

The Place of Religion in Neuromancer

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So much can be said about Gibson's prophetic work, the *Neuromancer* trilogy, that when I sit here and try and place my thoughts on my computer screen, (in some foreign language with some foreign syntax I was just taught yesterday) things become blurred. Gibson presents such an over-achingly dark and depressing picture of the future of technological society, that one could examine all sorts of themes, from apparent feminism, to the role of physical experience in the virtual medium, to the place of entertainment/past-time activity.

The most intriguing path into Gibson's world is through the place/role of religion in a society that is increasingly in complete control of their surroundings, while concurrently giving away their freedoms by creating simulated organisms that can be a rightful (?), and sometimes oppressing participant in their daily lives. I haven't gotten very far in *Count Zero*, a book that apparently confronts many of these notions head-on; in *Neuromancer*, though, Gibson presents a blue-print of the world that exists in all three books, including a few brief passages explicitly examining the place of a higher power, someone or something that commands an overall control.

"This way's better for you, man". He took his Partagas from a coat pocket and lit one. The smell of Cuban tobacco filled the shop. "You want I should come to you in the matrix like a burning bush ? You aren't missing anything back there. An hour here'll only take you a couple of seconds".

This passage, where the partial Artificial Intelligence conscience known as Wintermute presents himself to Case, is the first overt mentioning of the role that AI can take in one's life. Wintermute's extreme control of Case's surroundings, the fact that he can appear on any television screen anywhere, that he can track Case's every movements (recall the airport scene where the telephone-rings seem to follow Case's footsteps), these show the omniscient powers that Wintermute holds. Indeed, the whole of the plot of *Neuromancer* can be viewed as just the method of one element of an artificial consciousness, Wintermute, doing everything in its power to join with the other element, Neuromancer, and create a complete ultra-organic mechanism of worldly authority.

Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality.

Indeed, I'd like to push the possibility that this ultra-organic element of human construction can be seen as one part Divine and one part Diabolic. Using the template of western religion, a simple metaphor can relate Wintermute to God and Neuromancer to Satan. For instance, in contemporary religion, the participants are neither allowed to utter the true name of the Divine, and if they try to write it down, apparently it instantly disappears. A similar situation is true in Gibson's realm, where, in order to gain control of the **evil** AI, Case has to learn its true name, uttering it at just the right time. Names like Wintermute and Neuromancer are merely aliases for un-utterable names.

"Neuromancer", the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. "The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Neuromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend", and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing in the sand, "I **am** the dead, and their land". He laughed. A gull cried. "Stay. Your woman is a ghost, she doesn't know it. Neither will you".

It doesn't get much more demonic than that. But what does it mean when God and Satan join together ? Where does humanity stand once all that is good and all that is evil combine forces ? Since these divinities are creations of humanity, does that mean that we can finally perform those acts of god that for centuries we've been flailing at ? Is this all just hubris, or since the concept of god is a human construct (much like AI), does Gibson just follow the path of logic ?

Needless to say, I'm looking forward to a few answers in the coming books.