

Severian's Mausoleum

The Urth list — 9 messages, 4 voices, 21 Nov 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6703>

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Robert Pirkola — 21 Nov 2014, 15:16

I was struck by the term "faithless door" in the passage describing Severian's mausoleum " . . . it was the smallness of the room, the thick walls of masonry, and the single, narrow window with its one bar, together with the faithless door (so massively heavy) that remained eternally ajar." (*Shadow and Claw*, pg. 17).

I do not know, and still do not know, what a faithless door is but while trying to find out, I came across this poem attributed to William Gifford, called *Epitaph* (1852), which has interesting resonances with Severian's story:

EPITAPH. Where ragged nettles mark the rising ground, And poisonous night-shade breathes infection round, Bill Brazen rots. In the good patriarch's phrase, Evil and few were his unhallowed days: Yet in these few and evil the rank knave Choused of a head-stone his poor father's grave; Abused his mother; grudged his children bread, And coffin'd them in wig boxes when dead;

Bullied his sister; kicked his wife to the door; Belied the parish books, and starved the poor. Till grown too bad for this bad town, kind Heaven Suffer'd the miscreant westward to be driven; Where three long years in solitary state He dragg'd the drunken hours through scorn and hate; Till as he lay one night devoid of rest, And conscience woke the worm within his breast, A wintry blast, with hoarse, tremendous roar, Rush'd through the gallery, burst the faithless door, Approach'd him, touch'd?? Christ Jesus! save, he cried, A wretch! a hateful wretch! "?? shook, groan'd, and died. Now buried here, the scorn that dogg'd his way Through life, still scents, and opens on his clay. * * * * * Stranger! this scene demands an awful pause: A vicious world takes arms in virtue's cause: Vice cowers beneath the shame she boasts to brave, And finds chastisement on this side the grave.

Norwood, Frederick Hudson — 21 Nov 2014, 15:20 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

Just as in the poem the door is faithless for letting in the cold wind, Severian's door is faithless for failing to remain closed.

Rick Norwood

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Robert Pirkola Sent: Friday, November 21, 2014 10:16 AM To: urth at urth.net Subject: (urth) Severian's Mausoleum

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Stranger! this scene demands an awful pause:
A vicious world takes arms in virtue's cause:
Vice cowers beneath the shame she boasts to brave,
And finds chastisement on this side the grave.

Robert Pirkola — 21 Nov 2014, 15:29 · follows Norwood, Frederick Hudson

Sorry. ?The formatting really mangled that poem. ?You can read it here more easily:?

<http://lordbyron.cath.lib.vt.edu/monograph.php?doc=Wijerda.1852&select=v4c7.4>

António Pedro Marques — 21 Nov 2014, 17:21 · in reply to Norwood, Frederick Hudson

Faithless in that you can have no faith in it.
Interesting verses.

No dia 21/11/2014, ?s 15:20, "Norwood, Frederick Hudson" <NORWOODR at mail.etsu.edu>
escreveu:

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Norwood, Frederick Hudson — 21 Nov 2014, 17:29 · in reply to António Pedro Marques

I think the intent is more to personify the door. It is faithless because you trusted it to stay closed, and it failed you.

Rick Norwood

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of António Pedro Marques Sent: Friday, November 21, 2014 12:21 PM To: The Urth Mailing List Subject: Re: (urth) Severian's Mausoleum

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Stranger! this scene demands an awful pause:
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Robert Pirkola — 21 Nov 2014, 17:50 · follows Norwood, Frederick Hudson

I supposed that was why it was called a faithless door, but I guess I was more interested in whether the term was a common one or was coined by Wolfe. "If it weren't coined by Wolfe, then I supposed that it might provide some insight into the nature of the mausoleum. How could such a heavy door be faithless" "It is implied that the door is so heavy that it will never be closed. ?If that is so, how was it ever opened in the first place" "And by whom"
Certainly not by a stray gust of wind like the faithless screen door at my house!?

António Marques — 21 Nov 2014, 18:27 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

Recurrent small floods might heighten the floor and get the door stuck? (I don't remember what the paving was.)

On 21 November 2014 17:50, Robert Pirkola <rpirkola at hotmail.com> wrote:
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How could such a heavy door be faithless? It is implied that the door is so heavy that it will never be closed. If that is so, how was it ever opened in the first place? And by whom?
Certainly not by a stray gust of wind like the faithless screen door at my house!

Norwood, Frederick Hudson — 21 Nov 2014, 18:40 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

I think the significant thing is not that the door could never be closed, but rather that when you closed it, it didn't stay closed. I get an image of Severian lying down to go to sleep and -- creeeeeeeeeek -- the door opens!

It's been so long since I read the book that I don't remember, is there any chance that the door opening, seemingly of its own accord, is a clue?

Rick Norwood

-----Original Message-----

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Robert Pirkola Sent: Friday, November 21, 2014 12:51 PM To: urth at urth.net Subject: (urth) Severian's Mausoleum

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Jeffery Wilson clueland.com — 24 Nov 2014, 06:36 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

On 11/21/2014 9:16 AM, Robert Pirkola wrote:
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I believe it is personification, and a faithless door will not serve its intended purpose like a faithless servant does not serve as intended. The mausoleum door is stuck open so it cannot keep safe the interior, likewise the door in the poem fails to keep out the person that bursts in. I suppose a door that fails to open when necessary would be equally faithless.

It's a quaint and archaic turn of phrase like many in the BOTNS, and perhaps it is no coincidence that it appears near the beginning and ends of the tale(s), which are also the times when Sev discusses his own faithlessness, as in the numerous vows he has broken.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< <http://www.tamut.edu/cil> >