises a greater or more glowing future. This figure is often linked to kingship and temporal power, and the yearning for such a leader is intensified by hardship, persecution, suffering or slavery.

Within the Christian tradition, however, the iconography is somewhat different. Although the notion rises out of the Judaic concept of being anointed or consecrated, the sense of

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divinity, of being the 'son of God', is stronger. Nationalistic and political implications become more tenuous. Within this framework, the hero becomes a spiritual redeemer, a saviour-figure who intercedes with God on behalf of humanity, who offers his own suffering flesh in atonement for the evils of the world. Such a redeemer is concerned more with the world of spirit than the world of flesh. Indeed, flesh is sacrificed for spiritual growth. Salvation is not temporal but sacral.

In our age, where loss of confidence in humanity's resources, in faith and in science is endemic, it is perhaps to be expected that the messiah-figure should become a frequent presence in much of the literature of science fiction and fantasy. Since the concept of messianism is associated with a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration with the world in its present state, messianic longings encompass, as a corollary, the strong desire for a saviour who will have the ability to redeem the tragic or unsatisfactory conditions of human life. Messianism is often associated with a sense of the eschatological, that is to say, with the profound and overwhelming sense of the imminent death or destruction of the old order. Here it is that the figure of the saviour, the man or woman with a divine mission, with the ability to take upon himself or herself the suffering of common humanity and to transform this experience into a regenerative process, becomes meaningful. The messianic figure undergoes not only a personal transformation, but takes on the mantle of common humanity, returning to it a gift that is the promise of fulfilment, of apotheosis. In the process, a newer, brighter age than the present is promised, in which the group, or even mankind in its entirety, is rejuvenated and transformed. Joseph Campbell (1975:22) expresses the desire for the saviour figure as 'a cry for the redeeming hero, the carrier of the shining blade, whose blow, whose touch, whose existence, will liberate the land.'

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Writers of science fiction and fantasy have long been fascinated by the possibilities of the myth of messianic action and transfiguration. Perhaps one of the most well-known of contemporary examples is Frank Herbert's Dune (1966), which was followed by several sequels. Here, on the drought-stricken planet of Arrakis, where water is of the utmost value, the messianic figure of Paul Atreides rises to lead his world into a new history and a transformed future. The Old Testament connotations are strong. Since Biblical saviours are often associated with the privations and asceticism imposed by the desert landscape, it seems fitting that Arrakis is a uniformly harsh and arid world. Dune is a complex book, investigating concepts such as planetary ecology, the nature and obligations of leadership and the corrupting influence of power, to name a few only. It achieves a sweeping and epic range and is an example of how sf can, in certain cases, transcend the limitations of a featureless, lumpy or journalistic mode of expression to express ideas powerfully.

Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land (1977), portrays yet another saviour figure. Valentine Michael Smith, a man from Mars who has paranormal powers, is brought to Earth where he becomes a virtual superman, without losing his superior (and Martian) sense of ethics. Heinlein draws some crude parallels with the New Testament life of Christ. The protagonist founds a church based on universal brotherhood, the sharing of water and sexual licence, and is nastily martyred by unbelievers. At the eleventh hour he transports himself - by 'discorporation'- onto the astral (perhaps heavenly) plane. Apart from the Biblical analogues, the book is a confused hodge-podge of Heinlein's always suspect and decidedly irrational social theories, all disguising a disturbing and shallow ideology of power and manipulation. In addition, the language is coyly stilted, consisting almost entirely of interminable and painfully self-conscious conversations. Alarmingly, this rather distasteful novel became something of a cult book in the 1960s and was, chillingly,

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the favourite reading of mass-murderer Charles Manson[1] who was, no doubt, influenced by Michael Valentine Smith's habit of eliminating disagreeable or inconvenient persons by 'discorporating' them.

Recent writers of sf and fantasy have continued to be fascinated by the concept of messianism, and some have produced works that are infinitely superior in artistic terms to both of the above examples. One of these writers is, perhaps, the most stimulating and idiosyncratic writer now working in the sf and fantasy fields. Gene Wolfe, whose work had already being recognised as especially interesting by the 1970s, has experimented with various combinations of these two genres and has written what might sometimes be called sf, sometimes fantasy and sometimes science fantasy - the last being the term with which he himself seems to be most comfortable.[2]

His writing is marked by subtlety, intelligence and sophistication. He has a supple and precise prose style that is extraordinarily evocative in its allusiveness and its illusiveness. His style is often slightly mannered, but always individual and often quite beautiful. However, despite its beauty, it is never sentimental. There is, in fact, often a tinge of perversity present. He has also distinguished himself by the depth of the themes that he chooses to explore. Mythic in their scope, they include such archetypal concerns as the nature of reality, perception and identity, the importance of memory, and the ambiguous qualities of good and evil. In the flexibility of his prose and the scope of his concerns he is sometimes associated with the 'New Wave' novelists of the 1960s. It is obvious,

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[1] The influence on Manson of this book is well-documented, Aldiss (1986:290) even quoting from Manson's biographer a passage in which the effect of the book is mentioned.

[2] In an interview with Larry McCaffery (1990:235), Wolfe stated: 'The only way I know to write is to write the kind of thing I would like to read myself, and when I do that it usually winds up being classified as SF or science fantasy, which is what I call most of my work.'

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however, that his remarkable and literate style comes from a variety of sources within the mainstream itself, and that these sources amplify and enrich his writing.

When The Shadow of the Torturer - the first volume of his tetralogy, The Book of the New Sun - came out in 1980, it was greeted with much excitement. The other volumes followed soon after, and by 1983 The Claw of the Conciliator, The Sword of the Lictor and The Citadel of the Autarch had appeared and had been greeted by critics and fans alike with admiration. The whole series was hailed by David Pringle (1990:43), for example, as a 'master-piece: dense, complex, possibly allegorical.' While it is undoubtedly dense and complex and undeniably evocative and commanding, the certainty of its stature as a masterpiece is open to debate. Aldiss (1986:424), more cautious in his assessment, calls the work 'flawed' but 'magnificent'. What is certain is that, in the sinuosity of its style and its mysterious allusiveness, it is obviously superior to much that the twin fields of fantasy and sf have produced. The cycle, which displays all the qualities of a 'sword and sorcery' series becomes, on closer scrutiny, a richly evocative allegorical and metaphorical voyage of discovery.[3]

Set in the unimaginably far future of the dying 'Urth', when the sun has cooled and civilisation has decayed, the scope and range of the four novels constitute a brilliant and bewildering succession of adventures and images. The story resists summary, and perhaps the easiest way to approach its dense and complex structure is through the various

[3] 'Sword and Sorcery', sometimes known as 'heroic fantasy', forms an immensely popular, much-exploited and, more often than not, mediocre grouping within the fantasy genre. It is characterised by heroic physical action, is set most frequently in an exotic or medieval-styled society, has a strongly dualistic nature in which the forces of good are pitted against the forces of evil, and is marked by the use of magic or strange powers. J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (1954 - 1955), though not a pure example of this type of writing, is perhaps the inspiration for, and the progenitor of, much that is currently produced in the sword and sorcery format

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patterns and symbols that can be seen to emerge.

Dominating the tetralogy is a central image around which the story is organised. This is the archetypal and mythic image of the journey, what Campbell has called the 'road of trials'.

> ...the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favourite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper.... Or it may be that he...discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him....
>
> (Campbell, 1975:90)

Wolfe's protagonist, the Torturer Severian, is banished from the great city of Nessus for aiding a prisoner of his guild to evade torture. He has committed the ultimate impropriety of falling in love with her and then giving her a knife with which she is able to take her own life, thereby escaping her sentence. Subsequent to his banishment, he embarks on a series of adventures that appear, initially, to be merely picaresque, but which eventually take on richly symbolic and compelling aspects. He finds himself in possession of a holy relic called the Claw of the Conciliator and vows to return it to the nun-like order of Pelerines from which it has been stolen. The rest of the story is dominated by the image of the Claw, with which Severian seems able to work miracles of healing and regeneration, and also by his growing perception of the presence of the 'Increate'. Finally, after enduring numerous prodigious and puzzling adventures, among which are war, mutilation and the loss of the woman he loves, he returns to Nessus and ascends the throne of the

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Autarch. Indeed, the entire story is told by Severian in the first person from his vantage point as the newly- ascendant and powerful figure of Autarch. At the story's conclusion, Severian readies himself to undertake a journey to the stars, a journey that may serve to redeem the senescent planet and mankind from the entropy into which both have sunk.

This is the plot in its barest outline, since no précis could give expression to the story's many wonders. For one, the tale is told in a manner so complex, with so many digressions and ruminations, with so many side-steps away from the action of the plot, that the reader is deflected again and again from the course of the story's evolution.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the exotic vocabulary that Wolfe employs in this tetralogy. The writing is fantastically detailed, clotted with obscure and obsolete words. Over and over again, the reader is brought up short by a word, placed rather like an unexpected obstacle on a path, that seems to impede the free flow of thought and event - as in this excerpt from The Sword of the Lictor.

> *Terminus Est* I believe to have been the best blade ever forged, but I knew that she would accomplish nothing against the power that had routed so many cavalrymen; I cast her to one side in the vague hope that she might be found and eventually returned to Master Palaemon, and took the Claw from its little bag at my throat.
>
> It was my last, faint chance, and I saw at once that it had failed me. However the creature sensed the world about it (and I guessed that it was nearly blind on our Urth), it could make out the gem clearly, and it did not fear it. Its slow advance became a rapid and purposeful flowing forward. It reached the doorway - and there was a burst of smoke, a crash, and it was gone. Light from below flashed through the hole it had burned in the flimsy floor that began where the stone of the outcrop ended; at first it

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> was the colorless light of the creature, then a rapid alternation of chatoyant pastels - peacock blue, lilac, and rose. Then only the faint, reddish light of leaping flames.
>
> (The Sword of the Lictor:74)

This moment is the culmination of a longish episode that takes up five pages of description, and which succeeds in building up a great deal of tension as the mysterious and horrifying creature pursues Severian, charring with hideous ruthlessness all in its path. And then suddenly, at the climactic moment, the reader is brought up short by the obscurity of the word 'chatoyant', a word with which very few are likely to be familiar and which comes like a dash of cold water to impede the forward-motion of the reader's thoughts.

