

On a rereading

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 18 May 1998

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J. Schultz — 18 May 1998, 19:50

Having taken a week long vacation I got a chance to reread the four books of the New Sun. I am writing more as a reflection and coalescence of my own thoughts, rather than to anyone in particular. Bear with me if anything I say repeats things said long ago in archives or states the obvious that you already figured out for yourself. Also, it has been sometime since I have read the sequel book so my speculations may contradict things contained in it.

The first 3 and a half books seem to deal with the theme of Severian becoming his own man and casting off other authorities' hold on him. Every authority that is, except that of the Increate. In each episode of Sev's life he pledges his loyalty to a vestige of authority which is later broken by him. We see shy this breaking of authority is necessary during the dream that takes place after the play near the wall of Nessus. In the dream Malrubius reviews the several types of authority with Sev. He illustrates personal loyalty to the throne is the strongest and most basic type of authority. He leaves his argument open ended but implies that Sev must forge a personal loyalty to the Increate himself. Thus we see that those who follow the church, or the crown, or the police, or those whose loyalties lie indirectly with Increate are far more distant from Him. An example of this are those who consider themselves 'born again.' They have a much stronger faith having found God for themselves than those who have been brought up to believe the Church without question. Sev's life is a slow process of removing himself from outside authority and following what I guess should be called the 'True Path,' that of direct loyalty to the Increate. Sev states that the Conciliator, if he had weapons used them on himself and later makes alludes to the fact that he feels he is doing that himself. He is killing of the parts of him that will blindly follow false authority (all authority being false except that of the Increate) Earlier in this group we discussed Sev's turning point, which being a human and prone will not be black and white in Sev's life. The turning point is just before he attacks the castle of Baldanders when he pledges to follow the will of the Increate above all others. All other events have led up to this and in rereading the passage I'm sure you'll agree. He breaks ties with the Guild, the Archon, Voudalus, Dr Talos' Death name tag, Typhon's will, etc. etc. and finally forges his personal loyalty to God. The title Autarch as meaning 'self ruler' also alludes to this theme. I probably could of said all that better, but its been a while since I've had to write coherent thoughts. Feel free to state it better, or reverse it in your own words.

This post is already overlong, but I wish to tie it in to a question. I have a feeling that the imagery of the phalus is tied in with this theme of self governance. The autarch carries an iron phalus around his neck. (He later compares the fluid inside to that of semen when Sev is forced to eat him in the jungle prison) Gurelos has a fake phalus, because he's a coward and can't use his real one. Sev calls Terminus Est his phallus and when it is broken (ouch) it is replaced by the pointed object of the Claw. The Claw in its earlier gem form has a little phallic imagery of its own, being carried in a little soft sack of skin. Any thoughts on this?

And Finally,

I feel I need to be the Doubting Thomas on the little theory of the 13 Severian's. (remember now, I have not reread Urth of the New Sun yet) I think we cannot look at Severian as Sev to the

13th power or anything like that. I don't understand why the White Fountain and the Claw should be considered separate entities all their own. The Claw is merely a focus of Sev2's own power that as he says himself he draws from the very earth and sky around him. We don't need to quantify this energy into Newton's, or wonder what type of energy Sev is tapping (whether its Solar, Ocean, etc) The power is that of RENEWAL and CREATION and is present in all things because everything has passed through the hands of the Increate (as Sev points out himself on the Beach) Sev was able to tap this infinite energy and funnel it through the Claw. The Claw does not have a mind of its own. Why does the Claw sometimes act and sometimes doesn't? (Good question but I don't think the answer is that its a separate Severian) To make a Science out of Sev's powers is to act like Baldanders, thinking everything should be rational and quantifiable. And we saw what his thinking leads to, Ragnorak!

I see the first Sev as being a part of the second Sev. It is Sev1 who Sev2 feels standing next to him at the Sang. Field. It is Sev1 who Sev2 finds he is praying to in the temple of the Pelerine's near the lazeret. Sev1 is like a higher soul who has perceived the future. There is a religion (it smacks of Shirley McClaine but bear with me) that believes that we are higher beings who have sent a part of our soul down to Earth in order that we may learn certain lessons. Our Higher soul stays in heaven and gives us strength and guidance and knows our fate. This religion believes when you have a clairvoyant dream, or contact a guiding angel you are actually contacting your higher soul. Because Sev's higher soul exists there is no need to go splitting him into infinity ("Sev 203 took the door on the right, but Sev 204 took the door on the left). Sev's higher soul, et al, is responsible for all the little miracles that direct Sev2's life, there need be no more. This is all within the first book. I understand things are different when you start to configure Apu and the sleeper into the picture, and other anomalies in the sequel.

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