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Making Myth: Narrative Discourse in *The Shadow of the Torturer*

Charles Simmons
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Lund University
Supervisor: Cian Duffy

Abstract

This dissertation argues that the incongruity between the narrating I and the narrated I in *The Shadow of the Torturer* produces a site where myth is made. The novel differs from other works in the canon of science fantasy because its science and fantasy are rarely, if ever, juxtaposed. Instead, I argue that whatever technological understandings the narrator obtains throughout their journey are reproduced as myth. Myth is treated as the fusion of scientific and fantastic worldviews. This dissertation focuses on the events found in *The Shadow of the Torturer* while addressing other novels in Gene Wolfe's greater *Solar Cycle* when relevant. The background section provides the reader with an historical overview of science fantasy's two parent genres and identifies the basic features which define a work as either science fiction or fantasy. Also included in the background section is an introduction to Gerard Genette's narratological concepts of mood and voice. The analysis section begins by looking at the peculiarities of Severian's discourse through the lenses of these two concepts. Having thus established the way in which the novel's narrative is constructed, the final section explores Severian's mythic vision.

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Introduction

Gene Wolfe writes what is considered genre, or popular fiction. But anyone would be hesitant to call his work *popular*.¹ Nevertheless, his contemporaries working in the fields of science fiction and fantasy have recognized and lauded his accomplishments. Ursula K. Le Guin is quoted on the front cover of *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* (1972) as having said it is “a subtle, ingenious, poetic, and picturesque book”. Likewise, Neil Gaiman’s proclamation that Wolfe is the “smartest, subtlest, most dangerous writer alive today” appears square on the back panel of *The Knight* (2004). *Endangered Species* (1989) is stamped with a paraphrased review from *Publishers Weekly* claiming it illustrates “the sometimes elusive, always challenging vision of an author whose love for language exceeds the boundaries of genre”, and in response to Wolfe’s magnum opus, *The Book of the New Sun* (1980-83), Ian Watson likens it to “a chain of conjuror’s scarves...for what we sense as each emerges is a new and deeper level of reality beneath the one that dazzled us just now”. While these recommendations are all glowing in one way or another, they reveal a common observation: that in Wolfe there is something just beyond reach which adds to his appeal. His writing is at turns subtle, elusive, or magic, the stuff of a conjuror, whose power always lies in what they conceal from their audience.

This raises a series of intriguing questions: just what eludes the reader of Wolfe? Wherein does his subtlety lie? And how can an object be subtle yet picturesque? Part of the problem is that Wolfe writes neither science fiction nor fantasy strictly speaking, so that even determining his genre is difficult. *The Shadow of the Torturer* (1980), henceforth referred to as *Shadow*, is emblematic of this generic discrepancy. Initially, it presents what Brian Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) calls the “distanced, quasi-medieval worlds” (42) typical of sword-and-sorcery fantasy. The protagonist Severian’s gaze comes to rest upon many of the icons typically associated with fantasy. There is an imposing citadel, a barbican, and an assemblage of guards bearing pikes. Characters talk of witches who “have supernatural knowledge and premonitions” (Andre-Driussi 375), and Severian even carries an amulet which may or may not be magical. But the reader, through subtle clues, discovers that *Shadow* is no stock medieval fantasy; rather, Severian’s world is a *future* earth (Urth), so far-flung that the dichotomy between old and new is essentially overturned, or at the very least,

¹ See *The New Yorker* article “Sci-Fi’s Difficult Genius” (April 2015) by Peter Bebergal for a discussion on Wolfe’s lack of popular appeal.

obscured. *Shadow* is a case of overlap, what Attebery calls “a hybrid form” (106), which results in the subgenre “science fantasy”.

What the reader knows of Urth is inextricably tied to what Severian knows of it. Narrated in the first-person, *Shadow* functions as a kind of quasi-autobiography in the vein of Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913). Due to this, there is no analytic or omniscient narrator to fill in the blanks of Severian’s apprehension; the questions of *who sees* and *who speaks* find consolidation in him alone. In this sense, any elusion on behalf of the novel is due to the narration of its proposed “author”: Severian the Lame, Autarch in the last year of the old sun. The quirkiness of Severian’s narration should not be understood as a strategy, but suggests, more significantly, the very epistemological constitution of the world he inhabits. Significances sometimes elude the reader because they defy Severian as well. This is a world in which incredible interstellar technologies can appear old, mythic, sometimes sword-and-sorcery fantastic and vice versa.

While not entirely novel, as stories fusing elements from science fiction and fantasy range from the early pulp endeavors of Edgar Rice Burroughs to Ursula Le Guin’s “Hainish Cycle” (1966-1974), there is something peculiar about *Shadow* at the level of its narrative discourse. According to Attebery, “the effect of these stories [science fantasy] is a product of their juxtaposition of two rhetorics, two ways of speaking about and, hence, of perceiving the fictional universe” (119). Attebery goes on to stress that the achievements of Le Guin rely on the “contrast between high and lower technologies” (121; emphasis added), and as it pertains to Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), “the story would not be complete without both kinds of narratives” (121). Thus, the productive quality of science fantasy would lie not only in combining the two genres, but in the contrast of their respective worldviews.

The following dissertation will argue that *Shadow* departs from the way in which Attebery claims generic fusion applies to science fantasy. Instead of juxtaposing fantastic and scientific elements, so making each mode of seeing explicit, Wolfe avoids any marked dialogue between the two in order to bring about “the undivided perception from which myth emerged” (Attebery 119). Severian’s vision is mythic precisely because it does not distinguish between the two. This is embodied in the manner Severian describes the autonomous spacecraft which takes him to Ocean: “that ship was worked by hands I could not see” (*Sword & Citadel* 544). It is the narrator’s inability to concretize the things of their lifeworld as either technological or magical which produces that quality which Wolfe’s peers laud as his unique subtlety, elusiveness, or magic. Severian’s is a metaphysic just out of reach.

Science Fantasy – A Brief History of Genre(s)

Science fantasy results from combining elements from science fiction (SF) and fantasy literature. Virtually any bookstore one visits is bound to lump the two genres together; they share the same shelf space, and typically attract a similar audience². In addition to this, Brian Attebery claims that the genres sometimes overlap thematically. This overlap results in what is defined as *science fantasy*, “a hybrid form [that] can with equal justice be defined either as a form of fantasy that borrows from science fiction or as a subgenre of science fiction drawing inspiration from fantasy” (Attebery 106). Before venturing further into the domain of science fantasy, it is worth investigating the particularities of its parent genres, SF and fantasy.

In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), Farah Mendlesohn states that “[s]cience fiction is less a genre – a body of writing from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes – than an ongoing discussion” (1). Because of this, SF is at liberty to experiment with the tropes and plot structures that define other genres, even those considered *realistic*. For example, in the mystery novel there is always something to be ‘unraveled’ or solved. Likewise, the romance invariably involves the confrontation of two individuals and the reconciliation of their passions. In a work of horror, the “intrusion of the unnatural into the world” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 2) is bound to occur, such as the invisible monster in H. P. Lovecraft’s *The Dunwich Horror* (1929) which quite literally bursts upon and rampages the Massachusetts countryside. If SF can conceivably borrow elements from any available literary genre, what gives it a recognizable form so that one can even begin to approach it as a genre?

Mendlesohn argues that all instances of SF are “centered on what has been termed the ‘sense of wonder’” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 3). She even goes so far as to write that “[f]or the first fifteen years of the development of genre sf (from the mid-1920s), it was the basic narrative” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 3). Early, golden-age examples of genre SF usually relied on the representation of marvelous inventions, or on the protagonist’s arrival at an alien place³. These themes carry with them questions of “what if?” which are still crucial to contemporary SF, “and has led to the most

² See Brian Attebery’s discussion on the development of genres in his chapter on Science Fantasy in *Strategies of Fantasy* (105-107).

³ See Mendlesohn’s discussion on early, golden-age SF in their introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (1-11).

popular interpretation of ‘sf’: speculative fiction” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 4).

To speculate and wonder, to be occupied with the outlandishly possible: this is the emotional heart of SF literature. Brian Stableford, in his chapter on the history of pre-genre SF, presents the argument that the earliest examples of SF originated in utopian fantasy, “whose usual narrative form was the imaginary voyage” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 15). This form offered writers the freedom to speculate on various *what ifs*, such as Johannes Kepler’s *A Dream* (1634), which “includes an ingenious attempt to imagine how life on the moon might have adapted to the long cycle of day and night” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 16). Nevertheless, these tales, according to Stableford, labored under several handicaps. Stableford cites a “chronic frivolity” that infected the stories as they entered regions which pedestrians or sea-faring ships could not access. Writers at the time simply could not rely on scientific know-how to make their speculations plausible, and gaining access to the future could only be represented through dream states or having their characters sleep for incredibly long periods of time.⁴ Furthermore, in these early works of utopian fiction scientists themselves were often targets of satire, rather than celebration. While utopian fantasy was speculative, it was not strictly *scientific*.

Stableford notes that “[m]odern historians of sf often locate the origins of British scientific romance in the works of Mary Shelley, although the Gothic trappings of *Frankenstein* (1818) place it firmly within the tradition of anti-science fiction” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 19). Instead, Stableford sees Edgar Allen Poe’s prefatory essay attached to reprints of “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall” (1835) as “the first tentative manifesto for modern sf” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 19). This is because the essay stressed the need for verisimilitude when it came to speculation about the future and the extension of travellers’ tales beyond earth’s atmosphere. For the speculative aspect of SF to really function, it had to be rooted in the scientifically plausible, not the mere fantastic. Essentially, Poe demonstrated the limitations of both travellers’ tales and visionary fantasies by exposing their very *non-scientific* underpinnings and explanations.

Many subsequent authors championed Poe’s views, such as Jules Verne and M.P. Shiel, but it was H.G. Wells who really continued Poe’s determination to combine speculation with a degree of verisimilitude. As Stableford writes:

⁴ See Stableford’s chapter on early forms of SF in *The Cambridge Guide to Science Fiction* (15-31)

[t]he idea of mesmerically induced ‘true visions’ no longer commanded the least shred of plausibility,... he took advantage of articles by C.H. Hinton collected in *Scientific Romances* (1886), which popularized the idea of time as a ‘fourth dimension’, to provide an apologetic jargon for a new facilitating device: *The Time Machine* (1895). (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 24)

This is an example of speculation grounded in rational enquiry. Wells does not relegate his character’s access to the future by way of dreams or the extended sleep episodes of earlier utopian fantasies; rather, his characters seek justification in the scientifically plausible. In this case, the burgeoning notion of a fourth dimension. Stableford is convinced that “Wells single-handedly laid the groundwork for the distinctive methods of modern sf” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 25). This influence is seen in “the magazine era” of SF (1926-1960), where “the best way to sneak in scientific content was to offer readers the traditional pleasures of popular fiction” (*The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 33). The requirement for scientific validation extends to the New Wave and backwash SF of the 70s and 80s, whose practitioners did not share their forebear’s blind allegiance to scientific method, but nevertheless grounded their work in a dialogue with scientific progress. A quick glance at relatively contemporary work in the field of SF shows a marked occupation with advancements in science, such as Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Red Mars* (1992), which projects a situation where Mars is terraformed by methods considered technically plausible at the time of its being written.

Thus, if SF is not a genre as Farah Mendlesohn claims, it can be viewed as a discourse that relies on scientifically grounded speculation. SF, for readers and authors alike, is the space in which one can *reasonably* dream of what the future may hold.

Fantasy, on the other hand, “is about the construction of the impossible” (1), as Mendlesohn argues in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012). It is, like SF, difficult to pin down or situate as a genre. In *The American Tradition of Fantasy* (2003), Brian Thomsen proposes that “we view fantasy as a group of texts that share, to a greater degree or other, a cluster of common tropes which may be objects but which may also be narrative techniques” (4). These tropes range from the portal-quest, which sees a protagonist enter another world, to the dragons, castles, and elves which characterize stock high fantasy.

Historically, fantasy is tied to the purely imaginative. In *Elements of Criticism* (1762), Lord Henry Home Kames writes that “this singular power of fabricating images without any foundation in reality is distinguished by the name *imagination*” (669). This immediately signals a break with SF, which demanded a foundation supplied by the realities of scientific

progress. Gary K. Wolfe, in the chapter “Fantasy from Dryden to Dunsany”, claims that “it was Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1817 distinction between fancy and imagination that set the stage for [...] critical debate [...] and that arguably surrounded the birth of the modern fantasy narrative” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 9). For Coleridge, as Wolfe explains, fancy is a mode of memory, while “the imagination represents something new and entirely different” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 9). To imagine is to render the fantastic, the new, or the entirely alien not indebted to any memorial experience of the world. Still, Coleridge’s musings failed to really champion the fantastic in the public’s eyes, evidenced by Sir Walter Scott’s estimation in the essay “On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition” (1827) that “fantastic elements be ‘rare, brief, indistinct’, yet characterized by ‘philosophical reasoning and moral truth’” (4). This reveals an attitude which Wolfe claims dominated the late eighteenth century’s discourse around fantastic literature, where any fantastic invention “required some sort of extra-literary rationale” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 10), not entirely different than the thematic demands witnessed in the field of SF.

The link to modern fantasy materializes with the rise and subsequent popularity of the *Kunstmärchen* (literary fairy tales). Wolfe cites the 1812 story “The Elves” by Ludwig Tieck as a predecessor to the “portal fantasy” type touched upon previously in this chapter. In the story, a little girl crosses a forbidden bridge and “finds herself in a verdant world of tall, beautiful elves and elemental spirits” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 12). This illustrates fantasy literature’s unique mode of seeing: the speculation of things which are not bound to scientific plausibility but explore the wildly irrational – or in other words, the impossible.

