

Death, Memory, Ghosts, Resurrection

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 21 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1557>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Apr 1999, 09:23

In several essays and countless conversations, people have wondered "Why Severian? What qualifies him?" And often, after listing his various strengths and weaknesses, his first known special talent is hit upon as being somehow the most significant: "It must be his Memory."

It may be, but I haven't seen anyone pursue that thread--it is usually a stepping stone to someplace else, or a side attraction. (Or maybe I'm just forgetting something.)

So here's a thumbnail sketch:

Let's pretend, for the sake of this experiment, that his memory is the =only= thing that qualifies Severian. (I.e., it is not that he is a torturer; nor that he is the person on throne when the timer runs out; nor anything else.)

Now then...

Throughout the Urth Cycle we see many funeral customs and the way that memory plays a part in them: from the hut where Hallvard's people maintain a memorial shield until nobody can remember that person anymore, to the Antechamber's memory of the navigator's funeral.

We also see how ghosts are raised--Malrubius and Triskele from Severian's memories; the Vivimancer from the memories of an ancient being living on or near Fomalhaut; the legions drawn from Severian to fight on Yesod.

The same rules for raising ghosts =seem= to apply to resurrecting corpses (which makes sense, of course, since in resurrection one is raising the ghost and reuniting it with the body). But the various resurrections are often complicated by other things: who remembered Typhon for his resurrection (well, I would say the Claw); the Jonas ghost riding in the Miles body (actually this finds a possible solution in the outline above); who remembered Dorcas (well, "Charon," obviously); etc.

So Severian's memory is the same sort of lifeboat as we see in Ellison's "Demon with a Glass Hand" (where the question "Where are all the people?" is answered "All on a wire in your robotic chest," iirc). Not only all the autarchs, however dimly, but also all the other people he has written about--the text itself (writ by Severian, remember) is the final proof for Yesod that he has the ability to recreate the world.

Now, does this mean that Severian resurrects everybody from his narrative immediately after transmitting the last chapter of URTH? No. But he is a living *momento mori*, a breathing tombstone, for lost Urth: he is, himself, like a shield of the dead in the hut of Hallvard's people.

=mantis=

Peter Westlake — 21 Apr 1999, 17:39 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

At 09:23 1999-04-21 -0800, you wrote:

(interesting bit snipped ;-)

...

who remembered Typhon for his
resurrection (well, I would say the Claw);

I don't think anyone did; I think Typhon's suspended animation machinery restored him exactly as it was meant to, when Severian and Severian were fiddling with it trying to make it feed them.

Re. the interesting bit snipped above: interesting!

Some questions about Severian as living monument:

1. Who is going to see/read his memories? Perhaps he will pass stories on to the survivors. But he has already passed on his manuscripts.

2. Can't the Hierodules and their machines remember things?

3. With all that time travel going on, why bother?

I'm much more convinced by Severian's own explanation, that the torturers are the only people who can be relied upon to Do What Needs To Be Done.

SBear.

Peter Stephenson — 22 Apr 1999, 09:49 · follows Peter Westlake

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

In several essays and countless conversations, people have wondered "Why Severian? What qualifies him?"

Surely, at least to some extent, Severian is Everyman? That may seem hard to accept of a rather dour torturer with a perfect memory, but I think Wolfe wants us to make the imaginative attempt. It seems to me to make the religious resonances stronger if Severian has no a priori claim to being chosen. Quite what 'a priori' means in this chronological mess is another matter, and this maybe a major spanner in the works of this theory: he can't be Everyman because he's inextricably bound in right from the start with a very complex and particular web of causality. So that carefully cancels out this posting.

Yours in nullity,
corncrake

Tony Ellis — 22 Apr 1999, 12:37 · follows Peter Stephenson

Mantis wrote:

In several essays and countless conversations, people have wondered "Why Severian? What qualifies him?"

Am I the only person who feels that we don't need to ask this one? :-) For me, any explanation begins and ends with the words of Master Malrubius, when he tells Severian "In you all the divergent tendencies of our race may have achieved synthesis." [Citadel, XXXI]. A peculiarly eloquent, concise, classically Wolfean sentence, and one that has popped into my mind at the oddest moments over the years.

That being said, I still found mantis's musing on Memory thought-provoking. I've been waiting for someone to suggest that Severian's memory qualifies him to bring the New Sun because it was what tipped the balance in the battle on Yesod, that his superior recollection led to the creation of superior - or more numerous - allies, and thus victory. Or has this already been suggested?