

Severian & St. Peter

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 19 Oct 1998

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Alex David Groce — 19 Oct 1998, 14:55

I was talking to a friend at lunch who took John Kessel's Fantasy Literature class last year. When I took the class several years ago, he taught Shadow & Claw (which prompted my third read of both), and this year Kessel taught the whole BOTNS (without Urth, which my friend hasn't read). My friend wrote his term paper on a thesis Kessel hadn't seen before: Severian as an Apostolic figure, specifically Peter.

I haven't seen the paper, but his basic argument runs like this: Wolfe has said that Severian is a Christian figure, rather than specifically a Christ figure. It's St. Peter who actually raises Dorcas in Acts. It's also Peter that rebukes Simon Magus (Cyrix) after he tries to buy the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. Peter's definitely NOT perfect (thrice-denying Christ, the rebuke just after his recognition of Christ, his early views on circumcision and the Law, etc.) and in fact is the one Apostle we see as violent--he cuts off the ear of a Roman soldier in the garden (Christ heals the man and rebukes Peter). So, maybe Severian is (at least partly) a version of Peter: he's also a flawed, violent man who fails to understand much of what is going on but carries out the will of the Increate and at times has astonishing insights into the Truth, he raises a Dorcas from the grave and runs into Simon Magus/Cyrix, and is, in a sense, the first head of a new "Church" on Urth. This would create an interesting correlation between the Autarchy and the Papacy. Severian's role then in bringing the New Sun would be somewhat like the role of the Apostles after Pentecost (which is the experience in Briah?) in spreading the Word. I think that's the concept in a nutshell.

Any opinions (if anyone's interested, I'll offer a better version of the idea if I can get ahold of my friend's paper.)

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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