The revival of literary fairy tales most likely had a significant influence on George MacDonald (1824-1905), “sometimes credited as the author of two of the earliest modern fantasy novels” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 13). Not only did MacDonald’s novels anticipate and prefigure modern fantasy narratives, but he was a friend of Charles Dodgson, and “urged Dodgson to publish what would become the most famous of all Victorian fantasies, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1863)” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 14). The influence of German fairytales is immense in the Victorian era, which is often seen as “something of a golden age of children’s fantasy” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 14). Avril Coleridge-Taylor wrote a German-influenced fairy tale titled *Phantasmion* (1837), which among other things fantastic contained a fully realized secondary world. The construction of a “secondary world” is vital for modern

fantasies of the “immersed” set, from Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* (1954) to Steven Erikson’s popular high fantasy *Gardens of the Moon* (1999).

But the success of the fantastic during the Victorian period is not relegated to children’s literature. Wolfe claims there was a “substantial tradition of adult fantasy, even if it operated nearly in exile” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 14). He goes on to mention how the “ghost story” thrived during this period, as seen in Charles Dickens’ classic *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and other stories which featured substantial fantastic elements like Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu’s *Carmilla* (1872), an example of early vampire literature. During this period William Morris, “[t]oday largely remembered for his association with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and the arts and crafts movement” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 15), produced an extended short story that contained a detailed secondary world which had “a crucial influence on fantasy writers such as David Lindsay and J. R. R. Tolkien” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 15). These secondary worlds represent a *construction of the impossible*, which decidedly set them apart from their SF brethren. Instead of a *what if* based on the possibilities afforded by contemporary science, they are founded on unbounded imaginary visions: they contain worlds and events which simply never were and perhaps never be.

If the nineteenth century started as an age of the rediscovery of folk and fairy tales, largely borrowed from the work of German writers, Wolfe asserts that “it ended with a renewed interest in returning to these same materials” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 18). Among the most prominent to recycle the fantastic borrowed from folk tales was W.B. Yeats, with his *Fairy and Folk tales of the Irish Peasantry* (1888), which celebrated the mythic. It was also towards the close of the century that animal fantasies “took on a new and more sophisticated literary life” (*The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* 18), such as Rudyard Kipling’s *Jungle Book* (1894) and Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), both of which contained figures of the utterly impossible.

This triumph of the imaginary in a time of almost fanatical rationality had far reaching implications for the fantasy of today, or *genre* fantasy as it is typically referred to. No longer were imagined impossibilities seen as mere flights of fancy. To construct images that had no correlating realistic foundation⁵ came to be a legitimate way of narrating in its own right. This led to a new appreciation of the fantastic and fostered the careers of Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Charles Williams, to name only a few.

⁵ See Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future* for a more critical view of this conviction (57-71)

Returning to the hybrid genre of science fantasy, which *Shadow* is routinely labeled, it is now easier to determine just what Attebery means when he writes that the “fictional form [is] able to make sure of the conventions of science fiction and those of genre fantasy to comment on one another” (106). Both conventions speculate or imagine scenarios outside of what has been, though one is bounded by the reasonably possible, and the other defined by its very impossibility. Or, as Fredric Jameson argues in *Archaeologies of the Future*, fantasy “dreams [a] non-historical vision” (60), whilst SF is saturated by a mode-of-production awareness: it is historized. In *Shadow*, these two metaphysical visions are somehow juxtaposed, or better yet, fused.

In Attebery’s assessment of science fantasy, it is hard not to hear the negative overtones he attributes to traditional SF, and the positives to fantasy which, when combined with the discourse of SF, works to cover up some of the latter’s inherent flaws. For example, Attebery calls the “megatext” of science into question, arguing that “it becomes less and less possible to write about certain things and still call upon that megatext” (108) since certain “icons” or standards in the field of SF have been disputed by science itself. Things which used to have speculative power, such as interstellar travel, aliens, and the colonization of remote planets have been cast in doubt by recent technological understandings⁶. By adding fantasy to the equation, the result has the power to “challenge SF, partly because it pays its own tribute to science” (Attebery 108). This is because “impossibility itself, one of the elements of fantasy, is defined largely through reference to the current scientific worldview” (Attebery 108). Because fantasy essentially affirms impossibility, any flaw that the rational megatext of science may reveal is instead opened onto the realm of myth. But myth is no mere make-believe or code-word for a dead megatext, for as Attebery asserts, they “yet retain their narrative momentum and [...] their congruence with the ways we wish we saw the world” (109).

One of the earliest examples of science fantasy fusion, according to Attebery, is found in the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs. In *A Princess of Mars* (1912), Burroughs uses “the terminology of science fiction for the apparatus of fantasy [which] freed himself from much of the obligation of both forms” (Attebery 112). Fantasy is restricted because of its obligation to narrative closures associated with traditional storylines: the epic quest, the coming-of-age story, and the apocalyptic battle all demand this kind of formal closure. SF, on the other hand, is restricted due to its dependence on the megatext of science, which requires the laws of

⁶ See Attebery’s discussion of this in the chapter on science fantasy in *Strategies of Fantasy* (116).

physics or biology to justify itself. This allowed Burroughs to weave a narrative “ostensibly based on astronomical observation but more closely akin to the lost-world fantasies of H. Rider Haggard” (Attebery 112) while being free of the ethical consistency demanded by fantasy. But not all science fantasy hinges on the writer's desire for formal emancipation. Many of the titles Attebery cites as exemplary of the genre, such as the work of Andre Norton, Anne McCaffrey, and Ursula K. Le Guin, reveal a desire to “combine the truths accessible to each” (Attebery 121) in order to arrive at a new way of seeing. But Attebery, in a curious move, abandons his original proposal that the power of these works results from their ability to *fuse* the scientific and fantastic. For example, when discussing Le Guin's *Rocannon's World* (1966), he writes: “[t]he mix is largely successful and would be more so if...she had kept her magic more rigorously scientific and her magic less eclectic” (121). Likewise, Samuel Delany's genius lies in his ability to “juxtapose the rational and emotional or scientific and magical perspectives” (Attebery 121). Given these examples, and the general rhetorical thrust of Attebery's chapter on science fantasy, it would seem the genre's main function is to *contrast* the opposing worldviews in order to better reveal their respective sets of logic.

Attebery admits that the case is different in *The Book of the New Sun* and *The Urth of the New Sun*. In admiration of Wolfe's accomplishments, he states that “the imagined world [Urth] easily accepts the discourse of either form, for it projects a time when advanced technology represents not the future but the distant past” (123). And due to the naivety of the narrating instance, these technologies of the “past” are never entirely determined as technological, but appear quasi-magical, which in turn “may be only technology more advanced still” (Attebery 123). Attebery goes on to suggest that every facet of Severian's tale is mythic, and that each step “involves his learning another lost secret of the technological past and thereby gaining more control over his life” (124). Conversely, this dissertation will argue that it is the very opposite of this that makes the novel mythological. Though Severian may gain more knowledge of the past, it is rarely, if ever, a technological understanding of things. And even when something technological is imparted to him, it does not register as a technology per se. Additionally, it never feels, throughout the course of *Shadow* or the entirety of *The Book of the New Sun*, that Severian gains any control over his life. If anything, myth is layered upon myth, and anything that may be technological is subsumed by the ambivalence of the telling. Severian always feels compelled by something higher. It is in this unique way that *Shadow* and the subsequent novels in the tetralogy make use of science fantasy's double vision.

Narratology: Mood and Voice

In the foreword to *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), Jonathan Culler tells the reader that “someone who wanted to learn about cars would have no trouble finding a manual, [but] there is no comparable work for the student of literature” (7). Essentially, concepts such as “point of view”, “first-person narrator”, “flashbacks” and the like have developed over the considerable history of literature studies but had never been systematized. Gerard Genette’s labor was an attempt to do just that. Genette sought to “identify, name, and illustrate the basic constituents and techniques of narrative” (Genette 7). Genette does this by submitting Marcel Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu* to the formal concepts of order, duration, frequency, mood, and voice. In his study, Genette is not aiming to interpret Proust’s novel, but instead dwell on the formal complexity of Proust’s unusual, quasi-autobiographical narrative. As Culler points out, this approach allows Genette to expose the “strangeness of Proustian discourse, constantly pointing out how bizarre a construction this novel is” (9). In a similar fashion, my aim is not to interpret or derive any ultimate meaning(s) from Severian’s narrative, but to expose some of the ways its mythic vision is accomplished.

This dissertation will borrow two concepts which Genette develops at length in *Narrative Discourse*. These are “mood” and “voice”, both of which are related to the way in which the discourse is *told*.

The mood of a text hinges on the speaker’s capacity to “tell *more* or tell *less* what one tells, and [tell] it *according to one point of view or another*” (Genette 162; original emphasis). These features determine, to a large degree, the amount in which a narrative is shown or told. To illustrate this, Genette uses an example lifted from Book III of *The Republic* (381 BC), where Plato contrasts the two modes by rewriting a scene from Homer’s *Iliad* (1260-1180 BC) which was originally mimetic in construction. In the original version, Homer writes, “So said he, and the old man was afraid and obeyed his word, and faired silently along the shore of the loud-sounding sea. Then went that aged man apart and prayed aloud to King Apollo, whom Leto of the fair locks bare” (*Iliad*, I, 33). In this excerpt, two features which define a mimetic text are brought to bear: the amount of information (details) and the relative absence of any speaker. Conversely, in Plato’s rewriting, two things occur: there is a suppression of superfluous, or picturesque detail, and the fact that it is *told* is made overt. No longer does it contain realistic effects such as “the loud-sounding sea” and “the fair

locks bare”, and instead of employing direct speech, Plato writes it entirely in direct dialogue, exposing the fact that this is indeed a mediation. The scene no longer tells itself.

Plato’s rewriting affects what Genette metaphorically describes as “distance”. For example, in Homer’s original, the old man “faired silently along the shore of the loud-sounding sea”, details which seek to bring the reader into the scene as if they were also experiencing the material reality of the situation alongside the focalizer. The act of direct speech “so said he” works to make the reader “forget that it is the narrator telling” (Genette 166). These “cardinal precepts” of showing, which is defined by “a maximum of information and a minimum of the informer” (Genette 166) produce a mood. In this case, one of self-immanence: the reader is invited *into* Homer’s world, one in which “delight in physical existence is everything to them [the world’s inhabitants]” (Auerbach 13). Whereas in Plato’s version the reader hears of the world from a distance. In Homer, the narration comes from within the story (direct discourse), whereas in Plato, the narrator is without, looking down on events from up high: “And the old man on hearing this was frightened and departed in silence” (Genette 165). Mood is determined by the position of the narrator in relation to what is told.

The category “voice” is not concerned with the way a narrative is told, but with “*who* tells it, where, and when” (Genette 212). Effectively, it focuses on the situation of the speaker in time and space. Genette calls this the “narrating instance”. This situation is not to be confused with the instance of the author writing the work, as Genette points out “the role of the narrator is [always] itself fictive, even if assumed directly by the author” (213).

The examination of voice is restricted to the elements of “time of narrating”, “narrative level”, and “person”, though this dissertation will take “place” into account as well. “Time of narrating” focuses on the interval between the narrated action and the narrating instance. *Shadow* is told in the past tense, but this does not necessarily indicate “the temporal interval which separates the moment of the narrating from the moment of the story” (Genette 220). What is more, this interval can and inevitably does change throughout the course of the narrative. The more a narrator tells of his past, invariably the closer the story comes to the instance of its narration. This shortening is not readily felt by the reader, for narrative has the queer function of making its duration irrelevant: the narrating would seem to involve an instantaneous action, or the representation of a constant present. This makes “time of narrating” a fascinating inquiry. As Genette notes, in reference to *A la recherche du temps perdu*, “the uniform use of the past tense...does not allow this gradual shrinking to be imprinted in the very texture of the narrative discourse, but we have seen that to a certain

extent Proust had succeeded in making it felt” (225). Thus, according to narratology, the critic’s task (as regards “time of narrating”) is to identify places in a narrative where the shortening of the interval between the narrating instance and the events narrated is made manifest. In a sense, quasi-autobiographical fiction never draws towards its end, but towards its origin: that moment the story overtakes or merges with its maker.

“Narrative level” distinguishes which events are inside the narrative proper, and which are without. Genette illustrates this by using an example from the French novel *Manon Lescaut* (1731), where the narrator Chevalier des Grieux speaks of past adventures to an audience in the “Lion d’or”. In this case, what separates the storytelling at the inn and the episodes recounted “is less a [temporal] distance than a sort of threshold represented by the narrating itself, a difference of *level*” (Genette 228; original emphasis). This shows how the actions of the hero, which one may think of as the main story, are contained and framed by another: the situation of it being told at the inn.

Genette stresses that “*any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed*” (228; original emphasis). This notion of embedded narratives can be better understood by using *The Book of the New Sun* as an example. Placing the events a narrator recounts at a level “higher” adds a kind of qualitative emphasis on the diegetic action, but what Genette means is that at the *bottom* (lowest), one places the extradiegetic narrator, in this case the ‘G.W.’ who has supposedly translated Severian’s manuscripts from a “a tongue that has not yet achieved existence” (*Shadow* 275). Next, on the second level, one is faced with the intradiegetic narrator: the Severian who narrates his past. The next, or third level, are the events the intradiegetic narrator recounts, though this is not necessarily the “highest”, depending on where one is in the course of the story. For example, the narrated Severian could begin his own story *within* the narrative, thus creating another “bubble”, or level, which would be the ‘highest’ narrative level. For example, when Severian relates “The Tale of the Boy Called Frog” from his brown book in *The Sword of the Lictor* (1981) the narrative of *Frog* becomes the “highest”. Examining the levels in a narrative potentially calls the “primary” narrative into question. For example, in her review of *Narrative Discourse*, Shlomith Rimmon asks: “What, for example, is the primary narrative of Nabokov’s *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*? Is it Sebastian’s reconstructed life or the narrator’s quest for his half brother’s biography?” (“Comprehensive Theory of Narrative” 59). Common sense would say that it is of course Sebastian’s life (hence the title), but a closer look at embedded levels may reveal that it is quite the opposite. The same goes for *Shadow*, whose primary narrative may not be

what is first suggested but is only a commentary on the primary story: Severian's impending religious-mystical advance into the stars.