The appearance of such obscurities is the rule rather than the exception. The four books are liberally sprinkled with words such as 'cataphract', 'ylem' 'epopt', 'armiger', 'gonfalon' 'anacreontic', 'nidorous', 'cacogen' and 'coryphaeus' - to mention a few only. Sometimes, passages are veritably choked with unfamiliar terminology, as in the following few sentences:

> The old castellan would have died of a stroke had I demanded it, and he was so concerned for my safety that any incognito would have been accompanied by at least a platoon of lurking halberdiers. I soon found myself arrayed in lapis lazuli jazerant, cothurni, and a stephane, the whole set off by an ebony baculus and a voluminous damassin cape.
>
> (The Citadel of the Autarch:266)

While the use of such arcane words certainly serves to give a unique flavour to the writing, and helps to create a world that is alien and removed from the reader's own

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experience, there is a certain annoyance value attached to the fact that the reader has to stop so frequently to hunt for meanings.[4]

The language of The Book of the New Sun has been called 'baroque'; it is highly-ornamented, sinuous and labyrinthine, like the plot itself, sometimes lit by strange gleams that throw objects and events into high relief. However, it often achieves a remarkable precision and beauty, as in the opening of The Shadow of the Torturer.

> It is possible that I already had some presentiment of my future. The locked and rusted gate that stood before us, with wisps of river fog threading its spikes like the mountain paths, remains in my mind now as the symbol of my exile. That is why I have begun this account of it with the aftermath of our swim, in which I, the torturer's apprentice Severian, had so nearly drowned.

If the story itself 'resists' a context, it is perhaps from the myriad and intriguing array of events and circumambulations that a series of recurrent patterns and images gradually become visible and provide meaning. Indeed, the 'wisps of fog' in this first paragraph immediately suggest the intricate and circumambulatory nature of the many journeys which will follow; their intricate and tenuous meanings, and the difficulty of finding a pathway through the proliferating complexities of Severian's experiences. There is clearly a sense in which reading the tetralogy is rather like following a series of trails. Clues, like dropped hints, abound and later link up with other elements to give richness and amplitude

[4] It must be noted, to be fair to Wolfe, that many critics - Joan Gordon and C. N. Manlove are but two - comment approvingly on the elaborate quality of the writer's vocabulary, which is drawn from a wide range of sources and from many languages. Wolfe himself justifies his vocabulary in an appendix to The Shadow of the Torturer by explaining that he is translating from 'a tongue that has not yet achieved existence' and that, rather than invent terms, he has used the 'closest twentieth-century equivalents' (302). This is, of course, a permissible conceit on his part. However, it must also be noted that a vast proportion of the terminology used is archaic, certainly not in current use, and sometimes difficult to track down.

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to the work. The profile on the coin that Vodalus gives Severian at the beginning of the story, for instance, turns out, later, to be the etched face of the Autarch. The old man in the Botanic Gardens searching for his dead young wife in the waters of the lake is revealed eventually to be the husband of the resurrected Dorcas. As Brian Attebery, in his discussion of Maude Bodkin's (1934) study of archetypal patterns, points out: 'The relationships among the images within [the poem] constitute its meaning' (1987:184). This sense of correspondence and interconnectedness is present to a large extent in The Book of the New Sun, and it is in the relationships of the parts that the 'meaning' of the book may be finally discernible. The story in its entirety is extraordinarily complex and yet the threads are all woven together so closely that the book becomes a marvel of organisation and intellect. Little seems gratuitous. All is eventually resolved through the action or turns out to have some bearing on Severian's grasp of reality or his sense of destiny.

Character, for instance, takes on an archetypal aspect. Perhaps one of the weaknesses of The Book of the New Sun is the way in which Severian, as well as the other characters, are not personalities (as are, for instance, Le Guin's characters) in the strict sense of the word. The reader often finds it difficult to interact with them on a visceral level. Instead, they are somewhat distanced; associated in a general way with enduring human characteristics that recall many of the images that Frye has identified in his Anatomy of Criticism (1990) as being the special province of the mythic imagination.

Severian himself is a striking figure. Tall, dark, bare-chested, clad in his fuliginous cloak and carrying the great sword *Terminus Est*, he recalls initially the sombre and foreboding figure of Death with his terminal scythe. The woman Agia, manipulative, vengeful and

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alluring, and whom Severian desires intensely, becomes the archetypal eternal harlot or siren. Even more obviously emblematic is Jolenta, who would seem to characterise Desire. She is empty of all emotion except the need to inspire lust. As she herself says, she is 'only really comfortable when I can keep my legs apart' (Claw of the Conciliator:206). In different ways, both these women epitomise what Frye calls the 'demonic erotic relation that works against loyalty or frustrates the one who possesses it' (1990:149). Severian's other love, Dorcas, symbolises Innocence: she is blonde, childlike, delicate as the flowers she wears in her hair. Frye has pointed out that such figures are associated with eternal virginity. And despite the obvious evidence that she has carnal relations with Severian, she retains her virginal simplicity and trusting character.

Characters, then, take on aspects above and beyond the merely physical. The Green Man becomes an image of Renewal, associated with vegetation and growth.[5] The dog, Triskele, becomes, perhaps, an image of Devotion. But other recurring images take on richer significance and appear and reappear constantly throughout the tetralogy. One of these is the image of the rose: there are the purple roses in the necropolis of Nessus, the rose carved on the ruined mausoleum which the child Severian adopts as his own, the roses in the Atrium of Time, the roses of Holy St. Katherine's Day, the rose drawn in the air by the Vatic Fountain in the Autarch's gardens - and many more. So persistent are these images that the reader cannot help but be struck by them and, since Severian is in possession of the holy Claw and is constantly aware, also, of the numinous, it seems probable that the rose is more than just a flower. In fact, the rose is a potent communion symbol. Frye remarks: 'In the West the rose has a traditional priority among apocalyptic

[5] The symbolic meanings of the Green Man image are explored in much greater detail in Chapter Six of this study.

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flowers' (1990:144). The image of the fully opened rose has, indeed, a relationship with the mandala, the magical circle that is a symbol of consciousness, of unity, of knowledge, of wholeness and of cosmic and sacral order.

Jung points out, in his commentary on the Chinese text 'The Secret of the Golden Flower' (1991d:351), that 'most mandalas take the form of a flower....' Just as a flower opens petal by petal, gradually exposing itself to the sun and sky, so does Severian's consciousness expand, until he reaches an intuitive and unshakeable belief in the existence of the 'Increate' and of the manner in which he is connected to all of suffering humanity. At the end of The Citadel of the Autarch, Severian undergoes an epiphanic experience that marks his assumption of maturity and true humanity. Alone on a deserted beach, he comes to a clump of wild roses. A thorn becomes embedded in his flesh, and as he withdraws it, it is transformed into a holy symbol.

> ...All that bush and all the other bushes growing with it were covered with white blossoms and these perfect Claws. The one in my palm flamed with transplendent light as I looked at it.
>
> What struck me on the beach - and it struck me indeed so that I staggered as at a blow - was that if the Eternal Principle had rested in that curved thorn...then it might rest in anything, and in fact probably did rest in everything, in every thorn on every bush, in every drop of water in the sea. The thorn was a sacred Claw because all thorns were sacred Claws; the sand in my boots was sacred sand because it came from a beach of sacred sand..... ...everything had approached and even touched the Pancreator, because everything had dropped from his hand. Everything was a relic.
>
> All the world was a relic. I drew off my boots that had traveled with me

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> so far, and threw them into the waves that I might not walk shod on holy ground.
>
> (The Citadel of the Autarch:252 - 253)

Another image central to this epic adventure is the image of Severian's sword, *Terminus Est*, a symbol of Severian's potency in the execution of his craft and also of his manhood. The sword also serves to connect Severian with the vigorous image of the Old Testament messiah or saviour. As an image, the sword suggests that it is he who will become the instrument of power, the leader who will bring enlightenment or rebirth to an Urth fallen into decay and darkness. Indeed, Severian is so closely bound to his sword that he risks great danger to regain *Terminus Est* when he loses her in The Claw of the Conciliator. After his struggle with the man-apes in the mine, he says 'I would have despised myself if I had left her behind' (54). And at another point, on regaining his sword he says 'I was a whole man again' (177).

Later, in The Sword of the Lictor, when Severian finally casts the broken remnant of the blade into the lake Diuturna, there is a distinct Arthurian echo. The action is symbolic: from this point on, Severian has freed himself of his earlier life. He will never again practise his craft as carnifex and torturer; he has dedicated himself more firmly to the Increate, and has renewed his resolution to return the Claw to the Pelerines. The casting aside of *Terminus Est* - which means, literally 'here is the end' - marks a moment of evolution and epiphany for Severian. It signifies that he has discarded what is no longer valid and marks a new beginning for him in terms of the role that he will soon assume - the transformation into a more Christ-like figure, possibly the Conciliator or the New Sun himself. In a bizarre reversal of the ceremony of communion he consumes part of the Autarch's brain (The Citadel of the Autarch:236), thus taking on the mantle of suffering

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humanity and the task of regeneration. Whether this task will be the physical restoration of the dying solar body, whether it will mean the spiritual rejuvenation of the inhabitants of the moribund Urth, or whether it will be a mixture of both, is left ambiguous. The possibilities seem to exist for both or neither. The promise of the New Sun is tenuous, at best.

