

Hyacinths and Weeds

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Nov 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3606>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Charles Reed — 25 Nov 2002, 18:24

Howdy again.

I've always been a little puzzled by how the passage Remora quotes ("Though trodden beneath the shepherd's heel, / the wild hyacinth blooms on the ground.") at the end of RttW is able to affect the re-emergence of Silk. Of course, there's the very suggestive reference to Hyacinth, but I've always felt there had to be something a little more to this passage.

I'm still not sure I have a handle on it, but I just finished my first re-reading of THE URTH OF THE NEW SUN in well over a decade.

[Side note: My first reading left me a little cold, but the second reading improved it considerably, although it's still my least favorite of the the "Sun" books. I think the reason has to do with it's being more of a "philosophical" work than one in which I become strongly, emotionally involved with the characters. Still, there were a great many things made clear to me that had been fuzzy, so it's definitely worth a re-read or two.]

In any case, I found a really nice passage, that bears at least peripherally on the Remora quote. It occurs in Chapter L, and the setting is this: After Severian, as Apu-Punchau, attempted to leave the stone village and walk to the sea, the villagers caught up with him and killed him when he refused to come back. Afterwards, Severian awoke to find himself with his old cacogen friends: Barbatus, Ossipago, and Famulimas. Severian is disturbed by the fact that he hasn't been allowed to die. Pay special attention to the last line.

"I suppose that even if I were to kill myself,
Ossipago could still call me back to existence."
Barbatus shook his head, though not as a human
being would have. "There would be no point -- you
could take your life again. If you truly want to
die, go ahead. There are funeral offerings here
[referring to the funeral offerings of Apu-Punchau],
including a great many stone knives. Ossipago will
bring you one."

I felt as real as I ever have; and when I
searched among my memories, I found Valeria there
still, and Thecla and old Autarch, and the boy
Severian (who had been Severian only). "No," I
said. "We will live."

"I thought so." Barbatus smiled. "We've known
you half our lives now, Severian, and you're a weed
that grows best when stepped upon."

Perhaps there's no real connection other than a thematic one, but it was a powerful connection

for me, and somehow makes Remora's quote more powerful. It's as if somehow Silk, like Severian, has to make a choice about whether to continue living. And he is confronted with the two things that have been the most important things in his life -- Hyacinth and the Shepherd (i.e., the Outsider) and finally realizes that if he does not continue to live he will cause the Hyacinth-that-lives-in-him and the Outsider-that-lives-in-him, to die. He cannot do such a thing so he (like Severian, who cannot allow all those who are within him to die), chooses to live.

Wolfe continually amazes me.

Charles