The last category that Genette's chapter on "voice" focuses on is the "person" of the narrator. "Person" is pertinent when dealing with an example of autobiographical fiction. As Genette notes, there are always two subjects the reader encounters: the narrating I and the narrated I. These are distinguished by "a difference in age and experience that authorizes the former to treat the latter with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority" (Genette 252). One need only think of their own memories in relation to their current self to see that this is undoubtedly the case. Time and experience have a way of changing who we are. Not only does the narrating I know more than the narrated I, he or she knows how their story will unfold: they know the *secret* which is withheld so that the reader can follow along with the narrated in their ignorance of the future. Genette argues that "the two voices can blend and merge, or spell each other in a single speech" (253). Furthermore, Genette observes that "the hero's [narrated I] *I thought* can be written "I understood"...that is, can coincide with the narrator's *I know*" (254), a feature that is prevalent in the discourse of *Shadow*.

By applying these narratological categories to *Shadow* I seek to accomplish two things. First, I want to illuminate the peculiarities of Severian's discourse. This seems a logical first step when approaching a novel that is so heavily mediated and maintained by a narrator. Second, I believe that much of the way myth is constructed in the novel rests on the way it is narrated. By subjecting the narrative to the categories of "mood" and "voice", I will identify the discursive sites where myth arises in the final section of the analysis.

A Note on Myth

This dissertation will submit *Shadow* to the concept of myth developed by Attebery in *Strategies of Fantasy*. As has already been mentioned, Attebery's claim is that myth functions as an undivided perception of phenomena. Attebery traces this through the work of Owen Barfield, who argues that language, and thus thought, did not always split things “into contrasted pair—the abstract and the concrete” (Barfield 85), but at one time posited the “natural symbol and [its] spiritual significance [as] one and the same” (Attebery 119). This produced a *mythological* reckoning of the world. According to Attebery, for example, Barfield argued that the word *spirit* did not denote something that was particularly concrete nor abstract but incorporated both. The older conception of spirit “meant something that was not exactly “wind” and not exactly “life”” (119). In *Shadow*, Severian perceives things as if they were at the same time scientific and magical. This produces a narrative that is essentially mythical, without any explicit contrast between the categories. The novel functions as a kind of pure science fantasy.

On Mood: A Question of Distance and Perspective

The following analysis will emphasize five settings in *Shadow*. These consist of the Citadel and its necropolis, the Water Way, the Rag Shop, the Botanical Gardens, and The Inn of Lost Loves, in whose proximity Severian's first overt miracle is accomplished. It is not for nothing that the chapter names of the *Solar Cycle* often refer to the material settings in which the corresponding action takes place: "The House Azure", "The Hut in the Jungle", "The Showman's Tent", "The Widow's House", "The Sand Garden", and so on. The abundance of these headings indicates the importance of *place* in the development and outcome of Severian's narrative. These settings will be analyzed through the narratological categories "mood" and "voice". The first two sections will be devoted to each respective category: "mood", which involves narrative distance and character focalization; and "voice", which emphasizes "the person who reports it, and, if need be, all those people who participate" (Genette 213). The third and final section will argue that these formal narrative features help give rise to the mythical texture of the work.

During the opening chapter Severian experiences the rapture of memory: "Every rattling chain and whistling wind, every sight, smell, and taste, remains changeless in my mind...I remember the feel of my own hands as I rubbed my arms, and the lantern bobbing among the steles" (*Shadow* 4). The narration presents what Gerard Genette deems "mediated intensity"; a marked "transgression, a rejection pure and simple...of the millennial opposition between diegesis and mimesis" (168). Traditionally, diegetic fiction is not rich in scenic detail. It does not seek to produce what Barthes' calls a *realistic effect* ("The Reality Effect" 11). As an attempt at pure narrative it lacks the *intensity* of presence found in the referential illusion maintained by realist literature⁷. Diegetic fiction can be viewed as a mode of telling, as opposed to the self-emanate showing characteristic of mimetic efforts. The diegetic mode presents, as it were, the representation of telling. Mimesis, on the other hand, demands the "absence (or minimal presence) of the informer" (Genette 166). A mimetic text seeks to evoke a world governed by the senses, hence the emphasis on setting and materiality. A mimetic text "shows" by referencing phenomena which can be empirically observed. Norman Friedman notes that this is typically done by filtering the action "through the consciousness

⁷ See Nancy Armstrong's discussion on literary realism in the introduction to *Fiction in the Age of Photography* (2002), which establishes the argument that the novel is tied to the development of photography.

of one of the characters involved...thus avoiding that removal to a distance necessitated by retrospective first-person narration” (70). The opposition between diegesis and mimesis would then be largely a matter of “distance”.

In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette provisionally states that ““pure narrative” will be taken to be more *distant* than “imitation”: it says less, in a more mediated way” (163; original emphasis). “Distance” is the metaphor applied here because the nature of mediation is an intervening; the more mediated a narrative, the greater intervention between reader and text. This is easily grasped if one considers the transparency of narration in Hemingway’s work, which Genette likens to “a recording”, or camera – circumstances are merely given in their outward appearance, which entails detail, or quality of *scene*. The mimetic features draw the reader closer to the text because they remove, if not entirely, the medium, the *between*, thus placing them in the scene by way of sensual detail.

Shadow works in contrary of this modal opposition. It is a novel simultaneously near and far. Severian, like Marcel, is always “present as source, guarantor, and organizer of the narrative” (Genette 167), yet at the same time the novel consists almost entirely of *scenes* in the Jamesian sense,⁸ furnished with all the necessary details that would render them realistic. The opening chapter, in which the reader is introduced to the Citadel’s necropolis, illustrates this dialectic tension:

It is possible 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. (*Shadow* 1)

The initial sentence serves to make the reader aware of a kind of dual subjectivity at play in the text: “it is possible I already had some presentiment of my future”. This forecasting statement produces a split between narrator and protagonist – they are identical, the *I* of the text, but different: the Severian of the past, who might *possibly* know of his future, and the contemporary narrating instance who certainly does. The sentence which follows reverts squarely to the narrated *I*: the reader is beckoned to see the fog-shrouded gate as it once stood before the group of adolescent torturers. But this orientation is quickly displaced by the last clause, which again establishes distance between the teller and told: it “remains in my mind now”. Furthermore, Severian tells the implied reader that he has “begun this account” of his

⁸ See Genette’s discussion of Henry James’ aesthetics in his chapter on “mood” (168-169).

exile, signaling his writing labor. The last piece of information the paragraph supplies contains a curious testament to the inevitable slippage of recollection: “in which I, the torturer’s apprentice Severian, had so nearly drowned”. Severian would thus seem to both negate and confirm his own subjectivity. This difficulty of addressing a former self unconsciously harasses Severian throughout his narrative: the personal memoir effectively meditates upon the Other, or has-been.

Shadow is decidedly theatrical, both in its treatment of scene and speech. The initial chapter is *scenic*, and pivotal in establishing the subsequent mood and texture of the novel’s world. It is also emblematic of the way the world mixes the scientific and the fantastic. Severian notes its real antiquity, dating from when the autarchs used the Citadel as their stronghold. It is bordered by “the Witch’s Keep, and is separated from the Grand Court” (*Shadow* 10), all stock icons of genre fantasy, though subtly displaced by the admission that “the curtain wall our guild was to help defend was ruinous even then...where I used to climb the fallen slabs of *unsmeltable* gray metal” (*Shadow* 10; emphasis added). The narrator goes to mimetic lengths to bring this ancient necropolis about as a segment of his perceived, material reality:

It was cold and growing colder; we had no light, and the fog had begun to roll in from Gyoll in earnest. A few birds had come to roost in the pines and cypresses, and flapped uneasily from tree to tree...the fog brought out the smell of the river water in my shirt, and the pungency of the new-turned earth. (*Shadow* 4)

These environmental details are essentially useless; they have no bearing on the story or its eventual outcome. Rather, they are there for the sake of mimesis; to show that Severian’s narrative is indeed “governed by “reality,” by the presence of what is there” (Genette 165). However, this abundance of narrative information was preceded by Severian stating that: “It is my nature, my joy and my curse, to forget nothing. Every rattling chain and whistling wind, every sight, smell, and taste, remains changeless in my mind” (*Shadow* 4). Again, the reader is met with the interjection of a narrator who is temporally removed from the event(s) he is describing and is at no pains to hide it; quite the contrary, as the act of Severian writing his memoir becomes a kind of theme in and of itself. Genette argues that Proust’s quasi-autobiography does not let the story tell itself, and that “what we are dealing with is not the story, but the story’s “image”, its *trace* in a memory” (168). In the same way, Severian’s telling constantly asserts itself as “memory”, which he constantly assures the reader is faithful. Even when there is a substantial intensity of detail, the scene is often foreshadowed or marked as recollection: there is a constant movement between the modes of showing and

telling, which is a modulation of “distance”. This modulation is also illustrative of a subjectivity divided by time.

Severian is eventually driven from the Citadel, which up until then was his world entire. After helping a “client” take her life, Severian is exiled and given the means to earn his bread as “a carnifax, who takes life and performs such excruciations as the judicator there decree” (*Shadow* 106). His first night outside the gates of the Citadel, Severian “threaded the narrow streets to the Water Way, which runs with Gyoll” (*Shadow* 113). About this he writes:

Something in me soared, and when the wind whipped my cloak out behind me like wings, I felt I might have flown. We are forbidden to smile in the presence of any but our masters, brothers, clients, and apprentices. I did not wish to wear my mask, but I had to pull up my hood and bow my head lest the passersby see my face. Wrongly I thought I would perish on the way, Wrongly I thought I should never return to the Citadel and our tower; but wrongly too I believed that there were many more such days to come, and I smiled. (*Shadow* 113)

The reader is confronted with the *reality* of Severian’s situation. This excerpt attests to the condition of both his physical and psychological being: the whipping of the wind which caught his cloak made something inside him soar. The first three lines, taken in isolation, would constitute an attempt at realistic representation. But this is quickly effaced by the attached clauses which imply the presence of a removed narrator of events. It is a case of the narrating instance overriding the focalizing figure; of the contemporary *I* high-jacking the narrative which is presumably centered on his former self. It stresses that what Severian felt then is not congruent with the way he feels *now*, at the time of writing. Exemplified is the difference between his former self and the Severian which now relates his story.

Another scene which exhibits the contention between showing and telling is when Severian first encounters Agia, the young shopkeeper who will be the cause of many trials and tribulations throughout his account. While looking for clothing less conspicuous than his torturer’s garb, he is distracted from his search by “a slender woman of twenty or a little more who came out of one of the dark shops to unfasten the gratings” (*Shadow* 132). Struck with a feeling that he describes as “love that was deadly and yet not serious” (*Shadow* 133), he hastens to describe her presence which so transfixes him: “She wore a pavonine brocade gown of amazing richness and raggedness, and as I watched her, the sun touched a rent just below her waist, turning the skin there to the palest gold” (*Shadow* 133). After some consideration, he enters the shop which she and her brother tend, and again sees her coming “from one of the dark storerooms at its rear. With her upturned nose and strangely tilted eyes,

she looked so much like her brother I felt sure they were twins, but the slender figure and delicate features that seemed incongruent in him were compelling in her” (*Shadow* 137). The reader is once more presented with “superfluous” detail whose main function is mimesis: the story could advance accordingly without what Genette describes as these *picturesque indicators*. That she wore a ragged through rich gown, and that she had such and such a nose attests to Severian’s *perception* of things present – “what demands to be “shown”” (Genette 165). Translated into the mode of *pure narrative*, or diegesis, the account only needed to record *what happened*: I saw a girl that I greatly desired. I entered the shop and spoke to her brother before seeing her again emerge from one of its storerooms. They looked remarkably alike; twins in fact. Instead, Severian renders the scene in a way typical of mimesis by evoking picturesque, ontic details.

This would be in no way unusual if Severian, as the narrator, did not at once interject after this series of descriptions. After an exaggerated paragraph break, he writes:

Now I begin again. It has been a long time (twice I have heard that guard changed outside my study door) since I wrote the lines you read only a moment before. I am not certain it is right to record these scenes, which perhaps are important only to me, in so much detail. I might easily have condensed everything. (*Shadow* 137)

Not only does he flag something for the reader and place emphasis on the activity of writing, but even concedes that the way he has just described his first encounter with Agia may be wholly unnecessary. Why not condense everything, as he has just stated? Severian complains that he has “spent weary days in reading the histories of my predecessors, and they consist of little but such accounts” (*Shadow* 137) but says nothing more about what made them wearisome. This could be an instance of Severian reiterating Aristotle’s remark in *Poetics* which Hans-George Gadamer argues implies that “history only relates how things actually happened, whereas poetry tells us how things may happen and teaches us to recognize the universal in all human action” (13). Ironically, this would contest Severian’s constant assurances that his memory records everything as it *actually happens*. The narrator thus finds himself a poet and historian both.

The case could also be made that Gene Wolfe speaks to the modern reader here, addressing our insatiable appetite for the *real*. Genette addresses the issue of the mimetic function, explaining:

It goes without saying, for example, that the same text can be received by one reader as intensely mimetic and by another as only slightly “expressive”... [the audience for

the classics] would undoubtedly have found the so richly and minutely described accounts in the naturalistic novel to be only chaotic proliferation. (166)

Could one hardly expect that Severian's hypothetical audience, so far removed in the future, would have had the same expectation for detail? However the case, it can be argued that the reader now experiences the text at a triple remove.