Severian's journey towards the messianic role is metaphorised by several complex symbols that Wolfe exploits in subtle and varied ways. Perhaps one of the most persistent images, one to which many commentators have drawn attention, is that of the labyrinth. The novels are filled with references to mazes. There are the convolutions of the Citadel itself, as well as the intricate passages and tunnels that lie beneath it. The Botanic Gardens where Severian goes with Agia seem maze-like in their complexity. There is Father Inire's 'room within a room' that is itself painted with labyrinths. Finally, the House Absolute which houses the Autarch, is labyrinthine in extent.

The image of the labyrinth is a well-documented symbol of the unconscious, the 'underworld', as it were, of the human psyche. The most ancient and archetypal of all labyrinths is undoubtedly the Cretan maze which housed the monstrous Minotaur, a hybrid creature which symbolised both King Minos's unchecked avarice and his queen's unbridled lust. The vast underground maze, therefore, is a powerful and composite image. It suggests not only the hidden and little understood areas of the human mind, but also the journey into these baffling and hidden zones, and the passage out again. Throughout Wolfe's tetralogy, The House Absolute, with its many subterranean levels, its vacant chambers and numberless rooms, becomes a potent image of the subconscious mind with its limitless possibilities and its areas of mystery and inaccessibility. This is the place to

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which Severian must finally accede and in which he must find himself at home. Significantly, Severian is also, for a time, imprisoned in a dark, vast and underground chamber of the House Absolute (The Claw of the Conciliator) and must find a way to escape the meandering structure. It becomes difficult to deny that this maze-like web is a metaphor for Severian's sub-conscious as well as for his spiritual journey, and that the focal point of his wanderings is his assumption of the mantle of the Autarch and his acceptance of the challenge to become the champion of humanity and of the Urth.

And, finally, clarifying the symbolism of the maze, there is the composite structure of Severian's own personality, after he has eaten and thus absorbed the mind of the Autarch.

> ...my single personality was no more, but the new, complex structure no longer dazzled and bewildered me. It was a maze, but I was the owner and even the builder of that maze...
>
> (The Citadel of the Autarch:243)

And, indeed, the very structure of the tetralogy is an intricate network; branching, hydra-headed, interleaving - as maze-like as the memories of Severian himself. Symbolic meanings are suggested, too, by the fact that the different personae that Severian absorbs through the mind of the androgenous Autarch are both male and female. Thus, Severian's mind takes on an ambivalent, even bisexual aspect. Jung (1991f:148), calls the archetypal hermaphrodite figure a conciliator of opposites and draws attention to the fact that it signifies reconciliation, unity and wholeness. Despite its 'monstrosity', it is a bringer of healing.

But over and above the image of the maze is superimposed an even larger pattern that also

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becomes a metaphor for the movement of Severian towards the point where he assumes responsibility for the future of mankind. Wolfe's approach to certain metaphysical and cosmic concepts such as the passage of time, the persistence of memory and the meaning of human life is often mystical. Certainly, Severian's musings and his capacity for metaphysical realisation seem to become more complex, more intense as the books progress. This sense of mystical enquiry is symbolised by a larger pattern that overlies the maze-like surface glitter and brilliance of invention and action. The third book, The Sword of the Lictor, seems to be particularly full of an awareness of the Increate, of the sense of a larger movement and of a larger pattern that embraces the smallness of men's lives, and which embraces even time's passing and the movements of history.

This greater pattern which shapes the entire Book of the New Sun takes on, it would appear, a spiral form. Campbell, talking of 'the metaphors used to represent eternity' (1960:65), identifies the spiral motif as an ancient one that symbolises birth.

> In archaic art, the labyrinth...was represented in the figure of the spiral. The spiral also appears spontaneously in certain stages of meditation, as well as to people going to sleep under ether. It is a prominent device, furthermore, at the silent entrances and within the dark passages of the ancient Irish burial mound...These facts suggest that a constellation of images denoting the plunge and dissolution of consciousness in the images of non-being must have been employed intentionally, from an early date, to represent the analogy of threshold rites to the mystery of the entry of the child into the womb for birth.
>
> (Campbell, 1960:65 - 66)

In The Book of the New Sun, the image of this entoptic spiral springs unbidden to mind and superimposes itself on the whirl of smaller patternings. The word 'entoptic' refers,

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literally, to that which is within the eyeball, to the visibility to the eye of objects within itself. The entoptic spiral, as Campbell has pointed out, is a form seen sometimes in trance states and seen by migraine sufferers also, who experience explosions of light and other visual disorders during the onset of an attack. The spiral is also associated with shamanistic ritual. Severian falls habitually into trance states at moments of repose, fatigue or strain, spending a great deal of time in a dream-like suspension in which memory, speculation and revelation afflict him. At such moments in time, he often reaches heights of ecstatic religious revelation, as in The Citadel of the Autarch, when he prays in the chapel of the Pelerines and experiences an extraordinary vision.

> I asked only that I might lead myself; and as I did so, I seemed to see with a vision increasingly clear, through a chink in the universe to a new universe bathed in golden light, where my listener knelt to hear me. What had seemed a crevice in the world had expanded until I could see a face and folded hands, and the opening, like a tunnel, running deep into a human head...I was whispering into my own ear, and when I realized it I flew into it like a bee and stood up.
>
> (111 - 112)

This, the oneiric spiral - rather than the simple circle that is often suggested by the journey motif - seems to portray more clearly the overall shape of the Book of the New Sun. The spiral is appropriate, too, because of the fact that the frame of reference of the tetralogy is enormously wide (just as a spiral may begin at its widest or most open point and circle inward to its centre), with diverse images and information feeding into the matrix of the story and suggesting circle upon narrowing circle, which in turn hint at layers or levels of reality and meaning. This swirl of thoughts gradually narrows down to a central point as all the references and allusions become resolved, and as Severian's destiny as the New Sun becomes finally focused on his role as Autarch. To quote Campbell again:

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> The maze form - which is an elaborated spiral - gives a long and indirect path from the outside of an area to the inside, at a point called the nucleus, generally near the centre. Its principle seems to be the provision of a difficult but possible access to some important point.
>
> (1960:69)

This image of the 'elaborated spiral' is one that takes form slowly with the unfolding of Severian's successive wanderings, both physical and spiritual, towards the final assumption of responsibility. The sharpness and precision of Wolfe's language gives an almost hallucinatory edge of clarity to the images he uses, and this precision complements the dreamlike nature of the symbol of the entoptic spiral. For Severian is often aware of his own incipient insanity, a state wherein dreams, visions, and things seen within the eye, are most likely to be encountered. His metaphysical thought processes are often depicted as though in wheeling motion, as he slowly circles toward some focal point of comprehension. Severian constantly attempts to relate events and sensations to some larger motion of the universe, and even speaks of the 'swirling order' of the galaxy - itself a spiral - in The Sword of the Lictor (227).

The coiled patterns are repeated with variations. Severian sees an amphisbaenae - a two-headed snake - in the heavens. The Hierodules speak of the ourobouros - the emblematic serpent that eternally devours itself, thus symbolising the cycle of destruction and rebirth. Despite the fact that Wolfe is a highly sophisticated and conscious craftsman, these patterns seem fortuitous rather than contrived, giving the impression that they have emerged spontaneously from the deepest recesses of the psyche. They express Severian's long wanderings and tribulations as he moves gradually back to the Matachin Tower and to the House Absolute, to be reborn (in a sense) as the New Sun. Gradually, the spiral

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narrows to a central point. This point, the focus of all Severian's adventures, appears to be Jung's moment of 'self-individuation', Campbell's 'difficult but possible' task. For Severian's destiny encompasses more than simply the personal. He is, it has been frequently remarked, a 'Christ figure',[6] and here again there is a larger pattern superimposed on the pattern of mere personal destiny.

There are several incidents in the course of the work that draw parallels between Severian and Christ. First of all, there is his status as a homeless wanderer with no property but his great sword, the clothes he wears, and the few objects that he carries in his sabretache. There are the various tests that he undergoes that have parallels in the life of Christ. Both the monstrous undine (in The Claw of the Conciliator) and the equally monstrous Typhon (in The Sword of the Lictor) offer Severian temptations which he resists. He is, with the help of the Claw, able to perform miracles of regeneration and healing: he raises Dorcas from her watery grave (The Shadow of the Torturer), revives the dead uhlan (The Claw of the Conciliator), and resurrects the dead soldier from whose flesh comes 'the smell of death' (The Citadel of the Autarch:14).

There are further correspondences. Like Christ, Severian suffers mutilations. In the final book, his face is disfigured by the hand of Agia. He is maimed, also, by a wound to his leg during the war with the Ascians. And Dorcas says, tellingly, (in The Claw of the Conciliator:200), that he is not really Death, that he could become 'a carpenter or a fisherman', her imagery thus linking him with Christ, who was both.

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[6] Joan Gordon (1986:92), in her study of Gene Wolfe, states: 'Severian is a Christ figure who hopes to save the world from eternal darkness'.

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However, it is in his potential capacity as the New Sun and as the potential redeemer of the dying Urth and of humanity, that Severian's fullest destiny lies. As the story progresses, he learns a greater sense of duty. He learns that he has been given the Claw in trust, and as time progresses his ownership of it becomes more purposeful, more deliberate. As he finally absorbs the personality of the old Autarch 'who in one body is a thousand' (The Citadel of the Autarch:224), he becomes one with a multitude of individuals, his personal identity subsumed in that of suffering humanity. And in his readiness to undertake the final, enigmatic test that is offered him on behalf of all mankind, he becomes a messianic figure. He gains, in Campbell's words, 'the power to bestow boons on his fellow men' (1975:31).

