

Moby Dick

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 May 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1612>

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Jim Jordan — 03 May 1999, 16:48

Perhaps it has been discussed here already, but if not, some might want to look into this: The end of Urth resembles the end of Moby Dick. To some extent at least, Severian appears to be a new "Ishmael," writing a memoir of his experience of witnessing the destruction of an old, sinful, world in a flood. To what extent are Abaia and those like him Moby Dick?

Melville's novel is certainly ambiguous. A lapsed Calvinist, he stands with Ahab in raging against a truly sovereign God who oversees human affairs and who appears, to man, capricious. But Melville is also Ishmael, the Jonah who trusts a kinder God than that symbolized by Moby Dick. To be sure, Wolfe is not retelling the narrative of Moby Dick, nor does he share Melville's doubt and rage. But the allusions seem to be there. Perhaps Severian is a "good Ahab," killing the wicked gods of Urth, unlike Melville's Ahab, who sought to kill God. (The many chapters on how to kill the White Whale -- always capitalized -- are Melville's inversion of the Book of Leviticus, which deals with how to kill one's own "flesh" in order to serve God.)

Grist for the old mill and all that.

I found an interesting discussion of Moby Dick at

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jbair/mobydick.htm>

Somebody's term paper on Wolfe and Melville could start here.

Jim Jordan