But this "distance" caused by Severian's authorial interjection is only momentary. The reader is brought back into the thick of things when the scene is again furnished: "However that may be, I let the shopkeeper's sister help me adjust the mantle. It could be drawn tightly about the neck, and when it was worn so, my fuligin cloak was invisible beneath it" (*Shadow* 139)

After their meeting at the shop, Agia convinces Severian to accompany her to The Botanic Gardens of Nessus (the major metropolis of Urth) in order to cut an *avern*⁹, which will act as a weapon in his upcoming duel with the mysterious hipparch. The Botanic Gardens turns out to be one of the most disorienting scenes in *The Book of the New Sun*. In the garden's rooms "the Autarch wants some people to remain [in order to] accent the reality of the scene" and where "his archimage, Father Inire, has invested them with a conjuration" (*Shadow* 156). Severian finds himself overwhelmed in these rooms, or mini environs, and meets many a strange and miraculous sight:

For some time we rowed in silence; I saw geese, alive and content for all I could tell, bobbing a long way off; and once, like something in a dream, the nearly human face of a manatee looking into my own through a few spans of brownish water. Beside me, Dorcas plucked a water hyacinth and put it in her hair. Except for the vague spot of white on the bank some distance ahead, it was the first flower I had seen in the Garden of Endless Sleep. (*Shadow* 186-187)

This descriptive effort places the reader *in* the scene, almost as if he or she were seeing the world through Severian's eyes or perceiving it through his senses. The world the text erects is self-immanent, despite the use of the pronoun *I* and the narrative distance it entails.

Essentially, the world shows up as something to be sensed. The narrator then disrupts the reading:

Is it possible the flower came into being only because Dorcas reached for it? In daylight moments, I know as well as the next that such things are impossible; but I am

⁹ "An artichoke-like plant of extraterrestrial origin, grown in the Botanical Gardens of Nessus, and used as a lethal weapon by duelists on the Sanguinary Field." (Andre-Driussi 39)

writing by night, and then, when I sat in that boat with the hyacinth less than a cubit from my eyes, I wondered at the dim light. (*Shadow* 187)

Once more, this attests to the plural subjectivity found in the novel. In this case there are two Severians performing the act of wondering: the Severian who wonders how the flower came into being, and the Severian who “wondered at the dim light”. These interjections come as unexpected ruptures in the telling, so that the reader is caught between two modes: one that is distant, and one that encourages the immediacy common to mimesis.

To begin the chapter titled “The Inn of the Lost Loves”, Severian foregrounds his descriptive process by affirming this dissertation’s concentration on scene: “It has been my good fortune – or even fortune, as I may be – that the places with which my life has been largely associated have been, with very few exceptions, of the most permanent character” (*Shadow* 195). Not only does this emphasize the scenic quality of the chapter to follow, but again signals the *narrating* presence; the mature Severian whose nature is different from that of the character the reader follows. Nevertheless, both appear entangled in scenes. The temporal divide between the two ‘subjects’ is pronounced when he writes:

I might tomorrow, if I wished, return to the Citadel and (I think) to the very cot on which I slept as an apprentice. Gyll *still* rolls past my city of Nessus; the Botanic Gardens *still* glitter in the sun, faceted with those strange enclosures wherein a single mood is preserved for all time. (*Shadow* 195; emphasis added)

This passage effectively signals what is at stake at this stage in the analysis. Namely, the idea of subjectivity dispersed across time and space (“distance”).

Shadow is narrated by Severian, the novel’s hero and central protagonist. The reader rarely, if ever, leaves his point-of-view. Severian never disappears as character or narrator, and the events which make up *Shadow* and the entire *The Book of the New Sun* revolve around his I like constellations. Gerard Genette calls this a “restriction of field” (189), or “the question [of] *who sees*” (186). The question may be better formulated as *who perceives*. As Roman Ingarden argues:

If, in our reading, we want to apprehend the world exactly as it is represented, we must, so to speak, fictitiously transpose ourselves into the presented center of orientation and wander about in the represented world in *fictione* with the given person. (231)

But what the person apprehends around them the fictive world is not limited to sight data alone. It is sometimes given to the whole apparatus of their perception. For example, when

Severian describes the opening episode in the necropolis, he “felt” it was growing colder. He could “hear” a few birds flapping uneasily in the trees, and he could “smell” the river water in his shirt. Everything is related to the narrative’s center of orientation through what he perceives sensually around him. It is through this process that the reader forgets their own orientation and replaces it with a character’s or narrator’s; they step *into* the story. The reader transposes themselves.

Since the narrator and protagonist in *Shadow* are the same entity, the problem of focalization would at first seem minimal. Much of the novel seems focalized through the perceptions of the protagonist Severian (the narrated I), though Genette rightly claims that “the “autobiographical” type of narrator, whether we are dealing with a real or a fictive autobiography, is – by the very fact of his oneness with the hero – more “naturally” authorized to speak in his own name” (198). It sometimes becomes unclear which Severian is acting as the focalizer, whether it is the narrating I or the narrated I. This phenomenon is not always announced; on the contrary, at times the reader is only able to determine which Severian *perceives* with respect to the knowledge he purports. Autobiographical fiction, according to Genette, does not have to respect the ignorance of its cast; “the autobiographical narrator, having no obligation of discretion with respect to himself, does not have this kind of reason to impose silence on himself” (198). Nevertheless, for the most part Severian places a kind of restriction on himself. The suspense of the narrative is upheld largely by the limitation of the hero’s knowledge.

Returning to the opening scene in the necropolis, which for Severian had “never seemed a city of death” (*Shadow* 15), there is a passage which neatly illustrates the issue of dual focalization. Severian relates that “the men had no armor, as I could soon see by the sickly yellow light of the lanterns; but they had pikes, as Drotte had said, and staves and hatchets” (*Shadow* 2). This is clearly a case of the action being filtered through the perception of the narrated Severian. The reader is orientated by what Severian witnesses, and the particulars of the approaching militiamen are brought about almost as if he or she (the reader) were perceiving them. This is what Jean Pouillon describes as “vision from behind” (22). The represented world is given to the reader as if he or she were looking over the shoulder, or through the eyes, of the focalizer. What makes this instance confounding is that the narrator foreshadows these mimetic effects by writing:

In the recesses of my mind we stand shivering there even now. Just as all that appears imperishable tends towards its own destruction, those moments that at the time seem the most fleeting recreate themselves – not only in my memory (which in the final

accounting loses nothing) but in the throbbing of my heart and the prickling of my hair, making themselves new just as our Commonwealth reconstitutes itself each morning in the shrill tones of its own clarions. (*Shadow 2*)

This passage presents a clear case of dual focalization. The scene is made anew by the *trace* of its memory; it is what the hero presumably apprehended all those years ago, but the narrating source recreates the event from memory. At the time, the hero's apprehension of those moments appeared fleeting, but now, at the time of writing recreate themselves perfectly. The scene is focalized somewhere between who speaks and who perceives, in the space of recollection which marries both.

Later during the necropolis episode, Severian fatefully intervenes in a skirmish that takes place between the militiamen and a trio of grave robbers. Now in fixed internal focalization through the hero, Severian describes his predicament: "All this took place in dark and fog. I saw it, but for the most part the men were no more than ambient shadows – as the woman with the heart – shaped face had been. Yet something touched me. Perhaps it was Vodalus's willingness to die" (*Shadow 7*). In the very same paragraph, the focalization then reverts to Severian the narrator, when he stalls the action to muse on its lingering psychological effect:

Many times since then, when I have stood upon a shaky platform in some market-town square with *Terminus Est* [Severian's carnifical sword] at rest before me and a miserable vagrant kneeling at my feet...I have recalled Vodalus at the graveside, and raised my own blade half pretending that when it fell I would be striking for him.
(*Shadow 7*)

This interjection shifts the focalization away from the hero who is in the act of saving Vodalus, who felt in that instant that his "whole life teetered in the scales with his" (*Shadow 7*). Focalization is thus driven through the narrator and presented as an image of recollection. The above passage illustrates what Genette calls an *advance notice*, and "such notification cannot be the hero's doing, but must of course be the narrator's" (205). The Severian who wrestles with the militiamen cannot possibly have knowledge of how this scene will later affect him, or that he would eventually be forced to make his living by performing executions in market-towns. If the reader indeed perceives the vagrant kneeling before this future Severian, it is through the focalizing perspective of the narrating I.

After having taken leave of Master Palaemon and the universe he has known since birth, Severian makes his way to the Water Way, where to ask for hospitality in one of the

decrepit buildings lining it “would have been an invitation to death” (*Shadow* 113). Now fixed on the internal perception of the narrated Severian, the passage reads:

With the broad blade slung behind my left shoulder, I made my way through the corpse door and out into the windy garden of the necropolis. The sentry at the lowest gate, nearest the river, allowed me to pass without challenge, through with many a strange look, and I threaded the narrow streets to the Water Way, that runs with Gyoll. (*Shadow* 113)

The reader follows the hero Severian into the heart of the vast city of Nessus. Aside from the *I* which signals the act of telling, the narrator disappears in this passage. One could merely replace the *I* with *he* to produce an analytic internal observation of events. The contemporary narrating Severian is thoroughly dissolved in the action of the hero-protagonist. What is recorded in the next paragraph is more problematic, as it is difficult to determine just whose feelings they are when Severian writes that the “watches of that afternoon were the happiest of my life” (*Shadow* 113). Is it the narrating Severian who feels the joy of recollection, or the narrated hero who once traversed these destitute avenues in route to his destiny? Or do the subjects converge here?

Severian’s confession that: “Now I must write something that still shames me, even after all that has occurred. The watches of that afternoon were the happiest of my life” (*Shadow* 113) is a key feature of this passage. That it *still* shames him testifies to the fact that both the hero and the narrator felt and feel something akin to shame despite themselves, though its source may be not be the same. But the next line clearly turns focalization back to the narrator, to the Severian of long ago, who surely could not have known in advance that these moments would be the happiest of his life. In fact, he later remarks about the same occasion that “wrongly...I believed that there were many more such days to come, and I smiled” (*Shadow* 113). This last statement contains an especially curious instance of dual focalization, as it expresses the mindset of both the hero and the narrator simultaneously. The hero Severian believed that the happiness he felt would last so long as he was footloose, but it is at the same time considered anew by the narrating Severian: “wrongly I believed”. The memory thus shows up to the reader at a double remove -- it is remediated by the narrating I.

In chapter XVI, “The Rag Shop”, Severian attempts to disguise his ominous profession by purchasing a “voluminous mantle of some cheap stuff” (*Shadow* 132) that could be worn over his guild’s habit. In many shop windows Severian sees “saddle blankets, saddles with armored pommels to protect the loins, red forage caps, long-shafted khetens, fans of silver for signaling, bows curved and recurved for the use by cavalry” (*Shadow* 132) and so on. Before

listing these items, Severian writes “though I knew nothing of it at the time, thousands of mercenaries were outfitting themselves for the summer campaign” (*Shadow* 132). Which Severian is seeing these items, the hero or the narrator? Could the green Severian, who had until then spent his existence in the Matachin Tower, possibly know that the “fans of silver” had some military function? Or that the “bows curved and recurved” were used exclusively by cavalry regiments? Any who have read the entirety of *The Book of the New Sun* knows that Severian later partakes in the campaign he alludes to here. Though even in *The Sword of the Lictor*, whose events are months removed from this scene, Severian confesses that “I had never so much as seen a battle, much less taken part in one” (254). Thus, the hero Severian may have seen the silver fans in the window, but the narrator properly *names* them. The hero Severian looked at the bows, but the narrator places them into a context. In this circumstance, it is the narrator who is clearly representing them as memory compounded by lived experience. It is as if the image of Severian looking in storefronts is driven through two consciousnesses. This is an example of how the narrative is often at the same time immediate and highly mediated.

After purchasing an appropriate mantle to conceal his identity, Severian writes that he: let the shopkeeper’s sister help me adjust the mantle. It could be drawn tightly about the neck, and when it was worn so, my fuligin cloak was invisible beneath it. Still without revealing myself, I could reach through the front or through the slits at the sides. I unfastened Terminus Est from her baldric and carried her like a staff for as long as I wore that mantle. (*Shadow* 139)

One is with Severian the protagonist when he practices cinching the mantle at the neck. At least it initially seems that way. But the last line causes a minor displacement which invites a reassessment of this entire scene: he “carried her like a staff for as long as [he] wore the mantle”, an observation that the hero could not have made at the time. That these words refer to a memory, and not a present act, reasserts itself through commentary only the narrating I is privy to. And it is not only that. The reader is shown the memory. It is a matter of the present showing us the past.

In confessing his ambivalent feelings towards the shopkeeper’s sister Agia, Severian explains: “I have already told how strongly I desired Agia. When we are talking to women, we talk as though love and desire are two separate entities; and women, who often love us and sometimes desire us, maintain the same fiction” (*Shadow* 208). Not only does the statement “I have already told” signal the act of narrating, thus producing a “distance”, but it additionally causes the sentences which follow to point to the psychology of the narrator, not

the hero in the moment he sees Agia coming down the steps carrying his avorn “which seemed to [him] to have grown larger in the failing light” (*Shadow* 208). The focalization through the narrator continues when he muses, “but no one can say from what it is that what we call (almost at our pleasure) *love* or *desire* is born” (*Shadow* 208) before reverting to fixed internal focalization, where the hero Severian perceives “Agia...[coming] down the stair, one side of her face was lit by the last light of day, and the other thrown into shadow; her skirt, split nearly to the waist, permitted a flash of silken thigh” (*Shadow* 209). A few lines later, it is as if Severian intends to excuse his authorial interjections by claiming that “I understood all this” (*Shadow* 209). This confession would imply that he may have intuitively or vaguely grasped this conflict between love and desire, but it is only the narrating I, Severian the Lame, who can put it into words and express it as such.

In the Botanic Gardens, there are several events which highlight this phenomenon. Upon entering the room labeled Jungle Garden, Severian explains:

Even now, as I sit at my writing table in the House Absolute, some distant noise brings back to my ears the screams of the magenta-breasted, cynaeous-backed parrot that flapped from tree to tree, watching us with white-rimmed and disapproving eyes—though this is no doubt because my mind was already turned to that haunted place.
(*Shadow* 158)

The reader is both with Severian the hero as he enters the strange structure, and with the narrator who recalls the event. One visualizes the scene as if he or she were striding alongside Severian, but it is marked as a recollection: “as I sit at my writing table”. The focalization is essentially *through* the narrating I in his act of remembrance. There is a noise about the narrator which merely recalls the screams of the parrot and the situation of the hero long ago. This is an extreme case of both showing and telling, where speaker and perceiver nearly converge through a single focalizing lens.