Jung, in his essay 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype', points out:

> The hero's main feat is to overcome the monster of darkness: it is the long-hoped-for and expected triumph of consciousness over the unconscious. Day and light are synonyms for consciousness, night and dark for the unconscious...Hence, the 'child' distinguishes itself by deeds which point to the conquest of the dark.
>
> (Jung, 1991f:141)

Significantly, in the Book of the New Sun, Urth has fallen on dark times in the physical as well as the metaphysical sense. The cooling sun is now only a dim remnant of the glowing orb to which we are accustomed. An eternal twilight has fallen over the earth, so that even the stars are visible during the daylight hours. And, throughout the tetralogy, there is constant reference to the fervent hope in the coming of the New Sun, an ambiguous renewal that may or may not take human form. The reader is left in doubt as to whether Severian will be the saviour of mankind - the living New Sun - or whether the coming of

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the New Sun refers to his belief in the regeneration of the sun itself and the rejuvenation of the senescent planet.

All these patterns and potentialities are curiously ambivalent and, indeed, an important aspect of The Book of the New Sun is its ambiguity. Agia says to Severian: 'Do you think there are answers to everything here?', and later, 'Then how can you ask the questions you do? Or if you have to ask them, can't you understand that I don't necessarily have the answers?' (The Shadow of the Torturer:180).

This seems to sum up some of the impenetrable and paradoxical qualities of the book. At various points in the story, Wolfe has different characters introduce parables or stories that have diffuse meanings. In The Sword of the Lictor, for example, the hierodule Famulimus offers Severian several metaphoric images that suggest that growth is balanced by decay, knowledge balanced by destruction, life balanced by death. She cites the amphisbaenae, of which one head is dead while the other head gnaws at it. She says, paradoxically:

> The living head stands for destruction. The head that does not live, for building. The former feeds upon the latter, and feeding, nourishes its food. A boy might think that if the first should die, the dead, constructive thing would triumph, making his twin now like himself. The truth is both would soon decay.
>
> (The Sword of the Lictor:265)

Perhaps the message of The Book of the New Sun is, in part, that the complexities of life, of reality and of identity, as well as the miraculous profligacy of creation, are too profound to be grasped entire. 'Final' answers can be self-defeating and reductive. The complexities of life, of creation, are too rich, too complex, to be narrowed to a definable

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point. Just as Severian's personality merges with the myriad personalities encompassed by the mind of the Autarch, so too do meanings become interconnected and diffused. The branching structure of The Book of the New Sun is so large and so complex as to be, finally, ungraspable, becoming, in effect, a metaphor for its own enigmatic meaning. 'We can if we like read into it serious themes concerning alienation of the self or man's distance from reality..., but so to do is to limit that which refuses limits' (C. N. Manlove, 1986:215).

Wolfe's messianic hero acts on a grandly sweeping scale, moving across a vast and infinitely varied canvas and promising the boon of renewal to mankind in general. But sometimes the messianic figure is conceived within a smaller context, and the gift he brings is to a more circumscribed community. In Roger Eldridges's The Fishers of Darksea (1984) the hero-figure is part of a small, beleaguered tribe, and the gift he will bring is one of ambiguous, even doubtful, value.

Set at some unspecified point in the future, when nuclear war has altered and ravaged the planet, The Fishers of Darksea describes the life of a small group of people who fled a nuclear holocaust - the 'Burnings'. Generations ago, they settled in the polar regions, on the harsh little island of Darksea, where they have successfully adapted to the radioactive elements of their tiny home. The island is dominated by the 'Liferock', and its radioactive substance has become a necessity for their continued health and well-being.

The tribe, only a few hundred strong, lead hard and primitive lives, subsisting on the kelp that they farm and the beasts of the brine that are caught by their élite, the Fishers. Life is circumscribed by fears and taboos which centre on the need for the Liferock, and the tribe

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is led by the Water Sorcerer, Glorkas, who presides over all the ceremonies that define existence.

Darksea has always been unstable, riven by blow-holes, spouters, and volcanic upheavals, shrouded in mists and steam, prey to the ravages of the encroaching polar ice-cap and to the storms that scour the scrap of land. Now, however, unknown to the people, the island is close to destruction. Enormous sub-terranean pressures are building slowly towards the final cataclysm. In addition, although the tribe is ignorant of the fact, supplies of the vital Liferock are failing.

The protagonist, No-mirth, is a young Fisher who has been paired as companion with another youth (Mirth) in a bonding that means that they are 'Others'. They are thus sworn to share life's perils and joys. But where Mirth is integrated into the tribe and comfortable with his status as Fisher, No-mirth is gifted with a special kind of sightedness that leads him gradually to apprehend disturbing and painful truths. He slowly realises that Glorkas the Water Sorcerer has been usurped by the blind curer, Nemu. He also sees that the visions which Nemu is imposing on the tribe will blind the people to reality and render them unable to prepare themselves for the coming end. No-mirth alone sees the evil of Nemu, that he leads his people to a dream-land that has no truth. Eventually, after much suffering, after excoriation and expulsion from the tribe, and after intense internal struggle, No-mirth slowly and painfully takes upon himself the responsibility of returning to his people and of bringing to them a saving, though dreadful, truth.

In order to focus upon the movement of No-mirth towards that point when he assumes the full burden of his role as saviour of his tribe, Eldridge makes use of a unifying image that

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is focal to the book. It is in this image that much of the power of the writing is concentrated and through which No-mirth's development becomes clear. For, central to the book, to the understanding of No-mirth's character and of his rise to maturity, are images associated with sight or vision, with 'seeing' in both the physical and the metaphysical senses. No-mirth's role as messianic figure is inextricably bound to his growth as a visionary, as one who 'sees' the future and the truth of what awaits his tribe. His slow and painful evolution into a saviour figure is focussed in the way Eldridge uses these images, as he shows how No-mirth gradually comes to see more clearly, until the moment of final revelation.

Initially, No-mirth 'sees' certain things, yet simultaneously does not 'see'. That is to say, he sees in the physical sense but does not yet comprehend the meaning of what he is seeing. This is because he is gifted with a certain intuitive knowledge, yet has - at the same time and for the greater part of the book, until he reaches an epiphanic maturity of vision - no insight. The images of sight, of seeing, of vision, are stressed repeatedly by Eldridge. The reader's first glimpse of No-mirth is symbolic: he is peering into the gloom, trying to see clearly. And, indeed, he spends most of his time struggling to see. The first words he speaks are his admission that his 'eyes were tricked' (9). And his Other, Mirth, prophetically calls upon him to 'see true'. Seeing true, will, in fact, be No-mirth's final messianic mission.

The imagery of sight is elaborated further: a constant dichotomy is drawn between physical seeing and visionary sight. No-mirth and Mirth will have to endure the scrutiny of the Water Sorcerer, Glorkas. For 'Glorkas had sent his eyes to watch for them', and 'his eyes were bright and all-seeing' (24). Already No-mirth feels 'his mind stretched to see

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with the Sorcerer's eyes' (25). In the dim recesses of No-mirth's mind, his strong need to 'see', to follow his destiny, is beginning to stir uncomfortably.

No-mirth is afflicted with eyes that view him sometimes too clearly, and sometimes not at all. He feels that Nemu, for instance, 'sees' him, and that the members of the tribe - from whom he hungers for acceptance - do not see him in any real sense as he is. And all the while, he himself is struggling to 'see', to find the truth, sensing that some reality is being hidden from the tribe. For No-mirth is the quintessential outsider. He is vision-haunted and dream-troubled. Mirth tells him, 'You have a mind like smoke, always drifting, and you have touched on matters that are not your concern' (61). While the common folk keep their eyes downcast, No-mirth lifts his eyes to meet Nemu's. The blind curer also sees in the visionary sense, despite the fact that he cannot see in the physical sense. Yet, as No-mirth gradually learns, Nemu's visions are untrue. He seeks to keep the folk, metaphorically, in a state like his own physical condition, one of blindness. It is No-mirth who will finally 'see true' and who will lead his people to a moment of spiritual truth.

No-mirth hungers for full vision, and hungers, too, for others to meet his eyes. But this last is an unreachable end. In whatever guise he appears to the folk, he makes them uneasy. All eyes are on him, yet no one truly sees him as he sees himself. The eyes of the people reject him, cast him away. Like the shadow which he senses has slipped between himself and his Other, Mirth, he feels lost in an in-between place. He feels the 'sadness of his unbelonging' (48). His role is constantly to stand apart. Until he accepts that he will never be a part of the daily life of the tribe, he cannot accept his destiny.

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From the moment he glimpses the great Fish, hears its mournful call and sees the menace of its single terrible eye (52 - 53) - which not so much sees him as 'discovers' him - he is catalysed into knowledge, into a vision of duty to Darksea. It only remains for him to find his way. This will prove an intensely painful and arduous task. No-mirth's is essentially a visionary mind: ghost-haunted, dream-ridden. Although taboos and rituals encircle him, his unsophisticated mind is capable of complexity. He will meet the challenge of his destiny. But the price he will pay is that of exile to a loneliness far beyond that which he has ever experienced as a maladroit member of the tribe. Significantly, he must finally break the greatest taboo in order to do so. He must separate himself from his Other, Mirth, who serves to symbolise the conforming and restraining aspects of his own personality. For No-mirth cannot be free until he has shaken off the restrictions which chain him to habitual submission to the tribe and to Nemu. When he finally kills his Other, whom he simultaneously loves and loathes, he is freed, for he has also destroyed that within his own psyche which keeps him fettered. He has, thus, sundered the final link with the tribe and may now breach the ultimate barrier and cross the forbidden ice on a journey that will lead him to transcendent revelation.

