

The Urth of the New Sun

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 06 Nov 1999

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Daniel Fusch — 06 Nov 1999, 19:09

Tim,

I don't think The Urth of the New Sun is a mistake, but it is clearly not to be taken as a sequel to The Book of the New Sun. (Now I know somebody is going to say--But Severian says its a sequel!--but that's not good enough.)

The Urth of the New Sun is not a sequel; it is a parallel narrative. The Book is a cyclical narrative; The Urth is a fixed and linear narrative, with a precise beginning and a precise ending. The ending does not flow back to the beginning, and vice versa.

The Urth of the New Sun also has a different narrator. Oh, he has the same name--Severian--but he can not be treated as the same character. First, he regresses in his character development back to the Severian of volume III of The Book of the New Sun. In the fourth volume, he had developed in terms of his morality (see his confrontation with Vodalus, his reaction to Dr. Talos' counterfeit coin, and his union with Valeria), his sense of justice (see his reunion with Palaemon), and indeed his entire philosophy of life (see the scene by the sea). When we get to The Urth of the New Sun, we find a Severian who is morally and philosophically the Severian of two books past.

The scope and scale of the narratives is also sharply different. The Book of the New Sun has an epic structure paired with an odd form of bildungsroman, beginning in media res. The Urth of the New Sun is a more straightforward heroic romance.

I don't have the time to expand this further, but it is something I've been thinking about. Consider that The Urth of the New Sun is to The Book of the New Sun what Paradise Regained is to Paradise Lost--a shorter, parallel work (not a sequel) with a smaller scale and scope. All of Paradise Regained is already contained in Paradise Lost, which spans all creation from its beginning (indeed, from before that dawn of time) to the final redemption of humanity. All of the Urth of the New Sun is already contained in The Book of the New Sun, which is not a linear narrative, but rather one which reaches back both into the past and forward into the future.

So The Urth of the New Sun should really be treated as a separate narrative. And it may be that you will enjoy it more in light of that.