The scenes selected highlight how distance and focalization are both important elements in the narrative of *Shadow*. Distance, as was shown, “can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way” (Genette 162). At times the novel is very direct, and the scenes are rendered in a purely mimetic mode with all the attendant details one would expect from a realist novel. In fact, it is nearly as if Wolfe “insists that the world be treated as character” (*Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* 8), a decision symptomatic of SF at large, where description stands in for characterization. But this is not entirely the case, as the narrator’s intensity of presence constantly makes itself known in order to disrupt the illusion of mimesis. The way *Shadow* is told sometimes imposes a

“distance” between itself and the apprehending party, so that what the reader experiences is less direct: that the story is *mediated* becomes a theme in and of itself.

Likewise, the conflict between focalizers affects the way in which narrative information is conveyed. The two instances of Severian have differing capacities of knowledge. The reader aligns these two different viewpoints, which at times seem to coincide and become one, as when Severian *sees* Agia approaching with the ominous avern, though the recollected vision is obviously colored by the present musings of the narrator in retrospect. Genette uses the activity of viewing a picture to succinctly grasp this: “the view I have of a picture depends...on the distance separating me from it [more or less mediation], and...on my position with respect to whatever partial obstruction is more or less blocking it [who sees]” (162). The reader’s access to the text, and the mood which it invokes, is dependent on both distance and perspective.

On Voice: A Question of Time, Levels, and Person

It is not unusual for readers to say that a text *speaks* to them.¹⁰ A text can have a certain style, a particular “voice”. In narratology, the category of ‘voice’ examines the type of discourse employed by the narrator. The type of discourse a narrator employs, and the way it is implicated in the diegesis, affects the way a reader receives, or *hears* a text. Genette is quick to assert that this linguistic metaphor “should not be taken too literally” (30), though the connection is easy enough to make. Essentially, ‘voice’ concerns the narrating instance – the place from which speech issues. It is the narrator a reader hears, so to say.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the narrative discourse that is *Shadow* was not issued by Gene Wolfe, only translated by him. The G.W. which signs the appendixes is a kind of extra-diegetic level beyond the scope of this paper. Rather it is the autarch Severian – or the different *Is* of the text. This person who narrates a fictive account is always itself *fictive*, “even if assumed directly by the author” (Genette 213). As Genette later says, “it is this narrating instance that we have...to look at, according to the traces it has left” (214).

In his chapter devoted to “voice”, Genette reasons that “the importance or the relevance of these implications [considerations of voice] is essentially variable” (212). The very first paragraph of *Shadow* draws the reader’s attention to who is narrating the story. This *I* who narrates in the subsequent is a constant figure of interest to the reader throughout the course of the novel. Severian’s “voice” will be explored through the categories of “time of narrating”, “narrative level”, and “person”. These categories will be loosely applied to the same five scenes reviewed in the previous section.

Shadow is told in the past tense, making it an act of “subsequent narration”.¹¹ Aside from what the verb tenses indicate, the first sentence of the novel reveals that it is the *past* the narrator speaks of: “It is possible I already had some presentiment of *my future*” (*Shadow* 1; emphasis added). Not only is the narrating presence made immediately explicit, but so is the temporal dimension of that presence. The relationship between the time of narrating and the time of narration itself immediately becomes a concern.

The necropolis scene is the most temporally distant from the time of narrating. Severian writes that his companion Eata “indicated the thousands of paces of wall stretching across the slum and sweeping up the hill until at last they met the high curtain wall of the

¹⁰ See Gadamar on play in *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (22-15)

¹¹ See Genette on voice in *Narrative Discourse* (212-220)

Citadel. It was a walk I would take, much later” (*Shadow* 1). The reader experiences this “walk” at a later point in the novel, but the episode in the necropolis is the oldest memory of Severian’s to which he or she are privy, as he begins his account with it in “the aftermath of our swim, in which I, the torturer’s apprentice Severian, had so nearly drowned” (*Shadow* 1). Unlike some forms of autobiographical fiction, where there is “a relative contemporaneity of story time and narrative time” (Genette 220), from the outset Severian’s tale contains indicators, punctuated here and there, which remind the reader of the time separating story and narrative. It is true, as Genette asserts, that “the very length of the story gradually lessens the interval separating it from the moment of the narrating” (221) until there is a final convergence. The reader witnesses this at the close of the *New Sun* tetralogy, where he or she is told:

Here my pen shall halt, reader, though I do not. I have carried you from gate to gate—from the locked and fog-shrouded gate of the necropolis of Nessus to that cloud-racked gate we call the sky, the gate that shall lead me, as I hope, beyond the nearest stars. My pen halts, though I do not. Reader, you will walk no more with me. It is time we both take up our lives. (*Sword & Citadel* 611)

Here, hero and narrator merge into one instance, the space separating the two demolished more and more with each page turned. There is a similar form of closure to *Shadow*, though it does not offer the same kind of convergence that the final scene of the tetralogy does. The time elapsed between the told and the telling is far more indeterminate in *Shadow*. On its final page Severian remarks: “Here I pause, having carried you, reader...from the locked and fog-shrouded gate of our necropolis to this gate with its curling wisps of smoke” (274). This second gate, while closer temporally to the narrating instant, is not a convergence: much remains to be told, as Severian’s memoir attests to: “when I entered this second gate, I began to walk a new road. From that great gate forward, for *a long time*, it was to lie outside the City Imperishable” (*Shadow* 274; emphasis added).

The necropolis marks the beginning of Severian’s journey. This scene contains several clauses which indicate how time has elapsed between the two gates, as previously shown, but the final sentence of the chapter poignantly reminds the reader of this: “It was in this fashion that I began the long journey by which I have backed into the throne” (*Shadow* 9). This evokes a segment of space between the acts narrated and the instance of Severian writing about them.

Similarly, most scenes contain some mark which makes evident this temporal interval. For example, during Severian’s walk along the Water Way, a destitute district of Nessus, he

confides: “Now I must write something that still shames me, even after all that has occurred” (*Shadow* 113). Not only does this signal an extended interval of time between the events and the act of writing, but it also suggests an abundance of drama in that temporal gap. Genette argues that “this temporal interval, and what fills it up and gives it life, is an essential element in the narrative’s significance” (216). Genette is speaking of Proust’s *Recherche du temps perdu*, but these temporal markers play a remarkable similar role in Severian’s narrative. They constantly foreshadow the moments of consequence to follow and lend the narrative a degree of urgency it would not otherwise possess. It also indicates that it is not *now* in the diegetic, but in its future that the major drama occurs: “even after all that has occurred”.

Nevertheless, the “act of narrating” seems to obscure its own temporal dimension. This is not related to the amount of time that elapses between the moment Severian apprehends the fog-shrouded gate and the moment he commits it to paper, but to the actual time which elapses while Severian writes the account. As Genette notes, “narrating involves an instantaneous action, without temporal dimension. Sometimes it is dated, but it is never measured” (222). In The Rag Shop scene, the narrative pauses when Severian seemingly rests his pen to meditate on what he has just recorded of his uncanny encounter with Agia and her brother, the corpse-like shopkeeper, “Now I begin again. It has been a long time (twice I have heard the guard changed outside my study door) since I wrote the lines you read only a moment before” (*Shadow* 137). Thus, Severian addresses the time in which he broke from writing his account, but the actual process of writing *Shadow* is never explicitly measured. It is as Genette reminds one, typical of the subsequent first-person narrative: “it possesses at the same time a temporal situation (with respect to the past story) and an atemporal essence (since it has no duration proper)” (223). Severian may have labored years to produce his manuscript, or it could have taken just the amount of time it takes to read it – a matter of hours.

This sense of atemporality is more pronounced in *The Shadow of the Torturer* due to its general emphasis on the mimetic. When the narrative shifts its focus to the actions and dialogue in the episodes it recounts, the text appears self-immanent, reminiscent of the subsequently told “third-person” novel, where “the preterite marks[s] a sort of ageless past” (Genette 220) and obscures the source of narration. So, even though the narrative is written in the past tense, the events which unfold happen in an indeterminate past that appears nearly like the present. The Botanic Gardens scene illustrates this ever-presentness of the action, where the narrating presence is unusually subdued, and the floor given to Severian the protagonist and his companions:

We entered, and in so doing stepped into such silence as must have been in the morning of the world, before the fathers of men first hammered out brazen gongs, built squealing cartwheels, and splashed Gyoll with striding oars. The air was fragrant, damp, and a trifle warmer than it had been outside. The walls to either side of the tessellated floor were also of glass, but so thick that sight could scarcely penetrate them; leaves and flowers and even soaring trees seen through these walls wavered as though glimpsed through water. On one broad door I read: THE GARDEN OF SLEEP. (*Shadow* 154)

This example, like most of the sentences which comprise *Shadow*, involve an “instantaneous action”; they are neither dated nor measured. The *duration* of the narrating act is never a concern for its readers. Its episodes (and it is a highly episodic novel), are like “minute[s] freed from the order of time” (Genette 223). As it pertains to the “time of narrating” in the novel, it is only important to know roughly how much time elapses between the necropolis scene and the moment when it is evoked: “It was cold and growing colder; we had no light, and fog had begun to roll in from Gyoll in earnest...” (*Shadow* 4). It is in this interval that the drama of memory unfolds.

The location where Severian composes his autobiography is not merely decorative in *Shadow*. Indeed, the location of Severian at the time of his narrating significantly affects the way the reader receives the events it records. Genette claims that “the narrating place is very rarely specified, and is almost never relevant”, and furthermore, that “we scarcely think of worrying about it” (216). But this is not really the case in *Shadow*, where the location in which Severian narrates is explicitly given on several occasions, and the fact that it is *there*, in the remarkable confines of the House Absolute that he takes up the quill adds varying significance to the episodes he relates. It also contributes to the difference between Severian’s two selves: not only are they divided by time, but their stature as well, for the House Absolute is the seat and home of the Autarch, the commonwealth’s ruler. This dissertation argues that it is just as important to know *where* Severian writes as it is to know how much time has elapsed between the moment of narration and the events narrated.

It is easy to claim that what explicitly happens in the novel, from the activities recounted in the necropolis all the way up to Severian’s encounter with the great wall of Nessus, plus the representation of Severian writing about them, is inside the narrative. As has already been illustrated, these two instances are thematically different. This is what Genette defines as a “difference of level” (228). Likewise, the situation of Gene Wolfe producing the

fictive memoir of Severian is what can be described as an extradiegetic, or a third level: one truly outside of the narrative proper. This is the literary instance, as opposed to the composition one attributes to Severian, which is the narrating instance. Thus, *Shadow* contains three discernable levels to investigate. The first is the diegetic or *intradiegetic* act of Severian penning his account. The second is the metadiegetic aspect, which are the events accounted (the story), and the third level is the presence of Wolfe himself as author, or in the case of *Shadow*, its *translator* - the extradiegetic factor.

The metadiegetic elements of a narrative are often associated with stories told within the ‘main’ story, such as dreamscapes, hallucinations, or memorial episodes. The story of Severian’s journey from tower to wall at first appears to be the main story – the intradiegetic one. Nevertheless, the present situation of Severian, at the moment of his writing in the House Absolute whilst waiting to embark on “one of the huge spaceships of the alien Hierodules to travel across time and space...to become the legendary New Sun” (*The Urth of the New Sun* 1) is actually *the* story, the intradiegetic thread. All the objects and persons the reader encounters across its many pages merely confer an explanatory function of this event. As Genette writes, “all these narratives [the metadiegesis] answer, explicitly or not, a question of the type “What events have led to the present situation?”” (232).

The first scene notably heralds this kind of explanatory function which the metadiegesis serves. When Severian closes the chapter with “It was in this fashion that I began the long journey by which I have backed into the throne” (*Shadow* 9) it marks the forthcoming account as one long extended answer to the question of just how he arrived at the threshold of martyrdom.

Taking the episode at the Inn of Lost Loves and the combat which unfolds on the adjacent Sanguinary Field as an example, it can be illustrated just how the metadiegesis confers an explanatory function on the intradiegesis. The reader is already aware that certain parts of the averns with which the contestants duel are fatal if touched. Before Severian carefully plucks his weapon in The Garden of Endless Sleep, the narrator informs the reader: “Whether the avern is deadly to the life of its own world I have no way of knowing. It may be that it is not, that it is only dangerous to us by reason of a nature accidentally inimical to our own” (*Shadow* 190). When Severian meets the Septentrion, a kind of decorated soldier, at the appointed place and hour to settle a score, it is presumably to the death.

Having been hit by one of the avern leaves thrown by his opponent, Severian drops to the ground and proceeds to give an account of the miracle that follows:

The peal of a carillon. The colors, which I had taken to be those of the struggling leaves, were in the sky instead, where a rainbow unrolled beneath the aurora. The world was a great paschal egg, crowded with all the colors of the palette. Near my head a voice inquired, “*Is he dead?*” and someone answered matter-of-factly, “*That’s it.*

Those things always kill. Unless you want to see them drag him off?” (*Shadow* 214)

The impossible happens. Instead of perishing, as all the gathered spectators expect, Severian “drew breath to ask what had happened, and something fell from my chest to my lap; it was a leaf with a bloodstained tip” (*Shadow* 215). While the parallels to the resurrection of Christ are obvious, this scene explains and gives credence to the narrator’s current, intradiegetic role as the New Sun. This miraculous feat, coupled with others that pepper the narrative, contributes to his legitimacy and explains his status. This legitimacy is what lands him on the throne and sets him on his eventual journey beyond our stars: the *real*, diegetic narrative of which *Shadow* is a mere pretext. All the happenings which occur in the metadiegetic, to a more or lesser degree, influence the intradiegetic situation. This may be the main thrust of Severian’s labor, for as he states in the beginning of *The Urth of the New Sun*, “Let me describe then, to no one and nothing, just who I am and what it is that I have done to Urth” (1). Severian’s recourse is memory; which has “always appeared with the intensity, almost, of hallucinations” (*Sword & Citadel* 451).

