

Severin

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 06 Nov 1997

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Doug Eigsti — 06 Nov 1997, 09:08

Spooky mantis, good work on cim.

Since you're lying down I couldn't help notice reference to "Severin" from Von Sacher Mashoch's VENUS IN FURS. I know you are not a proponent of the "Severin" to "Severian" connection but the contrasts are intriguing. Mashoch's Severin is the willing recipient of Wanda's excruciations, a Masochist. Wolfe's Severian turns the tables, assuming the role of torturer. Granted, he derives no pleasure from the act, other than the faithful execution of the Autarch's orders, he is no Sadist (as you correctly pointed out). The silimairity in the names alone is enough to make me think there is some connection, knowing how well read Mr. Wolfe is, unless you want to claim synchronicity or a Freudian slip.

=Talon=

m.driussi — 06 Nov 1997, 18:09 · follows Doug Eigsti

Reply: Item #8062114 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET03#

Talon,

The Severin/Severian notion is pretty interesting and I'm glad you are still kicking it around. You could build it up into a solid essay, I'm sure.

You remind me that last time we corresponded on this I said Severian isn't an algophilist. Just to cause mischief: Well, that's what

=Severian= insists at various points in the text. However, his relations with women are a bit more dominating/alienated than we can reasonably assume would be "average" for a man who had grown up (1) under near-total gender segregation, (2) being instructed on the arts of torture. Just as we begin to question his "perfect memory," we might well begin to doubt his lack of sadism.

To begin with the clear cases: he =knows= that he has been psychologically cruel to Dorcas with his flaunting of affairs with other women (well, maybe she doesn't know about Cyriaca); he =knows= that he has caused physical pain in consensual carnal relations with Dorcas. And this is a woman he really =loves=! Then there is the threat of violence against the Thecla khaibit; the "affair" with Jolenta that he himself says might have been rape (which is actually perhaps even more damning for his situation, since rape is shown to be a form of punishment dealt out by torturers =by judicial order=; see also the near-rape of Casdoe by zoanthrops); and so on, back to the beginning where Severian, in a mood of petty vindictive jealousy, gives Thecla a knife rather than setting her free (to love somebody else). (So how come people get all crazy about the petty vindictive behavior of the women in "The Cat" as some kind of gender issue when Severian his own self is so much worse--and that's before ingesting Thecla. [:)])

(Hey, maybe I should call "[:)" the Frankensmiley.)

Now if I recollect my cliff notes aright, VENUS IN FURS is at one level about the natural evolution of a masochist into a sadist, a transformation between what looks like polar opposites. TBOTNS is about the metamorphosis of a torturer into a kind of anti-torturer, but even in his "advanced" state, Severian has some odd moments with women: for example, his abrupt murder of the mistress of the jailors; the petty vindictive jealousy that might underlie the "accidental" assassination of Valeria.

SEVERIAN IS AN ANTI-HERO. I don't think that people will argue with that point. Among various "heroic" attributes we find "chivalric attitude towards women"; and yea, verily, Severian lacks this quality at various levels, confirming his anti-hero status. Moorcock's Elric is also an anti-hero; but when Elric kills the woman he loves (as when Jerry Cornelius shoots his sister/lover) it is an "accident" rather than pre-meditated (pulling punches?). OTOH in Clint Eastwood's "The Unforgiven," as in Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," [sp?] there is that moment when suddenly the reader's alligence shifts from protagonist to antagonist-as-victim.

Go Talon!

=mantis=