

Severian/Faust

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Mar 1998

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Peter Stephenson — 13 Mar 1998, 09:14

m.driussi at genie.geis.com wrote:

Re: Severian as Faustian when tempted by the undine who quotes Marlow. Please say more--which temptation are you thinking of? The dream scene? The sandbar scene?

The latter. I was a bit glib, so I've looked it up, in chapter XXVIII of *Claw*, 'The Odalisque of Abaia'. The undine tempts Severian to join her under the water for largely unnamed delights, and he is about to step in --- his motivation is not really clear to me: 'I wanted to believe her, to go with her, as a drowning man wants to gasp air' --- when Dorcas wakes up and the undine disappears.

A couple of pages later, during the ensuing conversation, Severian flicks through the brown book and finds "Hell has no limits, nor is circumscribed; for where we are is Hell, and where Hell is, there must we ever be." This is almost verbatim from Mephistopheles' remark to Faustus in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (actually, I remember "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed in one self place..."): Faustus has asked him, if you're all confined in Hell, how come you're here? and this is part of the response. Faustus evidently hasn't really got the point since his own reply largely adds up to 'oh, that's not so bad, then.'

Given whose name is on the cover of *Claw*, this presumably has some significance at this point. Is Severian being tempted into a Faustian pact (which takes different forms in different tellings of the Faust legend)? Is the undine Mephistopheles? Is she, perhaps more likely, Helen, as conjured up in Marlowe's version up to tempt Faustus ('`was this the face that launched a thousand ships'', etc.)?

With Wolfe you seem to need some analogue of the 'Seven Principles of Governance' from *Shadow*, say Principles of Association, in which case the Faustus quotation would be of the first kind, 'Direct association with the body of the text', and the relationship with the undine of a higher kind, 'Association conceived of as including but not limited to a reference to some or all of the immediately preceeding or following occurrences'. This second kind is rather more typical.

Peter