A detail that is worth exploring briefly is the representation of the extradiegetic personality which closes *Shadow*. While this narrative level is not made explicit in any of the scenes which this analysis highlights, it in some ways frames the metadiegetic and intradiegetic elements of the novel. For example, after Severian writes, “Here I pause. If you wish to walk no farther with me, reader, I cannot blame you. It is no easy road” (*Shadow* 274), there comes a section titled Appendix: A Note on the Translation. This is signed G.W. (Gene Wolfe) and says things such as, “In rendering this book – originally composed in a tongue that has not yet achieved existence – into English, I might easily have saved myself a great deal of labor by having recourse to invented terms” and “Latin is once or twice employed to indicate inscriptions and the like are in a language Severian appears to consider obsolete” (*Shadow* 276). This section introduces a third level of narration by which the other two are made subordinate. Here, the text addresses an actual reading public, contrasted with the imagined readership which Severian envisions when he writes: “The Sanguinary Field, of which all my readers will have heard, though some, I hope, will never have visited it” (*Shadow* 210). Thus, the primary level of narration (the productive efforts of the living author) is juxtaposed with the two secondary, fictive levels. This places the reader at a double

remove from the metadiegesis, marking another case of “distancing” which occurs amidst what is otherwise a heavily mimetic, intimate novel.

Under the heading “person”, Genette makes it clear that “the novelist’s choice, unlike the narrator’s, is not between two grammatical forms, but between two narrative postures” (244). Simply put, a narrative can be told by a character within the story, or some presence without, such as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), where the narrator pieces together the story through the study of historical documents and hearsay. Both these postures can potentially be told in the first-person (grammatical form) but “refer to two very different situations” (Genette 244) at the level of analysis.

The *I* which speaks in *Shadow* obviously does not refer to Gene Wolfe, even ignoring the absurdities entailed given that it is supposedly set thousands of years in earth’s future. Severian as narrator is introduced immediately and nothing is ever leveled against his initial claim as author: it is an autodiegetic narrative. To again quote Genette, “absence is absolute, but presence has degrees” (245). The presence of Severian in *Shadow* is immense; it is evident to the outmost degree. Unlike other famous narrators, such as John H. Watson, who tells the escapades of Sherlock Holmes but sometimes leaves the diegetic universe completely, Severian is *always* there. This is the case even when he listens to “third-degree narratives” told by other characters. They are always for the benefit of his ears, and their contents are always pertinent to his own quest of self-discovery. One could say it is the most self-absorbed of novels.

It is here, regarding “person”, that the reader encounters some of the difficulties associated with the focalized in autobiographical fiction. Genette speaks of this difficulty in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, where “narrative content...widely overflows the hero’s inner experience and at times requires a quasi-” omniscient” narrator” (251). This phenomenon was witnessed when examining the two different focalizing agents in *Shadow*.

The discourse of *Shadow* is stricter in this regard than Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*, which needed “an “omniscient” narrator capable of dominating a moral experience which is now *objectivized*” (Genette 252), or one who could occasionally access the minds of other characters. Conversely, Severian is careful to mark the occasions which border on the omniscient with words like “must”, “seeming”, or “perhaps”. These work to make such instances mere conjectures of what others must be feeling or thinking. For example, when Severian and Agia approach the steps which lead to the Botanic Gardens he receives “a startled glance from a woman carrying a dulcimer [which] told me the mantle I had bought

from Agia's brother was in disarray, permitting the fuligin of my guild cloak (which *must* have looked like mere empty darkness to the poor woman) to be seen" (*Shadow* 150; emphasis added). In this example the reader is never permitted access to the "old woman", but only Severian's own estimation of what caused the expression on her face.

Shortly after this, Severian takes the opportunity to appraise his companion, who, like every woman he seems to encounter, is desired:

Agia's face was far from perfect now in the clear sunshine, but she had nothing to fear from it. My hunger fed at least as ravenously upon her imperfections. She possessed the hopeful, hopeless courage of the poor, which is perhaps the most appealing of all human qualities; and I rejoiced in the flaws that made her more real to me. (*Shadow* 151)

At this point in the narrative, it is odd that Severian would know anything about Agia, especially if she was courageous or not. Furthermore, by stating that she "possessed" those qualities is to insinuate that she embodied them; to talk of the qualities that one embodies is a hallmark trait of the omniscient narrator. Nevertheless, is this only another case of a shift in focalization? With all that Severian comes to know of Agia throughout *The Book of the New Sun* it is safe to say that he could make such an observation without "accessing" her mind. Her actions come to speak of her courage, and her hopefulness or lack thereof. It is a case of the narrating presence interjecting itself into the situation of the hero.

In *The Garden of Sleep* the reader comes as close as they ever will to experiencing an omniscient narrating source. When trying to remain in this enclosure, Severian draws the ire of Agia which he expresses thus:

For an instant I saw a flash of anger in her face. Then it was spread over with an unction of philosophical irony, the secretion of her injured self-esteem. I was far stronger than she, and poor though I was, richer; she told herself now (I felt I could almost hear her voice whispering in her own ear) that by accepting such insults she mastered me. (*Shadow* 156)

"She told herself now" is a clear indication that the reader has now left the "person" of Severian for another; he or she is inside Agia and with her thoughts of mastery. But this transgression is underscored when Severian mentions in parenthesis that he "could almost hear her voice". Consequently, the reader does not hear the interior ruminations of Agia but is still grounded in Severian's own observations of what she must be thinking. It is a situation of extreme intuition on part of the narrator, rather than a transgression of rules.

Severian often prefaces his explanations of how another character in the narrative feels or thinks by referring to his own perception of things. When he and Agia come upon a mysterious hut in the Jungle Garden, he explains that “the man we had seen from the path stood at the window opposite the door, looking out” and that he “felt that he knew we had come...but that he wished to pretend he did not. There is something in the line of the back when a man turns so as not to see, and it was evident in his” (*Shadow* 167). In this instance, the reader is not granted access to the perceptions of the “man”, but the text is again, as is always the case, meditated through Severian’s *seeing*. That the man was in a state of pretense is given to Severian having read outward signs, as an augur of the Long Sun whorl might read the entrails of a sacrifice for unseen portents.

Genette claims that “in any narrative in autobiographical form... [the] erzählende ich (the narrating I) and erzähltes Ich (the narrated I) are separated...by a difference in age and experience” (252). Leaving all considerations of an autobiography written in the present tense aside, this “authorizes the former to treat the latter with a sort of condescending or ironic superiority” (Genette 252). Severian the narrating I does not show this kind of condescension towards his other self; in fact, Severian does not appear to have an sense of irony, then or now. This is perhaps a trait that makes him fit to be the New Sun. Be that as it may, like Marcel, the discontinuity between his two selves over the course of the narrative cannot be “reducible simply to “development” (Genette 253). If a bildungsroman is told in the subsequent first-person, the gap between the narrating I and the narrated I is decreased in proportion “as the hero progresses in “apprenticeship” to life” (Genette 253). Again, like the narrator of *Recherche du temps perdu*, Severian “does not simply know *more*, empirically, than the hero; he *knows* in the absolute sense, he understands the Truth” (Genette 253). In this way, *Shadow* reads part bildungsroman and part religious literature.

Severian must suppress his knowledge of the Truth of which he is now aware when narrating the events of his life. The difference between the narrating I and the narrated I is now no longer only one of maturity; it is the difference between a mortal and a kind of god, or demi-god – Autarch and New Sun, the conciliator come again. Each miracle that Severian performs with the Claw of the Conciliator, a relic the narrated I believes came into his possession by chance, must be represented in such a way as not to reveal the miraculous which is maintained between himself and the fragment of the long dead Conciliator, “a historical messianic figure who lived in the age of Typhon” (Andre-Driussi 90). For example, when Severian dives into the Lake of Birds in the Botanical Gardens to retrieve Terminus Est, he encounters a “hand [that] was pulling my own, drawing me down” (*Shadow* 178).

This hand belongs to Dorcas, a corpse laden with sling-stones that is reanimated through contact with Severian and the relic he carries. But in the scene, Severian exclaims “Whatever she is, she saved me” (*Shadow* 180), reversing and obscuring the reality of the situation that the narrating I knows: the Truth which will only be revealed at the very end of his narrative in *The Citadel of the Autarch* (1982).

It is here, when one acknowledges the “person” of the narrator that the dialogic nature of the novel shines. The narrating I, from the time he writes the first sentence to the time of the last, where the final revelation is revealed, knows who he is and the significance of his status. The metadiegesis ends when convergence happens: “disembodied voices, hundred-tongued, demand[ed] that Valeria report to some antiquely titled personage who I realized with a start must be myself” (*Sword & Citadel* 611). This revelation, during the entirety of the narrative, is concealed for the sake of the narratee.

According to Genette’s narratology, the “narratee” and the “reader” are two separate entities. Both are a kind of receiver of information, and like the aims of reader-response theory, Genette does not think “the receiver’s role here is purely passive, that he is limited to receiving a message he must take or leave” (259). He goes on to say that “nothing would be more contrary to Proust’s convictions” (259), and it would be fair to argue that the same holds true for Gene Wolfe. It is often said that Wolfe demands much from his readers, which is certainly the case with a novel like *Shadow*, which, like Gadamer writes of Franz Kafka’s work, “creates the impression that everything in it actually points beyond itself to something else” (Gadamer 71). But the novel cannot be interpreted as an allegory, as any attempt to decode a meaning in the text is ultimately disappointed. It is as Gadamer remarks: “[it] evokes poetically the mere semblance of allegory and opens out onto a realm of ambiguity” (71). It is amid this “realm of ambiguity” that the reader is demanded to work; realization is a task given to the reader.

Nevertheless, the narratee, unlike the reader, is a presumed audience within the diegesis. The intradiegetic narrator Severian intends his efforts towards an intradiegetic narratee. Even when Severian states in *The Urth of the New Sun* that it is absurd to think “this will ever find a reader” (1), *Shadow* on several occasions directly flags an implied, intradiegetic readership. One example which has already been mentioned is at the beginning of the avern duel scene, where Severian writes: “The Sanguinary Field, of which all my readers will have heard, though some, I hope, will never have visited it, lies northwest of the built sections of our capital” (*Shadow* 210). This suggests that Severian intends his narrative to be read by a contemporary audience, one which would have physically been able to visit

these decadent killing-fields. As far as the effect this has on a narrative, Genette argues that it keeps the reader “at a distance, since he [the narratee] is always interposed between the narrator and us” (260). Likewise, even a third-person omniscient science fantasy novel such as Jack Vance’s *City of the Chasch* (1968), which disguises both narrator and narratee, “always contains below the surface an appeal to the receiver” (Genette 260). This relative transparency of the narratee removes the *distance* between the narrator and real reader, allowing them to identify themselves more thoroughly with the intradiegetic reader. This brings one full circle to the concept of distance as it relates to showing (mimesis) and telling (diegesis).

Severian speaking to his readers again reveals the incredible self-absorption of the novel. Unlike Proust, who Genette quotes as saying it is “from the insincere language of prefaces and dedications, that the writer speaks of ‘my reader’. In reality every reader is, while he is reading, the reader of his own self” (261), Severian stresses that he *carries* his readers along: “Here I pause, having carried you, reader, from gate to gate” (*Shadow* 274). This is as if to say, “make no mistake about it: I am the author and you, reader, are along for the ride – do as you may with interpretation”.

Having identified some of the formal features which characterize Severian’s autobiography, it is time to turn towards examining how these features give rise to the mythological dimension of his account. The following section will argue that it is the relationship between the narrating I and the narrated I which produces mythic gaps, or what can be called the “undivided perception” of Severian’s discourse. This involves temporal and spatial difference, but ultimately lies in the narrating strategies of the “person” who is not only unwilling to impart his world’s secrets, but perhaps does not even *know* them objectively himself.

The Myth of Urth

The previous section identified and examined some of the key formal features which mark *The Shadow of the Torturer*. These fell under the main headings “mood” and “voice”, and included the conceptual problems of “distance”, “perspective”, “focalization”, “the narrating instance”, “time of narrating”, and “narrative levels”. While all these concepts are distinguishable from one another and present the critic with particular ways of access, they are related by their shared emphasis on the divide between who is speaking and who is perceiving in a text. For example, when it comes to the concept of “distance”, it is a matter of the narrator (the speaker) being more or less present. Involved is a matter of contention between speaker and perceiver which ultimately determines the “mood” of a narrative. Likewise, “the narrating instance”, discussed under the heading “voice”, examines “not only the person who carries out or submits to the action, but also the person (the same one or another) who reports it” (Genette 213). “The narrating instance” regurgitates this dichotomy of speaker and perceiver, and only distinguishes itself from the former by placing extra stock on *where* someone narrates. These narratological concepts were applied to *Shadow* because much of the narrative’s excitement is in this contended space between the narrating I and the narrated I; furthermore, that is where the making of myth occurs – or as I will argue, is compounded.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “myth” in several ways. First, myth is “a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon”. The term can also refer to “a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone” or “a person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence” (3:a). This definition is valuable because it expresses the contingent duality of the concept of myth: it contains both facts and the imaginary, or what is strictly unverifiable. Myth speaks of “historical events” and “natural phenomenon”, but only ostensibly. Myth acts to reconcile the material and ideal, a theme situated at the heart of *Shadow*.

