

Peace redemption, little bit on New Sun and false family (long)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Nov 2000

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Marc A Aramini — 13 Nov 2000, 21:36

I have always read the final lines of the text of Peace as a redemptive purification, a return to the "brand new" state of the ax which is so originally used as a metaphor for purity in the opening sections of Peace. The apples which incite A.D. Weer (or, as I like to think of him, "man after Christ" which is a possible reading of his name) to kill Bobby Black due to their assault against his dead ancestor's picture also signify the fall from grace which begins the biblical comedy of man. The sidhe receive eternal life only through Jesus Christ in the final story of the book, and the tale of the green pillow which is metafictionally marked as "important" before its relation in the book implies a return to the brand new state of the unbloodied ax, and while Weer cannot relive his life from a theologically sound Catholic interpretation, the spiritual power lurking behind Peace may be sufficient to make those marks on his soul as if they had never were in the first place. I really like to read those lines as the hopes not only of the resurrection of the body, but as the inevitability of a spiritual and metaphysical purging of Weer's stained soul, perhaps a heretical return to the divine logos.

Also, I have been interested in the doubling of Severian's family in the Book of the New Sun. Mr. Borski kindly corresponded with me about one of my previous theories that Pia was in fact Severian's sister, but he cited several flaws in my theory, mainly dealing with the positioning of the river in respect to Nessus. His insight was invaluable. Pia cannot move upstream, so Severian had to move downstream for my theory to hold any water. I have reread the text since then, and I find it odd that in fact there are two possibilities for Severian's family tree, a shadow of the rampant myths that Panteras the roman soldier actually impregnated Mary and begot Jesus, who covered her pregnancy with her marriage to Joseph. These secular tales of Christ are of course only bawdy tales, but they are commonly known. At the end of Citadel of the Autarch, Severian speaks with the Mandragora. The oddest part of the conversation is the question: do you remember being in the basket as a child. Severian replies that he does remember being in the basket. Well well well. From the story of Fish and Frog in Sword of the Lictor, we have the twins going downstream in a basket, reenacting Moses' little journey. We also have Cyriaca speculating "I could be your mother." during their tryst at the beginning of The Sword of the Lictor, and the possibility that Severian floats downstream from the river to Nessus in a basket, perhaps begotten by Paleamon on his exile, or recovered by him (I'm still not certain of the timeline which definitively places the exile of the Master Torturer). Here we have a "false family" for Severian, Pia as sister, Severian as brother floating downstream to Nessus, perhaps Cyriaca as mother, a shadow family in addition to the dubious Merryn as sister, Dorcas as grandmother, Ouen as father, Katherine as mother. And here we come to the concept of free will: Wolfe knows that in order for creation to be justified there must be enough evil to permit real free will. Indeed, the height of free will lies in choosing what stories to believe. The secular historian may choose to believe that Panteras and Mary slept together, the man of faith may choose to believe that Jesus had more divine origins. In any case, reflected in the text we find an expression of free will: we can choose which family and which fate to ascribe to Severian, who foolishly believes in the perspicuity and one to one relationship of words to ideas when even the name of his world holds multiple meanings.

Several other technical features of *The Book of the New Sun* are simply astounding. Every descriptive metaphor and simile remains heliocentric, the sun stays stationary while the tides and the earth rise to meet it. The preponderance of flood imagery in the descriptions are also amazing: they foreshadow the subsequent flooding of the earth countless times during the text, when Severian feels as if he is going to float up into the sky, as into a waterway. This imagery is especially thick in *The Claw of the Conciliator* and *The Sword of the Lictor*. Another of my favorite aspects of the text lies in its beautiful juxtaposition of water imagery, the loss of Terminus Est, and the inexplicably miraculous: Severian loses his Sword in the water where he then resurrects Dorcas; he drops his sword in the water at Saltus where he then heals the man-ape; his Sword causes him to stumble several times as he releases the floodgates at the opening of *The Sword of the Lictor* when he flees the city, then his claw heals the prisoners (that passage is especially full of resurrection and miracle imagery); on Mt. Typhoon he almost drops his sword while looking out on a sky that seems like a huge expanse of ocean (he uses his sword, planted in the ground as a cross, to climb out of the hand of typhoon after little Severian dies and he cannot raise him). Finally, he returns Terminus Est, the cross, to the water of Lake Diuturna at the end of *The Sword of the Lictor*. All of this prefigures the flood at the end of Urth of the New Sun, the consequence of his new sun. Incidentally, I am aware that many people have compared the *Book of the New Sun* to *Remembrance of Things Past*, and the most striking similarity is the evoking of involuntary memory through food: Marcel gains his memory back from eating a Madeleine with Tea, Severian gains the memory of others from eating various brains with alzado analeptic. How fascinating. I am sure much of this is old news, but I find these little unifying details truly fascinating, and I wanted to share some of my thoughts with those who truly appreciate the creative artistry and aesthetic craftsmanship of Wolfe.

Marc Aramini