Finally, he accepts Glorkas's augury of 'the fish-within-a-fish' (76). Over the eye of the little fish is a 'scarlet wound...and its long gauzy tail was split into two parts, one healthy, the other crooked and infirm.' The symbolism of the prophecy becomes clear. The tiny fish within the bigger fish becomes a prophetic reflection of No-mirth caught within the entrails of the great Fish. Like No-mirth, the tiny fish is marked on the brow by a scar, and its split tail symbolises No-mirth's own bodily mutilations. No-mirth feels 'an unnatural bond of kinship with it' (76 - 78). Eventually, No-mirth will fulfil the prophecy, venturing out into forbidden territory, crossing the sea, braving the ice-pack, and finally

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entering the great Fish itself. Thus, once again, the image of the journey becomes central. The voyage into unknown lands, symbolising the movement towards discovery within the self, becomes an outward manifestation of the manner in which No-mirth reaches inwards, into his own mind and heart to find the meaning for his sufferings and long travails. His sojourn within the submarine crystallises his disparate visions into a compelling and revelatory sense of redemptive messianism.

These symbolic images serve to add complexity and resonance to the book. Rather like Wolfe's Severian, No-mirth also becomes Christ-like in his assumption of the suffering of his tribe. The analogies with the Christian mono-myth are significant, for No-mirth is, like Christ, a "Fisher', and the fish itself is a potent and complex symbol. Apart from its pagan associations with fecundity and abundance, it has at times been a sacred creature, eaten on days of special significance in order that celebrants might absorb its divinity. In early Christian times, believers were known as *pisculi*. Significantly, the natural medium of the fish is water, and its immersion suggests baptism. When No-mirth enters the 'great Fish', yet another biblical echo is evoked, for the reader is irresistibly reminded of Jonah in the belly of the whale. Like Jonah, No-mirth will experience a revelation within the entrails of the great Fish, emerging reborn both intellectually and spiritually. Campbell points out the universality of the whale as an image of rebirth.

> …a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolised in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.
>
> (1975:79)

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No-mirth's apotheosis takes place in the engine room of the great submarine. He finally realises the kinship between the nuclear-powered machine and the stuff of Liferock. His body irreparably altered, his mind begins to change, too.

> He was a Fisher still, but also something more shadowy, less touchable. He was a man of flesh who dwelled on land, yet he had travelled inside the ocean and tasted its infinity; his mind rolled with the cadence of a tide, and he was brinish....Some would say he was beyond saving, yet he had been saved.
>
> Even his physical form altered: he was smaller and a part of him was pared. Yet the lost flesh had been replaced by spirit, so that the shape of his body was not the outer limit of his being. He carried a second envelope, like a dawnish glow about his person.
>
> (176)

The transmutation is complete. He exclaims 'I am ready. I am cured' (177). Here, within the Fish, he has learned the truth: Darksea is nearing the end of its time. He exults as he begins to realise his true calling. Finally, No-mirth has learned to 'see true'.

> 'Once the Eye hunted me; now the Eye is I,' he cried. '*I* am the Eye who seeks and sees. Soon I shall know my true name.'
>
> (181)

Rejecting safety, No-mirth returns to Darksea in order to depose Nemu., who has begun to impose his false visions on the tribe. No-mirth takes upon himself the mantle of Glorkas, giving up with sorrow his dreams of becoming one with his people. He becomes, in effect, the Water Sorcerer himself, accepting that Glorkas is now his 'true name', and yielding to his destiny as an outsider, as a 'dream-wanderer'. No-mirth thus embodies yet another archetypal pattern: '...the passage of the threshold is a form of self-

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annihilation. …the hero goes inwards, to be born again' (Campbell, 1975:80).

He embraces his hideous knowledge and the unavoidability of his mission. The gift he takes back to his people is a painful one. He cannot save them in the physical sense, but he can perhaps hope to redeem their ending, to bring them nobility in their going, to offer them spiritual regeneration. 'If my people are to die, I shall die with them, and perhaps I shall make their going easier' (195). Christ-like, he will bring redemption to his tribe, and will take upon himself the burden of his people's pain. He shoulders his responsibilities, apparelling himself in Glorkas's identity and garb. He 'accepts his new maturity with mounting ease' (212), and teaches his tribe that 'there will be no more fear in our laws, and there will be no more Foretellings; for Darksea has reached its fullness. We are the peak of a dream, the flowering of a fire' (212). His terrible burden is to teach his people not to go fear-haunted to their end, but to face the truth in full knowledge and with courage.

The success of the book, its ability to hold and convince the reader, and to convey No-mirth's apotheosis from a timid and dream-haunted youth to a powerful leader of his people, is dependent to a large extent on Eldridge's use of language. There is a certain ornateness to his style, a rather fantastic quality, that well suits the other-worldliness of the images. Yet this elaborateness in no way vitiates the vigour of the imagery and of the characterisations, nor does it soften the essential mysteriousness and bleakness of the world that he creates.

In order to portray this astonishing world with intensity, Eldridge uses a great deal of metaphoric physical detail. The island of Darksea becomes, in a sense, almost personified.

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The extensions of Liferock, for instance, are depicted as the veins running beneath the skin of the island of Darksea, and this skin is pitted with ruptures and spout-holes, like the open sores and wounds of a body that is constantly irritated and suppurating at its exposed nerve-ends.

The book is carefully organised around the person of No-mirth, and it is in him that Eldridge concentrates the simple, yet powerful images that become focal to the writing. As the book opens, Eldridge skilfully introduces the world of the Fishers. Their fear-haunted minds are immediately apparent, for he uses an almost anthropological approach to suggest to the reader that the people he is describing are alien and primitive. Through the consciousness of No-mirth and his Other, Mirth, the reader is able to apprehend the world in much the same terms that the two Fishers see it.

In the opening scene, the two young men are keeping watch on the fishwalk at the edge of the sea. To them, the sea is a vast, living monster which they fear. No-mirth, for instance, sees the sea as

> many-faced and deadly. Today it lay tame at his feet, sleek and silvery like a newly gaffed fish. Yet the sea could not fool him, for he knew the secret motion of its breathing, as it lightly rose and fell against the fishwalk. Just below the surface little lights sparked like eyes in the brine, watching him and wishing him harm.
>
> ...He lifted his long fish-stick and stabbed the sly sea, breaking its skin and making wrinkles spread outwards from the wound.
>
> (9)

The sea, then, becomes a living entity. It is guileful, playing at being 'tame'; yet, all the

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while it watches No-mirth with ill-will, breathing quietly and trying to 'fool' him. This animistic approach immediately alerts the reader to the fact that No-mirth and his Other think in terms that are primitive, yet not unsubtle. The metaphor becomes more extensive and more elaborate as the action proceeds. Mirth's harpoon caresses the air 'like the feeler of a giant sea-crawler' (9), and later the sea bubbles 'greedily' (13). The writer takes us into the consciousness even of a seal, which

> ...turned on its back and grumbled gently to itself, disturbed by the nearness of Darksea. It had strayed far from the cold playgrounds of its tribe, drawn by the lush aroma of fish spiced with a bitter-sweetness it could not resist. The scent was still there, heady and tantalizing on the outcoming drift, but there was something else now, a blackness that seeped from the island like poisoned blood. The young seal wavered and wished it were not alone.
>
> (11)

This kind of personification of both animate and inanimate objects is skilfully maintained by Eldridge throughout the book, consistently allowing the reader a passage into the intimate thought processes of his protagonist. The device never descends to the sentimental or the precious, and therefore never becomes obtrusive or cloying. Rather than being jarring - who after all can claim with authority to know what a seal or a walrus thinks or feels? - Eldridge manages to convince us of the naturalness of such anthropomorphism. He succeeds in this because he has convinced us that, like many primitive people who live close to the natural world, No-mirth and his Other have an empathetic - almost a symbiotic - relationship with the animals they hunt. Later, when No-mirth comes into contact with the 'nixie', the writer is able to make the reader see with perfect clarity the terms in which No-mirth translates the machinery of its airtight suit and its breathing apparatus into the natural terms of his own world and his own

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vocabulary.

> The creature who straddled him was like a man, yet such a man as creeps in nightmares. His skin was of burnished silver, and he had no features, only a vast round skull with a single eye that glowed from within. The hands which kneaded No-mirth's ribs had no fingers, and the toeless feet were stiffly blunted. A pale gut curled from his head into a bladder on his back.
>
> (133)

Similarly, the ice-bound nuclear submarine is perceived as a fearful living beast by No-mirth:

> …the Fish was ailing, perhaps even dying. It was bloodless and dry, and sometimes a rending crack hurt his ears. The Fish was made of a myriad of interlocking husks which seemed to be crumbling one by one, imploding under the gnawing stranglement of the ice.
>
> The silver-men were fully in command inside this living labyrinth of sapless cells, following the arteries and veins as easily as he trod the gullies of Darksea. They were like the parasites he had seen in the gut of diseased sea beasts….
>
> (168)

It is because of the grace with which the writer handles such moments that the reader can be so deeply involved in No-mirth's world and experience.

As well as the intensely detailed physical world, Eldridge achieves an almost epic quality in the unfolding of the story. There is a strongly mythic feeling in the chants and sagas of the folk of Darksea, to which he gives depth by the addition of much detail. For instance, he quotes a 'snarl-song' from Mirth's childhood:

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hissy-sissy seal
hair-wet and frail
cry and die and squeal
I caught you by the tail...

(10)

The diction of the tribe is filled with simple, yet strong, poetic images, with metaphors and similes - as is the language of primitive peoples - and this stresses the mythic and epic qualities of the writing. Mirth, for instance, pungently tells his Other, No-mirth 'I know there's emptiness in you where there should be meat' (102). And the writer assays, too, the oral traditions and heroic style of the saga songs with which the Fishers regale each other, as in this snatch of Mirth's gleeful account of the killing of the walrus, 'the fang-walker':

It was then my Other manfully rose
scorning the brutish glutton cries;
Even as Old Churny opened his jaws,
my Other struck, planting his arrow
in its gore-box. It was the end.
Its spirit soared away, and its body
was our great and glorious prize.