In *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery observes: “Science fantasy can derive humor from science, from magic...but the clash of rhetorics is not always funny” (118). Instead, what can occur, as in the case of *Shadow*, is that their fusion results “in a new intellectual synthesis, or their confrontation in an aesthetic experience” (Koestler 45). This “aesthetic experience” Koestler speaks of is the making of myth: the creation of an undivided

perception which incorporates both the spiritual and the material, the abstract and the concrete. Today, when one speaks of myth, it is in relation to make-believe. This is heard in the expression “that is just a myth”. But to think of mythmaking as an exercise in the production of the fantastic is to err. Rather, myth emerges from an “undivided perception”: the confrontation and combination of the figurative and literal. As Attebery argues, “what the serious writer of science fantasy is attempting to do is not to recapture an older worldview but to forge a new one from elements that have long been developing in isolation” (120). Nowhere is this strategy more paramount than in Gene Wolfe’s *Book of the New Sun*, which does not look towards the past to recover the magic of existence but projects a far future earth which marries both worldviews to produce scenes of sheer otherness.

What is peculiar about Attebery’s treatment of science fantasy is that after dwelling on “the *undivided* perception from which myth emerged” (119; emphasis added), he goes on to praise certain writers for *juxtaposing* the fantastic and scientific perspectives. He begins by saying that Ursula K. Le Guin, despite her self-criticism, manages to “mingle the scientific and mythic perspectives with ever increasing conviction” (120). As stated previously in the chapter, it is the mingling which produces the mythic, but he falls into the common-sense trap of replacing “magical” or “fantastic” with the term “mythic”. Attebery then complains that Le Guin’s novels would have been even more successful if “she had kept her science more rigorously scientific and her magic less eclectic” (121). Similarly, Attebery says that Samuel Delany’s novel *The Einstein Intersection* (1967) exhibits “a particularly ingenious way of *juxtaposing* the rational and emotional or scientific and magical perspectives” (121; emphasis added). There is no talk of the reconciliation initially ascribed to mythmaking, only of the ways in which science fantasy manages to contrast the magical and scientific worldviews. Admittedly, Attebery does suggest there is an understanding which occurs in the space which these contrasts or juxtapositions create. He remarks that in Le Guin’s *Rocannon’s World* the hero “come[s] to view the natives’ outlook as no less valid than his own: what he has been calling telepathy and coincidence might with equal justice be called magic and fate” (121). All sense of reconciliation arises from marked differences between the fantastic and scientific in the diegesis.

This dissertation would argue that any difference between worldviews that occurs in *Shadow* is minimal, and that from this relatively undivided perception springs its mythic force. Furthermore, the mythic perspective cannot be traced to Severian, whether he is the narrator or the hero. It is a mythic epistemology that reigns over Urth during an age when the sun is almost dead. This notion will be argued by looking at the ways of perceiving that are

accomplished by both the narrated I and the narrating I, who are separated from one another not only by time but by degrees of knowledge concerning the world which they inhabit.

As Attebery admits, “Wolfe’s imagined world easily accepts the discourse of either form [science fiction and fantasy], for it projects a time when advanced technology represents not the future but the distant past, traces of which remain and mingle with the magic that may be only technology advanced more still” (123). In this sense magic and technology are never juxtaposed and are so eerily similar that the reader must work out which is which, if there even *is* a difference. One can agree with Attebery that “every step of his [Severian’s] task is mythic” (124), though this is not due to fantastic overtones like “his two talismans, the executioner’s sword and the healing jewel” (Attebery 124) but to the discreet fusion which occurs in the novel.

Returning to the first chapter of *Shadow*, Severian witnesses the discharge of a “pistol” for the first time. Now with focus on the protagonist, he writes “[t]here was a shot, a thing I had never seen before, the bolt of violet energy splitting the darkness like a wedge, so that it closed with a thunderclap” (*Shadow* 4). In the appendix to book four, *The Citadel of the Autarch*, G.W. (the lowest level of narration) explains that “[t]he pistol given Thea by Vodalus and the one given Ouen by Severian are unquestionably stellar weapons” and that “it seems fairly clear that stellar weapons could not be produced on Urth and had to be obtained from the Hierodules at great cost” (613). This extradiegetic knowledge is not shared by either the narrated or the narrating Severian. The narrated Severian in the necropolis scene apprehends the shot discharged by a stellar weapon as a mere “violet energy splitting the darkness”, something that could just as easily be attributed to some arcane spell or other. Nor does the more experienced Severian who takes part in a battle against the Ascians in *The Citadel of the Autarch* (1983) offer better explanation of this technology, when he states “I had no idea what sort of device was used to project these bolts, or even whether they were in fact pure energy or some type of missile” (*Sword & Citadel* 471). Even the extradiegetic G.W. which signs the appendix writes “Nowhere are the manuscripts of *The Book of the New Sun* more obscure than in their treatment of weapons” (*Sword & Citadel* 612). The only indication that this was not an issue of pure magic comes when Severian says the “pistol” Vodalus handed over “caught the moonlight like a mirror” (*Shadow* 6), which suggests that it is at least an artifact, however indeterminate

Attebery claims that every step Severian takes “also fits into the rhetorical pattern of science fiction, for each involves his learning another lost secret of the technological past and thereby gaining more control over his life” (124). I would argue that this is only partially the

case. Severian *does* glean knowledge of his world and its underpinnings throughout his journey, but these are only vaguely of a technological character, and often result in deeper layers of the fantastic. For example, the Matachin Tower which houses the torturer's guild is initially presented as part of a keep, or stronghold in the medieval vein. Severian describes it as being:

Situating toward the back of the Citadel, upon the western side. At ground level are the studies of our masters, where consultations with the officers of justice and the heads of other guilds are conducted. Our common room is above them, with its back to the kitchen. Above that is the refectory, which serves us as an assembly hall as well as an eating place. Above it are the private cabins of the masters, in better days much more numerous...the real work of our guild is carried out below all this. Just underground lies the examination room; beneath it, and thus outside the tower proper (for the examination room was the propulsion chamber of the original structure) stretches the labyrinth of the oubliette. (*Shadow* 18)

While this entire passage appears narrated from the perspective of the narrated I, the parenthesis contains information Severian has learned since venturing out from its confines: “the examination room was the propulsion chamber of the original structure”. This affirms what Attebery says of Severian's journey affording him knowledge of the “technological past”, but this knowledge comes to Severian by way of one Dr. Talos labels “a professional tale-teller” (*Shadow* 273), the android Jonas who claims to know the “story” of the Citadel, and confesses sadly that “this is the only tale I know- or nearly so” (*Shadow* 273). He relates to Severian that “[m]any of the people were angry at the building of that citadel, holding it to be their right to slay their lords without hindrance if they so desired. But others went out in the ships that ply between the stars, returning with treasure and knowledge” (*Shadow* 273). With these clues that the Citadel could have once functioned as “starport during the First Empire period of the Age of the Monarch” (Andre-Driussi 84), the narrating Severian reimagines the examination room as a propulsion chamber. This is contrasted with the perspective of the narrated Severian, who only describes this area by saying “It was not a prepossessing place. About half of the old lights still burned, but mud had seeped into the corridors until it lay to the thickness of one's hand. A duty table stood where it had been left, perhaps, two hundred years before” (*Shadow* 29). Severian has indeed gained knowledge with time, but it is not necessarily a technological or scientific knowledge but is wrapped in a kind of legend that can only be taken with a grain of salt. In this way the mythic is

compounded: the undivided perception of the narrating I which makes no distinction between tall-tale and fact, but accepts both as possible truths.

The fact that Severian conceals what Genette calls the “final revelation” works to contribute to the novel’s mythological texture. When Severian enters Valeria’s towers, a section of the Citadel, for the final time and realizes that the “antiquely titled personage” (*Citadel of the Autarch* 611) which its walls announce is none other than himself, it is only then, at the very end of the *New Sun* tetralogy, that the reader realizes this structure was made for him. In *Shadow*, Valeria only remarks “How strange that [Severian] should come up in the Atrium of Time” (33). Valeria’s towers, and their function, are shrouded in mystery and bygone myth for the protagonist, who explains:

Her family [Valeria’s] occupied these towers. They had waited, at first, to leave Urth with the autarch of their era, then had waited because there was nothing left for them but waiting. They had given many castellans to the Citadel, but the last had died generations ago; they were poor now, and their towers were in ruins. Valeria had never gone above the lower floors. (*Shadow* 34)

The narrating I, who finally signs the account “Severian the Lame, Autarch”, knows that these towers serve a different purpose, namely a “time-traveling portal to a larger structure, like the ground level of the Last House, located in the heart of the Citadel” (Andre-Driussi 30). Severian’s final revelations do not offer a “contrast between high and low technologies” (Attebery 121), or even a technological knowledge that Attebery claims Severian receives through his many adventures and encounters. Instead, what the reader works out to be a speaker system still shows up to the mature Severian as quasi-magical: “something had wakened in the time-worn walls, its disembodied voices, hundred-tongued, demanding that Valeria report to some antiquely titled personage who I realized with a start must be myself” (*Sword & Citadel* 611). In a sense, this final scene only reinforces the mythic wonder generated by the initial encounter in *Shadow*. This follows the line of argument that Attebery makes about the *Book of the New Sun* projecting a time when advanced technology represents not the future but the distant past, traces of which remain and mingle with the magic that may be only technology advanced still. The intercom system installed in Valeria’s towers is an example of this ambiguous instance of something that could be magic or technology, or both simultaneously. But contrary to what Attebery claims of Wolfe making “full use of science fantasy’s double vision” (124), it is the single vision that Severian produces which gives the novel its mythic weight. The two rhetorical systems, magic and science, are never clearly

defined in Severian's tale. The narrating Severian only lends greater mythic complexity to a situation or instance of technology that the narrated Severian apprehends only crudely.

Such a situation occurs when the narrator gives a retrospect of Master Gurloes, one of the heads of the torturer's guild. After Master Gurloes assigns Severian to personally deal with the Chatelaine Thecla, which includes "[sitting] with her while she eats", there is a paragraph break which separates the mimesis from the diegesis. Severian then writes, in the tones of a memoire:

Gurloes was one of the most complex men I have known...Sometimes he went to the top of our tower, above the guns, and waited there talking to himself, peering through glass said to be harder than flint for the first beams. He was the only one in our guild – Master Palaemon not excepted – who was unafraid of the energies there and the unseen mouths that spoke sometimes to human beings and sometimes to other mouths in other towers and keeps. (*Shadow* 64)

At this point it is safe to assume that Severian knows the original function of the Matachin Tower, since he refers to Jonas's tall tale several times in the narrative with conviction. But this does not seem to entail a better *technological* understanding of it. If the reader now imagines the tower as a grounded space-shuttle, with the propulsion chamber at the bottom, this place in which Gurloes stands must be something like a flight deck, with windows made to withstand the incredible heat and pressures of intergalactic travel. It appears to also be equipped with an intercom system, which Severian interprets as "unseen mouths" which connect to others throughout the complex. The vast electronic apparatus which powers the ship is regarded as "energies", which suggests something somewhere between technology and magic. There is an instance in *Shadow* where the electricity supplied by the Matachin tower is comically referred to as "lightning". In one of the examination rooms, reserved for cruel forms of torture, Severian explains:

Antique lights like blood-red eyes gleamed on the control panel, and a droning like the song of some huge insect filled the entire chamber. For a few moments, the ancient engine of the tower lived again. One cable was loose, and sparks as blue as burning brandy played about its bronze fittings. (*Shadow* 100).

Severian gives Master Gurloes' response in direct dialogue: "Lightning," Master Gurloes said as he rammed the loose cable home. "There's another word for it, but I forget" (*Shadow* 100). The narrating I does nothing to correct his former master's fallacy.

Attebery claims that "many of the most vivid inventions [in *The Book of the New Sun*] are the direct result of the science fiction-fantasy fusion" (124). An emphasis should be laid

upon the word *fusion*, which according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary means “a merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole” (2: a). Again, the worldviews are not presented in marked contrast but fused into an indiscernible whole that embodies a touch of both: the revelation of the myth. Attebery cites the cyborg Jonas as an example of one of these inventions, and it is worth exploring this figure further. When Severian first encounters Jonas, focalization is through the narrated I, who notes that “The stranger pushed back his battered hat, and I saw that in place of his right hand he wore a jointed contrivance of steel” (*Shadow* 273). This is a curious case of Severian demystifying the phenomenon. Instead of seeing an arm of hammered quicksilver, or something equally fantastic, he only *wears* a contrivance of steel, suggesting something exterior.

Michael Andre-Driussi, through a close reading of all four books in the *Book of the New Sun*, has determined that Jonas is “an android sailor who left Urth in the First Empire period...when his ship returned to Urth (perhaps 200 years prior to the reign of Severian), there was no longer a port” (194). This missing port was the cause of the crash which disfigured Jonas so that he had to repair himself with “biological material salvaged from an Urth man who had been killed on the ground by the landing” (Andre-Driussi 194). This suggests that Jonas’s mechanical limb is not a prosthetic, but the reverse: all that Severian perceives as the flesh of Jonas is in fact artificial. This is what causes Attebery to view Jonas as a “tragic figure burdened by his partial humanity” (124). But Severian, both the narrated and narrating I, does not perceive this fact so readily or clearly.

When Jonas is severely wounded by the young exultants at the House Absolute, Severian attempts to heal him with the Claw of the Conciliator:

To reach the lower end of the wound, I lifted the cloth a trifle. When I thrust in my hand, I heard a faint note; the gem had struck metal. Drawing back the cloth more, I saw that my friend’s skin ended as abruptly as grass does where a large stone lies, giving way to shining silver. My first thought was that it was armor; but soon I saw that it was not. Rather, it was metal standing in the place of flesh, just as metal stood in the place of his right hand. How far it continued I could not see, and I was afraid to touch his legs for fear of waking him. (*The Claw of the Conciliator* 120)

Even with this revelation, Severian the narrated is hesitant to claim his companion is android or human. He only reports to Jonas, after he wakes up, that “You’re patched with metal...not just your hand. I’ve known that for some time, friend monster Jonas” (*The Claw of the Conciliator* 126). The worldview of Severian, or his epistemological outlook, is revealed

here: the distinction between science and magic, human and robot is blurred by an undivided phenomenology.