(36)

Roger Eldridge is, apparently, little recognised by the science fiction fraternity, and there is no critical comment that I can discover on The Fishers of Darksea.[7] Despite the lack of acclaim, however, it is my opinion that, in The Fishers of Darksea, he has produced a small gem of a novel, one that functions with a great deal of veracity and power and which

[7] The first edition of The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1979) ignores Eldridge completely, while the second edition dismisses him in a brief paragraph. Neither does Aldiss make any mention of Eldridge in his comprehensive Trillion Year Spree (1986).

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is deserving of critical attention. Although just over two hundred pages in length, the symbolic use of language and the mythic nature of No-mirth's character, his tribulations and his final apotheosis, convey an epic scope. Furthermore, the ambiguity of the ending gives the lie, yet again, to Frye's (1976) contention that fantasy is 'vertical', that it functions without the suggestion of 'linearity' or causality, that action is not contiguous and that character has no true consistency. For, in The Fishers of Darksea, character is carefully built up, stroke by stroke, through the layering of detail, and events follow one upon the other in logical progression. The result is one of complexity and subtlety, rather than one of transparent simplicity, and the extent to which the reader is emotionally involved with the destiny of No-mirth indicates the depth with which Eldridge creates his strange world and its doomed inhabitants. Fascinating, too, is the manner in which fantasy and sf elements are interwoven, with the scientific rationale for the radioactive Liferock and the tribe's adaptations to these alien exigencies only gradually becoming clear as the story unfolds.

In both The Book of the New Sun and The Fishers of Darksea, the success of the messianic role of the protagonist is left in some doubt. Severian may or may not meet the final test that awaits him when he journeys beyond the bounds of the solar system as an emissary from the dying Urth. And No-mirth's services to his people cannot save them physically, can bring them only the tenuous comforts of safety from metaphysical or spiritual peril. Nevertheless, what is undeniable is that the protagonists of the books discussed above share certain characteristics which link them to the archetypal structures of myth. One of the most striking aspects of each is his youth, often a significant aspect of the archetypal calling of the saviour figure. Jung, in his discussion of the archetypal 'child hero', draws attention to the fact of youth being an expression of 'potentiality' and of

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futurity, and each of these heroes is, if not quite a child, extremely young. Jung sees the child hero as one who unites opposites, 'a mediator, a bringer of healing, that is, one who makes whole' (1991d:138). The child paves the way for the potential future. Furthermore, the various difficulties that the young hero must face are proof of his 'semi-divine' or special nature, for '...the hero's supernaturalness includes human nature and thus he represents a synthesis of the ("divine", i.e., not yet humanised) unconscious and human consciousness' (1991d:140). Each of the books discussed so far in this section, displays this archetypal pattern. Paul Atreides, as Dune opens, is just fifteen years of age, and by the time he has undergone all the tests of manhood and taken on the mantle of the saviour of Arrakis, he is barely seventeen. Gene Wolfe's Severian is still an adolescent at the start of his adventures, and not a great deal older - though he seems so in experience - by the time he prepares himself for his final messianic task. And No-Mirth, as we meet him in the opening chapter of The Fishers of Darksea , is readying himself to bid farewell to his childhood.

Symbolically, these tests and privations also express in concrete terms the tenuous nature of safety and reality, concepts which the saviour figure must needs transcend in order to be able to deliver those liberating or redeeming boons of which he is the bearer. Severian and No-mirth show, simultaneously, some of the traits of both the Old Testament saviour figure and of the Christian messianic ideal. In Old Testament terms, each is something of the man of action, both moving within the realm of temporal power. Severian, through the various offices of carnifex, lictor and finally of Autarch, achieves a position of authority and dominance in the political sphere. And No-mirth, too, must act with wiliness and great skill to achieve leadership of his tribe. Yet, despite the 'political' role that each plays, both protagonists are messiah figures also in the visionary Christian sense.

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Each achieves moments of epiphany. Severian, at the edge of the ocean in the closing pages of The Citadel of the Autarch, reaches an overwhelming sense of the sacred nature of all creation and of his part in it. No-mirth's vision in the belly of the great Fish is of his compelling need to return to his people and bring them healing.

But in another moving novel set in the far future, the protagonist - also not yet out of his teens - eschews completely the temporal consequences of action and power. Like Severian and No-mirth, he must face experiences of loss and learning to achieve his vision. His peregrinations and sufferings, too, become a beacon that will guide the future. John Crowley's Engine Summer (1980) is a remarkable book that engages the reader on many levels and that requires careful reading to reveal its subtleties and beauties.

The central character, Rush that Speaks, dwells - like Severian and No-mirth - in a world that is apocalyptic in the sense that there is a feeling that things are drawing to a close, running down, coming to an end. His world has long since seen the 'Storm' which destroyed the 'angels'- which is what men now call their distant ancestors. The angels dominated Earth with their roads and engines, with all the magical paraphernalia of their powers. The world that remains appears almost idyllic, by contrast. Technology has been destroyed, and people have slowly reverted to a pastoral life ruled by the seasons and the collecting of the remnants of the angel's world.

A culture that is at once gentler, kinder, and more simple, now exists. It is dominated by the myths and legends that still remain from the time of the angels. The meaning and purpose of many of the angels' works are long forgotten. Their cities are deserted even by the rats, their 'engines' stand in ruins. The most obscure and trivial of their objects

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remain, to become relics of the past: venerated, feared, misunderstood, seen as signs and portents. Rush that Speaks is struck dumb with fear by an ancient weather barometer in the shape of a Swiss cottage, and also by a picture of the four gigantic heads of Mount Rushmore - which become linked in his mind with the myth of the four dead men, the meaning of which is revealed only much later in the book. Even language has altered to some extent. For instance, 'engine summer' is a corruption of 'indian summer'.

> There's a time in some years, after the first frosts, when the sun gets hot again, and summer returns for a time. Winter is coming; you know that from the way the mornings smell, the way the leaves, half-turned to color, are dry and poised to drop. But summer goes on, a small false summer, all the more precious for being small and false. In Little Belaire, we called this time - for some reason nobody now knows - engine summer.
>
> (42)

The style of the writing is simple and poetic; the mood is evocative, elegiac and ultimately beguiling. Crowley is acutely aware of the harmonious and seasonal patterns of nature, and his writing is suffused with a quiet acceptance of, and compassion for, humanity. Part of the beauty of the book lies in the gentle and pastoral nature of Rush that Speaks's peregrinations. For, in archetypal mode, he leaves his birthplace, Little Belaire, and sets off on a series of wanderings and adventures. There is a slightly fantastical and humorous quality to many of his experiences, and these link the book, in a sense, to the wondrous absurdities of fable or fairy-tale. He meets the twins, Budding and Blooming. 'Naked, they poled upstream, the leaf shadows flowing over them, wearing flowers in their hair' (69). He adopts, or is adopted by, a cow that he calls Fido - because this is what the angels called their animals. He meets a saint who lives in a tree, in a little house made from 'pieces of angel-made this and that' (72), and who presents a charming figure.

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> He was fast asleep. His hands were crossed over his bosom, and he snored; his feet, clad in big boots, stuck up. His white hair lay all around him on the ground, and his beard spread out around his small brown face so that he looked like a milkweed seed...Seeing us, he sneezed loudly, got up grumbling, and started off towards the woods across the pasture. Budding cried out and started chasing him as though he were a bird we'd raised. Blooming followed after...
>
> When they had been some time crashing around in the woods into which the saint had gone, they came back to me panting.
>
> "He's in a tree," said Blooming.
>
> (70)

Once again, as in the books discussed previously, it is the long journey of the protagonist towards some final vision of grace and enlightenment that becomes the true focus of the story. And, as in The Book of the New Sun and The Fishers of Darksea, this voyage takes the hero not only towards a moment of personal revelation, but also towards a point of general meaning, a point which will benefit more than his own single persona. For, the promise of the saviour figure is that he bears gifts which enrich the spiritual lives of his entire community or world, and Rush that Speaks's motivation for his long journey is, in fact, his own compelling desire to become a saint.

For him, a saint is not so much a holy or religious figure, as one who teaches men something. A saint is 'transparent'. By listening to the story of a saint's life, men may learn something about their own lives. Painted Red, who is Rush that Speaks's mentor in Little Belaire, puts it like this:

> She said: "The saints found that truthful speaking was more than just being understood; the important thing was that the better you spoke, the more other people saw themselves in you, as in a mirror. Or better: the

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> more they saw themselves through you, as though you had become transparent."
>
> (57 - 58)

Rush that Speaks himself wants 'to make sense of the world in the stories I told' (63). He wants to find a truth and meaning that goes beyond what can be apprehended merely by the senses.

First, however, Rush that Speaks must embark on that archetypal voyage of discovery which will enable him to reach for those meanings. One of the most significant of these is learned from the people of Dr Boots's List. Rush that Speaks wishes intensely to achieve the state of grace which the members of the List have attained, a state free of desire and need. The people of Boots's List seem to know how to 'be', and he longs to know what they know, to be as they are. He can do this only by receiving the enigmatic 'letter from Dr Boots'. When he finally experiences the consciousness, the being, of Boots, he is changed ineradicably. He learns a new kind of awareness, an instantaneous vibrancy of being that is recreated at each moment with each new and momentary sensation. He learns a kind of vividness, a clarity of sensation, a means of being that is completely visceral, completely unintellectual and of the moment. It is an awareness that has no memory, 'no meanwhile'.