Even something as nondescript as *Terminus Est*, Severian's carnifical sword, is charged with tones of myth. Before departing the Citadel as a newly minted exile, Master Palaemon presents Severian with the sword, claiming that "when a gift is deserved, it is not a gift but a payment" (*Shadow* 111). Severian gives the reader a catalogue of the sword's virtues, now clearly focalized through the narrating I who looks back on the memory: "you would have to see her and hold her to judge her justly" (*Shadow* 112). He goes on to describe the sword in glowing terms: "Her grip was onyx bound with silver bands, two spans long and terminated with an opal. Art had been lavished upon her...the words *Terminus Est* had been engraved upon her blade in curious and beautiful letters [these are in Latin]" (*Shadow* 112). Here, Severian presents an object that is clearly a man-made artifact. The reader is given no clues to it being anything but a finely wrought weapon.

This is subtly altered when Severian nearly loses *Terminus Est* on the Lake of Endless Sleep. Having fallen into the murky waters, he writes "I realized that I had dropped *Terminus Est*, and at that moment losing that blade seemed more terrible than the chance of death" (*Shadow* 178). This not only makes the reader privy to the almost spiritual connection between carnifax and his tool but reawakens one of the most potent myths of all: that of King Arthur and his famous sword Excalibur. As Severian relates:

My frantically groping hand encountered the blessed, familiar shape of her onyx grip. At the same instant, my other hand touched an object of a completely different kind. It was another human hand, and its grasp coincided so perfectly with the recovery of *Terminus Est* that it seemed the hand's owner was returning my property to me. (*Shadow* 178)

As Andre-Driussi notes, the line "'it seemed the hand's owner was returning my property to me" [recalls the moment] the Lady of the Lake gives the sword to King Arthur" (342). Not only is the act of regaining *Terminus Est* through quasi-magical means reminiscent of Arthurian legend, but the figure of Dorcas is in many ways homologous with the Lady of the Lake, especially the one found in the French prose work *Merlin*, where she is depicted as "'white' and innocent" (Berthelot 67); note also that on several occasions Severian speaks of Dorcas as "strangely childlike, though fully a woman" (*Shadow* 233). The connection to Arthurian legend is compounded in *The Sword of the Lictor* when Severian returns the fragments of *Terminus Est* to the waters of Lake Diuturna: "What remained of my blade I kissed and cast into the water" (*Sword & Citadel* 294).

Admittedly, the source of this mythic rendering cannot be traced to the narrator but is an intertextual nod that must be drawn out by the reader. Nevertheless, one must wonder what kind of narratives Severian has read in the “brown book” that he carries with him throughout his journey. This is titled *The Book of the Wonders of Urth and Sky*, which the librarian Ultan describes as “a standard work, three or four hundred years ago. It relates most of the familiar legends of ancient times” (*Shadow* 51). Could Severian have augmented his own narrative with the legend of Excalibur, seeking to produce a sense of fate which would link him to his own blade? It is not outside the realm of possibility, as Wolfe plants several references to the reader’s own time throughout the course of the narrative, such as the picture Severian encounters which shows “an armored figure standing in a desolate landscape. It had no weapon, but held a staff bearing a strange, stiff banner. The visor of this figure’s helmet was entirely of gold, without eye slits or ventilation” (*Shadow* 38). Additionally, this is another example of Severian’s undivided perception, as he interprets this representation not only as a document of the past, but as something strange, even other-worldly: Neil Armstrong is reduced to a creature of myth.

To make a final illustration of the fusion between the magical and technological which gives *Shadow* its mythic air, one can return to the Sanguinary Field where the combat between Severian and the Septentrion unfolds. The horrific quality of the averns, which are used as weapons, first appears through the logic of botany to Severian, as Agia informs him that “The leaves are poisoned...twisting your mantle tight about your arm will give you some protection, but try not to touch them” (*Shadow* 190). When Severian tries to pluck one, the plant reveals a hallucinogenic, strange property that is never reduced to anything solely scientific (a kind of excretion or other) or magic:

I had knelt beside it and was reaching toward it when as though a veil had been snatched away I realized that my hand, which I had thought still several spans from the needlelike point of the nearest leaf, was about to be impaled. I drew it back hurriedly; the plant seemed almost out of reach- indeed, I was not certain I could touch its stem even by lying prone. (*Shadow* 191)

Like the figure of the alzabo creature, which Attebery offers as an example of Wolfe’s science fiction-fantasy inventiveness, the avern when plucked, and when used in combat, seems to refuse to be apprehended as anything but mythic, which is the fusion of both sets of reasoning. When Severian regains consciousness after being pricked by one of the avern’s deadly leaves, he writes: “I touched the stem of my avern, and for an instant felt I had grasped the tail of some cold-blooded animal. It seemed to stir in my hand” (*Shadow* 215).

Additionally, he claims that he felt “my own avern was pulling me backward, or rather, my avern was gone and someone gripped me by the hand” (*Shadow* 215). In this case, the reader cannot be certain whether these strange qualities can be reduced to the botanical constitution of the extraterrestrial plant, a kind of magic that surrounds it, or Severian’s own confusion in the heat of combat.

Dorcas, who witnesses the entire martial episode, later speaks of the avern at greater length, but only manages to further its ambivalence. She tells Severian that she saw the petals unfurl and reveal “something underneath, something else, a face like the face poison would have, if poison had a face...you picked it up and it began to curl toward you, slowly, as though it were only half awake” (*Shadow* 219). Here Dorcas attaches a kind of agency to the flower, so that the reader is left trying to grasp what makes this thing so vaguely uncanny: science, magic, or a kind of alien personality which is simply Other?

That Wolfe chose to call these murderous perennials “averns” reveals their intended mythic character. Andre-Driussi points out that they are “named after Avernus (“the birdless lake” near Puteoli, said to be an entrance to infernal regions) because no birds can survive around it” (39). This example illustrates the way the creation of new mythologies in the *Book of the New Sun* often imitate other legends and so obscure their foundations; like almost all the phenomena that litter Severian’s Urth, “neither way of referring to [them] exhausts the reality of the thing itself” (Attebery 124).

This final section will argue that the mythic texture of *Shadow* is also dependent on narrative style. As was identified under the sub-heading *narrative of events*, Severian’s account shows both extreme mediation and utmost immediacy. This is due to it being composed largely in a naturalistic, or realistic mode, while still maintaining the narrator’s overt presence. In this way showing and telling are combined. The reader is shown the world of Urth by way of a detailed narrative, while never being able to forget that it is Severian doing the showing.

At first, this would seem to have the potential to disrupt the fusion which I have just argued is central to Wolfe’s mythmaking. If one agreed with Attebery’s claim that every step of Severian’s journey provides him with greater technological reasoning, the presence of the narrating I would provide a contrast, a juxtaposition, between the two modes of seeing. The narrating I would be able to correct, or improve upon, the naïve perception of the narrated I. But the case is usually the opposite. While the mature Severian who narrates his life story may know more, it is not often in degrees scientific or technological; often his advanced

knowledge only compounds the already mythic dimension of the phenomena caught by the narrated gaze.

Thus, it is worth looking at a key section where mimetic illusion is broken by the mediating presence of Severian and examining how this affects the production of myth.

Returning to Severian's description of his guild and the tower it inhabits, the mythic quality of his inherited occupation asserts itself to both the narrated and the narrating I. He writes, now focalized through the narrating I, that "Traditions from our days of glory, antedating the present degenerate age, and the one before it, and the one before that, an age whose name is hardly remembered now by scholars" (*Shadow* 10) still punctuate life in the Matachin Tower. Indeed, knowledge of the structure and the life it contains is shrouded by age; traditions and functions do not have reasons because they come from a time of myth – a time whose very name "is hardly remembered". In addition, in a heavily mediated passage in which the narrating I gives an overview of his guild's logic, Severian claims that "It is said in ancient times there were both men and women in the guild, and that sons and daughters were born to them and brought up in the mystery" (*Shadow* 11). That it is merely "said" attests to the mythic dimension of Severian's conclusions: his knowledge is adopted from hearsay about deep legend.

When describing the oubliette which is reserved for the housing of clients (those awaiting torture), Severian notes that "the lights of the oubliette are of that ancient kind that is said to burn forever, though some have now gone out" (*Shadow* 19). This is a description provided by the narrator, not the narrated, where the details of his past home are given in retrospect. It is not until the next sentence that focus is placed on the narrated Severian, who tells the reader that "my feelings that morning were not gloomy but joyous-here I would labor when I became a journeyman" (*Shadow* 19). But no better description of the lights can be given by the elder Severian, who Attebery claims has learned of the technological past. The lights still show up to him as something mysterious, only *said* to burn forever. The fact that it seems neither narrated nor narrator are privy to anything more than the legend of their wonder suggests that it is an issue of world-wide epistemology, rather than individual knowledge.

Conclusion

The novels which comprise Gene Wolfe's *Solar Cycle* have always fascinated me. I can recall reading *Shadow* as a teenager and being both exhilarated and bewildered. Admittedly, I did not finish it the first time around. But some quality of it stuck with me which I could not quite put my finger on. So, I eventually picked it up a couple years later and managed to make it all the way through Severian's narrative and beyond. I have continued to revisit Wolfe's work as an adult, the *Solar* novels particularly, and their strangeness has never diminished. If anything, it has grown.

Consequently, this dissertation set out to accomplish several things, all of which relate to what Ursula Le Guin, Neil Gaiman call Wolfe's "subtlety". Given how strongly mediated *Shadow* is by Severian, identifying what it is that makes the novel strange, subtle, or elusive would logically start with a closer look at the "narrating instance" and its traces found in the novel. The first two sections of the analysis intended to prove that Severian's discourse is formally complex, and at times ambivalent. In my experience, it is not often one finds such an example of extreme mediation and utmost immediacy contained in a single work. It is reminiscent of what Genette asserts is the marvel of Proustian narrative: the "*temporal distance* between the story and the narrating instance involves no *model distance* between the story and the narrative: no less, no weakening of the mimetic illusion" (Genette 168; original emphasis). By examining some key passages from *Shadow*, it was shown how, even in a single paragraph, the novel switches between the mimetic and diegetic: it can be picturesque, detailed, and *immediate* before suddenly reverting to the mediated, "distanced" tone favored by diegesis. Essentially, there is a constant strife between perspective and focalization. In addition, *Shadow* also illustrates a complexity of narrative "time" and "levels". That Severian is writing his account subsequent to the events the narrative contains is made clear not only by use of past tense, but also by scenic and memorial markers which locate the narrator in a different segment of time and space than the story which they relate. Submitting *Shadow* to the concept of "levels" revealed how the primary narrative may not even be the events which constitute the novel but point beyond themselves to a greater metanarrative about the impending fate of Urth which rests on the future deeds of the narrator. All of this was an effort to identify some of the formal, narrative features which make *Shadow* so apparently so elusive and strange.

From this, it follows that the main contention is that the incongruity between the narrating I and the narrated I in *Shadow* produces a site where myth is made. This incongruity, or what can be called its “heteroglossia”, involves all the narratological categories explored, but perhaps most relevant to the production of myth is “perspective” and “person”. At first, it would seem this dissertation suggests that it is the rift between narrator and protagonist which produces myth. This would follow Attebery’s line of reasoning, where a learned Severian (the narrator) procures knowledge which is contrasted with that of the naïve protagonist, in turn making explicit the two ways of seeing the phenomena of Urth. Instead, what I have tried to show is that the incongruity between the narrator and protagonist only compounds the mythic, undivided experience of *Shadow*. Severian’s heteroglossia, as it turns out, is more of a working agreement than a rift. Though Severian comes to know more of his world with time, it is never of the strictly technological sort. If anything, his increased knowledge only deepens the ambiguity of the things about him.

In many respects this dissertation would draw the ire of Mary Poovey, who wrote in *Uneven Developments* (1988) that she did “not respect the boundaries of the texts...as formalist critics of all persuasions do” (15). Inarguably my analysis has fallen within the boundaries of *Shadow*. While my background contained cursory introductions to the genres of science fiction and fantasy, I did not really contextualize the novel within their discourses. Any further investigations of Wolfe’s *Solar Cycle* may do well by exploring this generic dimension further and the discontinuities it contains. Additionally, a Marxist critic could accuse me of being overly “idealistic” in my assessment of the novel. In fact, I never once address the ethico-political backdrop against which *Shadow* was written. The material and political conditions of the lifeworld in which Gene Wolfe conducted his work would appear nonexistent, though the case is quite otherwise. For example, one cannot fail to connect the concept of a dying earth (Urth) to the growing ecological awareness in the time it was written (1980). Finally, I would like to point out some of the more recent developments in narratology that could be applied to *Shadow*. Notably the work of Monika Fludernik. Fludernik, who in the process of developing her “natural” narratology criticizes Genette’s original concept of “voice”, which she considers an “interpretative”, or theoretical move.¹² Richard Azcel takes this argument up in his commentary to the essay “Understanding as Over-hearing: Towards a Dialogics of Voice”, claiming that there are “no voices *in* written texts; there are only ways...of metaphorically conceiving texts as voiced in the act or play of

¹² See Fludernik’s article “New Wine in Old Bottles? Voice, Focalization, and New Writing” in *New Literary History* vol. 32, 2001, pp. 619-638 for a greater understanding of her criticism of Genette.

reading” (704). This approach takes cues from reader-response criticism by placing emphasis on the activity of the reader. A dialogic reading of *Shadow* could be potentially fruitful given the stress the novel places on the ability of the reader to, so to say, fill in the gaps.

In closing, this dissertation aspired to examine some of the key traits of the double-voiced discourse in *Shadow*. This discourse is one of the key ingredients to its mythical structure because it points, like a second-order sign, to the deeper, metaphysical constitution of Severian’s Urth. This metaphysical ground is what allows both the narrator and protagonist to judge his world in shades simultaneously technological and magical.

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