Boots, the reader learns only much later, is - or was - a cat. The angels had experimented with imprisoning or retaining consciousness, capturing four human minds in the glass spheres that have become part of Rush that Speaks's mythology - the 'four dead men'. But, not knowing whether the process would be fatal to their subjects or not, their initial attempt had been with a cat called Boots. Boots's sphere has remained through

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generations with the List, and her small, rich life is what has conditioned the people of the List to be as they are. Rush that Speaks learns what the List knows and what the angels, in their 'great anguish', struggled with and failed to learn. He learns a simpler, wiser mode of being, less confused, more lovely. He will somehow, ever after, carry Boots within him. He will be able, henceforth, 'to let the task be the master: which is only not to choose to do anything but what has chosen me to be done' (145). In a sense, the letter from Dr Boots carries T. S. Eliot's prayer from 'Ash Wednesday'. It is:

> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still.
>
> (ll. 39 - 40)

The secret of Boots, paradoxically, 'is that Boots has nothing, nothing at all to say (145).

Finally the realisation comes that the Rush that Speaks with whom the reader has been interacting for the duration of the book is long since dead. What has seemed like a life in the process of being recorded is, in fact, a life in the process of being replayed or re-experienced. Ironically, it is not Rush that Speaks himself who is speaking. His vision of life, his story, is being told - perhaps for the hundredth time in many, many generations - by the fifth sphere that contains his consciousness, and which the angels have captured for all eternity and for their own purposes. Indeed, the angels use Rush that Speaks much as the people of Boots's List use Boots - to learn something essential about existence and about the human condition, for he has indeed finally learned to make sense of the world in the stories that he tells. If, as Campbell maintains, the hero is one who has 'the courage to face the trials and to bring a whole new body of possibilities into the field of interpreted experience for other people to experience' (1988:41), then Rush that Speaks is

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undoubtedly a hero.

For when Crowley's protagonist describes the Storm which overwhelmed the angels, the reader senses that it is, in some measure, a warning, a description of contemporary life and what may very well await us. We learn of the angels' genetic tampering, their headlong, furious-paced lives, their creation of a second satellite to the earth, Little Moon. Rush that Speaks expresses the sense of things hastening to a climactic and violent finish, a maelstrom of destruction and senselessness. He knows that 'It can't be put back together' (83). He knows that the angels' search for immortality 'left us all legless men' (90). Humanity has been maimed: the angels have taken something from the world which cannot be replaced. The loss is final, irremediable.

What the reader has been experiencing is a Rush that Speaks that has been caught within the sphere, like a fly trapped in amber. He has recounted his brief life (he is only seventeen at the time of his telling) countless times, and will do so countless more times in the future for the angels, who will weep as they experience the beauty and the meaning of his existence. And poignantly, each time Rush that Speaks's conscious mind is recalled, it is fully awake; each time he himself experiences anew the loss of his past, experiences again the terror and anguish of not knowing what happened to him in the time after he entered the sphere. He himself can never learn about the years that remained to him when his consciousness was captured by the angels; he can never know whether he will find his love, Once a Day; whether he ever remeets Blink; whether he returns to Little Belaire. This is what makes his life ultimately so touching. His final painful cry is:

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> 'They're all gone. And I...what did I do, then, angel, in my life? Did I grow old? Did I ever go down the hill? And Once a Day...oh, angel, what became of me?
> ...
> And do I each time learn this? And then forget?
> ...
> Then free me now, angel. Let me sleep, if I can't die. Free me, quickly, while I can still bear all this...
>
> (181 - 18)

What we learn, together with the angels, is that Rush that Speaks's seventeen years of life have indeed become a transparency, like that of a saint. Through him, the angels learn to understand their own past, and we learn to understand something of our own present. For the lesson that he teaches is one of humanity and of humility. In giving up his life to the angels, Rush that Speaks seems close to the Christian vision of the messiah who sacrifices himself for the redemption of mankind. While Severian and No-mirth undergo metaphorical death in order to be reborn anew, Rush that Speaks's death is real. He has offered his life, and the result is a joyous vision; a clear sense of existence leavened by humility, love, compassion and patience. He teaches the angels to weep and to regain, perhaps, something of what they have lost.

Engine Summer is a particularly graceful book, each image containing a meaning above the purely visual and decorative. Thus, the fly caught in the clear cube of plastic, Mother Tom waving eternally, St. Gene's mobius loop - all these become metaphors for the captured and incomplete essence of Rush that Speaks. 'Engine summer' becomes a metaphor for the long, gentle twilight of the world, perhaps before the fall of some final and eternally chilling winter of darkness and total ignorance. Brian Aldiss feels that Engine Summer 'unfolds like a mysterious flower' and points out that its very complexity

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'divorces it from the bulk of science fiction' (1986:361). For, despite the fantastic quality of the story, there is depth of character and meaning that is not usually expected of fantasy. In Engine Summer, Crowley has proved the protean quality of sf, for he has shown that the genre is as capable of expressing intellectual and emotional complexity as are more traditional and more widely respected forms of writing.

All these protagonists, while gaining enormously in their stature as human beings and in their realisation of vision and achievement, must, as a corollary, give up something personal to achieve their apotheosis. Each suffers deep loss of some sort or another. Severian loses both Dorcas and his physical beauty. He faces, moreover, the threat of becoming an androgyne should he fail in his final mission. No-mirth, too, is scarred and disfigured by his sufferings. But, a greater pain than his bodily hurts, is the fact that he is forever sundered from the warmth of brotherhood, of communion with his tribe. By accepting his messianic role he condemns himself, as does Severian, to a life of isolation and otherness that can never be allayed by contact with the common mass of humanity. In each case, in serving some larger vision, the protagonist must give up some part of his self.

In a powerful novella by Ursula K. Le Guin, however, the loss is not only personal but is felt by an entire race. In order to fulfil his messianic vision, the protagonist takes not only from himself, but from his people, something which can never be replaced and which scars both his personal and his racial psyche irreparably.

The Word for World is Forest (1991) tells a simple and brutal tale. To the fertile and forested planet of Athshe comes an invasion of Terran colonists who call this world New Tahiti and see it simply as a source of raw material, to be stripped, plundered and looted

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for the benefit of Earth. In the process, it is not only Athshe which is being destroyed but also the indigenous population, which consists of uniformly small, green-furred humanoids who live in careful and delicate balance with the flora and fauna of their world. They are undeveloped in the sense that technology plays no part in their lives, and they have lived in static and unaggressive harmony with their environment for centuries. But they are highly developed in the sense that they can control the 'unconscious', the dream-producing parts of the mind. They dream deliberately, controlling and using their dreams productively, separating the 'dream-time' from the 'world-time'. By contrast, the Terrans dream only in sleep. Or '...they take poison to let loose the dreams in them, but it only makes them drunk or sick' (206). To the Athsheans, the Terrans seem insane, out of control and their humanity is doubtful.

Since the arrival of the Terrans, the Athsheans have witnessed their forests razed to the ground, their fauna hunted for sport, their own people enslaved as 'voluntary' labour for the colonists. In addition, the Terrans - who see the natives as 'alien' and 'inhuman' - use brutality and torture in their efforts to force the Athsheans to conform to expected standards of behaviour and productivity.

Le Guin's creation of the luxuriantly forested world of Athshe becomes emblematic, a potent metaphor that contains the seeds of the conflict and oppositions of two clashing cultures. The forest world, darkly intricate and mysterious, represents to the Terrans all that they fear and abhor. It symbolises the realm of dream, the subconscious world where motives and desires are shadowy and unclear. It is the 'forest of the night', which can be approached and understood only by plumbing the dark reaches of the mind that are normally inaccessible to those who are bound to daylight, bound to what the Athsheans

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call the 'dead world of action'. Campbell refers to the 'dark forest' as the world of 'original experience' (1988:41), in which the psyche must struggle to reconcile conscious and unconscious elements. Whereas, for the Athsheans, the subterranean world of the dream is a revitalising and reinvigorating landscape, for the men of Earth it is a primeval landscape in which they are lost and fearful. The Terrans, sundered from instinctual wisdom, have lost the art of listening to their dreams. Like Jung, Le Guin appears to believe that the sickness in the soul of Western civilization results from an inability to reconcile the instinctive and the rational aspects of personality. Jung comments wryly:

> Modern man does not understand how much his 'rationalism' (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic 'underworld.' He has freed himself from 'superstition' (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree.
>
> (1978:84)

This cultural polarisation is emblematised in two central characters who personify, through their very different personalities, the oppositions between Earth and Athshe. It is in the antagonism of these two figures, and the conflict between that for which each stands, that Le Guin animates and strengthens the collision between the two opposing worlds and cultures. The Earthman, Captain Davidson, is drawn in quick and vivid strokes, his swaggering figure becoming a powerful, almost a caricatured, presence. As Le Guin herself says, in her Introduction (1991:8),[8] he is 'purely evil'. In this novella, which has something of the effect of metaphor or myth, Davidson, in the simplification of his nature, speaks symbolically for all that is arrogant and brutal in the culture of Earth.

[8] The book was written in 1968.

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From the moment he steps onto the pages of The Word for World is Forest, he reveals himself - and therefore some aspects of our own culture. Intensely patriotic, armoured in his male pride and arrogance, he classifies all creatures into stereotypes. Women are, like cattle, 'prime stock'. His fellow officers are seen in terms of their racial characteristics. They are dismissed as 'euros' or - if they are specialists in a particular field - as 'bigdomes'. The implication is that they are not quite trustworthy, not quite real men. The planet, New Tahiti, needs to be 'cleaned out', remade into Earth's image. The indigenous people are 'creechies' and, because of their small size, despised and dominated.

In Davidson's predatory philosophy, New Tahiti is totally expendable. The deer can be hunted purely for pleasure and to relieve boredom, the people exploited to extinction, the forests destroyed until the world is a desert - and all for the continued existence and well-being of Earth. He sees Athshe as a 'wild' planet, waiting to be tamed and dominated by men like himself, who are in control. Davidson is the male principle carried to its final devastating conclusion. He personifies machismo. He is narrow, brutal, quick-thinking and, in some respects, very stupid. Like anything taken to extremes, his personality tips towards insanity.

Davidson is symbolic of the aggressive, rigidly-delineated and well-ordered patrist (or male-dominated) society which is fiercely intolerant of permissiveness, freedom from mental constraint and egalitarianism. As such, he instinctively opposes the matrist world in which Selver - the Athshean who will rise to lead his people to freedom - lives. Davidson loathes the forest with its shadows and its lack of clarity. Submitting to the forest, for him, is analogous to a descent into the 'dark side of the psyche', with all its primordial terrors and ambiguities.

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> No way was clear, no light unbroken, in the forest. Into wind, water, sunlight, starlight, there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex. Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots; they did not go straight, but yielded to every obstacle, devious as nerves.... The smell of the air was subtle, various, and sweet. The view was never long.... There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty.
>
> (191)

This is the world of the Athsheans, the world in which Davidson feels instinctively uneasy. To some extent, the forest symbolises Gaia, the eternal and fecund Earth Mother. Jung has frequently drawn attention to the connection of the feminine (or Great Mother) archetype with darkness and complexity, while light and clarity are often associated with the Father, or male, archetype. Light symbolises what is conscious and active. Darkness speaks of what is unconscious, unrealised and mysterious in nature and personality. Paradoxically, each principle contains both destructive and constructive attributes and, ideally, the two should be harmoniously balanced for psychic growth. Anthony Stevens (1982:317) feels that '...it can be convincingly argued that the most inventive and creative cultures are those...in which a balance between matrism and patrism is achieved'.[9]

Men like Davidson, however, are incapable of accepting this plurality. To Davidson, the mysterious complexity of the forest is unclean. He would like to see '...the dark forests cut down for open fields of grain, the primeval murk and savagery and ignorance wiped out, it would be a paradise, a real Eden' (175). Davidson becomes, then, more than a personality: he becomes emblematic of an entire culture, one that is single-mindedly - and

[9] Significantly, Le Guin has made her Athsheans green-furred - a colour that symbolises fertility and that which is capable of growth and transformation. Simultaneously, however, she may also have been making the point that her stereotypical 'little green men' are capable of greater humanity than earthmen.

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therefore irrationally - aligned with the restricted, mechanistically exploitive and masculine world of the colonists. He embodies the kind of mentality that gives licence to atrocities, to genocide. Armoured in his narrow arrogance and pride, he feels himself inviolable, unassailable. He is unshakeably convinced of his own moral high ground. Tellingly, the world of the colonists is almost completely masculine. The only Terran women on New Tahiti are the 'Collies', brought from Earth for the recreation of the colonists, or the few colonial 'brides'. Women play no part in the military hierarchy in which Davidson moves.

In contrast, the culture of the Athsheans is a balanced assimilation of both masculine and feminine energies. The men are the 'great dreamers', while the women are the doers, active in the spheres of political and social organisation. Each small Athshean 'city' has a head woman, who decides on policy in consultation with the dreamers. In creating this harmonious, forested world, Le Guin's gives expression, once more, to her Taoist affinity with balance and duality.

The terms in which the Athsheans see the Terrans are horrific, apocalyptic.

> In the dream the giants walked, heavy and dire. Their dry scaly limbs were swathed in cloths; their eyes were little and light, like tin beads. Behind them crawled huge moving things made of polished iron. The trees fell down in front of them.
>
> (193)

Out of this terrible vision of death and enslavement, Selver rises to lead his people against the colonists, to defeat them and to treat for peace. However, the price that is paid for these actions is a terrible one. The Athsheans are a non-aggressive species. Violent crime is almost unknown in their society. Rather than cut an enemy down, they humiliate him by

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'singing him down'. But now Selver teaches them a new thing. For Selver is, despite the incongruity of his small size and his green fur, a messiah figure. He grasps the moment: he sees the consequences of the arrival of the colonists, he knows that the time for desperate action has come. He sees the enormity of what he does, which is born of the violence of the Earthmen. He knows that 'all men's dreams will be changed' irrevocably in the time to come because of this new and dangerous thing that the people of Athshe have found it within themselves to do.

Whereas, in Severian's case, the apocalypse lies behind him and in No-mirth's case it lies ahead of him, in the case of the Athsheans, the apocalypse is upon them. For Selver, the colonists are bringers of death and destruction. The world is being 'cut open and left to rot', the humans 'kill the trees'; kill, therefore, the entire world.

Selver becomes, to his people, that rare thing, a being who will enter their myths and legends, a god, '...that knows death, a god that kills and is not himself reborn' (199). He becomes that singular personage who can span the gap between the dream-time and the world-time. He is 'a changer, a bridge between realities' (199). He brings a new reality to the people, a new and terrible thing into their hearts. Out of desperation, out of cruelty and oppression, he finds within himself the ability to kill, and he teaches his people to do the same. Selver becomes, then, a leader, truly wielding the 'shining blade' which will liberate his people and his land. He begins to have a messianic sense of purpose and also a sense of what is wrong with the 'yumens':

> They kill men and women; they do not spare those who ask life. They cannot sing in contest. They have left their roots behind them, perhaps, in this other forest from which they come, this forest with no trees....

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> Therefore they go about in torment killing and destroying, driven by the gods within them, whom they will not set free but try to uproot and deny. If they are men they are evil men, having denied their own gods, afraid to see their own faces in the dark.
>
> (207)

He understands that the Terrans have cut themselves off from the very well-springs, the 'roots', of nature and he knows that, left alone, they will destroy the world, which is the forest. So strong is his vision, that the people are drawn to him, are led by him. They sense the power of his presence and of what he has done. They embrace the newness gladly. And so Selver becomes a man of action. He becomes a 'harvester' of fear and terror and, in so doing, changes his world wholly. He himself, together with his people, are 'changed radically, from the root' (245) by admitting violence and death, by translating into waking life the central experience of his vision. 'Only a god could lead so great a newcomer as Death across the bridge between two worlds' (254).

The corollary of his actions is the terrible loss of innocence of his people. The possibility of violent death will forever after stalk the Athsheans and change their society irrevocably. And from this there is no going back.

> 'Sometimes a god comes,' Selver said. 'He brings a new way to do a thing, or a new thing to be done. He brings this across the bridge between the dream-time and the world-time. When he has done this, it is done...What is, is. There is no use pretending, now, that we do not know how to kill one another.'
>
> (300)

<u>The Word for World is Forest</u> is - unusual for Le Guin - something of a polemic, and was written in a mood of passionate outrage against the Vietnam War, the defoliation of

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forests and the killing of non-combatants. Perhaps it could, therefore, in some sense, be said to fulfil Joanna Russ's (1975:113) contention that science fiction is 'didactic'. There is clearly a 'message' encoded in the conflict between Selver and Davidson. Le Guin herself apologises for having succumbed, in the writing of this book, to 'the lure of the pulpit' (1989:127). But what adds to the potency of her writing is that the two contradictory cultures or world-views, and the two opposing personalities, take on a mythic significance because they evoke, on some subliminal level, those archetypes which have been identified in this discussion. While The Word for World is Forest is less poetic, less fantastic than, for instance, the world of Earthsea, Le Guin's ability to plumb the psyche for these metaphoric images is still clearly evident and adds to the power of her narrative to engage the reader.

The books discussed in this chapter achieve an epic scope and range, for each protagonist confronts not only a private destiny, but also the fate of his entire race. Campbell (1975:37) points out that the '...the hero of myth [achieves] a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph', and Severian, No-mirth, Rush that Speaks and Selver all become, in essence, messianic figures. Each is willing to sacrifice his life and sanity to become a facilitator of redemption, a saviour of his people. In so doing, each subscribes to a pattern so ancient that its origins cannot be ascertained.

> The general idea of Christ the Redeemer belongs to the world-wide and pre-Christ theme of the hero and rescuer who, although he has been devoured by a monster, appears again in a miraculous way, having overcome whatever monster it was that swallowed him.... The hero figure is an archetype, which has existed since time immemorial.
>
> (Jung, 1978:61)

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What is fascinating in the books discussed here is the manner in which each writer weaves the archaic symbol of the messianic figure into a context which is at once particular and universal. Thus, Severian, No Mirth, Rush that Speaks and Selver - who inhabit very different worlds and who seek destiny amidst disparate sets of circumstances - each becomes an amalgam of both Old Testament messiah and Christian redeemer. Like the charismatically endowed Hebraic saviour-figure, each is unquestionably a human being. Gerald Blidstein points out that, even in rabbinic thought, the messiah is 'generally assumed to be man, though writ large' (1971:1412). As such, the sphere of the messiah is essentially a complicated one, encompassing prophecy, war, justice, kingship and teaching. Wolfe, Le Guin and Eldridge all create protagonists who become men of action: symbolic warriors, prophets and leaders. Yet, although each inhabits the world of dynamic physical energy (with the exception of Rush that Speaks), each also exhibits the characteristics of the Christian redeemer. Together with Crowley's gentle hero, they emerge as ethical and moral saviours. Like Rush that Speaks, each develops transfiguring powers and becomes a symbolic lever that shifts the balance of his world towards the possibility of spiritual salvation. Thus, like the central figure in the great Christian monomyth, these protagonists also serve as psychopomps. Each is both the sacrificer and the sacrificed, and each stands on the threshold of a symbolic doorway, mediating the entrance into unusual states of perception and being.

Within the fantastic and futuristic settings of each book, these universal and epic motifs take on renewed vitality, so that the story-teller achieves a vigorous contemporary relevance. Wolfe, Eldridge, Le Guin and Crowley deal with these archetypal concepts and patterns with a good deal of subtlety and versatility, grafting the components of character,

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motivation and setting onto larger symbolic meaning, and demonstrating that sf and fantasy can attain, at their best, an emotional and intellectual amplitude that transcends mere narrative.