

Wolfe's Answer re Torturers' Guild

The Whorl list — 6 messages, 3 voices, 16 Jun 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/349>

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Wesley Parsons (7065) — 16 Jun 1997, 09:51

My question and Wolfe's answer were:

<<14. "Is there a member (current, former, or future) of the Order of Seekers for Truth and Penitence on the Whorl?" I'm going to interpret this question in the broadest possible sense, since that seems to be what Parsons wants. Yes, there is. It is Silk.>>

It's been suggested that Wolfe is slyly pointing out that Silk is indeed a "seeker for truth and penitence," and Wolfe's answer has no more meaning than that. I would respectfully disagree. it. Wolfe rarely emphasizes key information in his writing, but he is always, within the logic of the narrative, accurate. Believe what he says. The Order of Seekers for Truth and Penitence (capitalized as a proper noun) is a specific organization. Silk is a member. Either Silk is (or has been/will be) a torturer. Severian has to be the best candidate.

Wes

Jim Jordan — 16 Jun 1997, 18:05 · follows Wesley Parsons (7065)

At 09:51 AM 6/16/97 -0400, you wrote:

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Wes

Nope.

I'll bet you're completely wrong.

The Order for Seekers of Truth and Penitence is (tada!) the Christian Church, or the Catholic Church.

Silk is a member of it in the proper sense.

Severian starts as a member of a perverse antichrist copy of it.

Thus, "in the broadest sense," both are members of it.

Don't be too surprised at this. Remember that in the bible, the opposite

of the Bride is the Whore. The anti-church of the antichrist clones (manmade men) in The Fifth Head of Cerberus is a whorehouse. The Autarch also runs a whorehouse.

All of which means to me: I need to reread the Severian Quintet for clues about this matter.

Hmmm. The towers. Consider. The towers at the center of a city, with a graveyard nearby, are usually the Cathedral. Here we have Witches, Animal Torturers (Bear Tower), and Human Torturers. Boy! An anti-cathedral or what?! But as Wolfe has said, Severian is trying to grow out and away from his horrible beginnings.

Hey, these towers are spaceships, pointed toward heaven, that once travelled in the heavens. A VERY interesting symbol for the church! But one that recurs in the form of THE SHIP of The Angel of Justice (Tsaddki-El). (How often is a spaceship a church in SF?)

"How marvelous it would be to send this old Matachin Tower hurtling among the stars! And yet there was something sinister about it, as about all things perverted from a noble purpose to a shameful one." Urth of NS, hc, 261.

For me, this is opening up a lot of new and interesting possibilities.

What do you experts (Mantis, et al.) think?

Nutria

Wesley Parsons (7065) — 17 Jun 1997, 08:10 · follows Jim Jordan

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Nutria,

Thanks for your comment, but I don't follow your logic. Membership in a group usually disqualifies one from membership the group's "opposite." If you're NRA, you're unlikely to have signed up for Citizens Against Handguns. Same for Republicans/Democrats. Or citizenship in different countries (you lose your citizenship when you swear oath to another.) Granted that "opposite" groups share the same subject matter, for example, handguns, or politics, or religion. When you interpret "in the broadest sense" so _broadly_ <g>, it tends to lose any meaning. Wolfe typically does not speak this way.

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Very interesting analysis. Isn't Silk's worship of pagan gods just as anti-Christian as anything Severian did in the Matachin Tower? Neither of them starts out worshipping the Judaeo-Christian God, although both are arguably enlightened by Him later.

Different question: Why would Wolfe say, "Knowing Typhon as I do . . ." (Question 3). Typhon is not that sufficiently characterized, as Typhon in NS, or as Pas in LS, to merit such familiarity.

Could it be that Typhon is a prominent character in Short Sun, and Wolfe has been inside his head these many months as he has written SS? And if Typhon is back, in the flesh, whose flesh has he got?

Wes

Michael Straight — 17 Jun 1997, 09:47 · follows Wesley Parsons (7065)

On Mon, 16 Jun 1997, Wesley Parsons wrote:

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Or maybe...

"All men are torturers." - Severian

-Rostrum

Wesley Parsons (7065) — 17 Jun 1997, 13:52 · follows Michael Straight

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"All men are torturers." - Severian

-Rostrum<<

Well said. But taking Severian's quote literally . . . half the Whorl are torturers. Wolfe identified Silk in particular (and not Blood, or Pike, or Horn, etc) as a member of the guild.

Wes

Jim Jordan — 18 Jun 1997, 13:56 · follows Wesley Parsons (7065)

At 08:10 AM 6/17/97 -0400, you wrote:

[Posted from WHORL, the mailing list for Gene Wolfe's Book of the Long Sun]

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Well, I sure won't burn at the stake for my thinking here! But in Christian theology, both Church and Antichurch are the same place. Roman Catholic theologians will say that just as a good Pope is the Vicar of Christ, so a bad Pope is an antichrist. Another way of putting it is that the shadow anti-church exists alongside the true church. This is definitely taught in the Bible. Now, how much of this is in Wolfe's mind? I don't know. But "Seekers of Truth and Penitence" is a perfectly good descriptive name for the Church. And, Severian's order is just like a monastic order in certain ways. Considering that both parish churches (Silk) and orders (Severian) exist within the Church, and that the Church can be more or less faithful, mixed with idolatry (Silk), even reversing her role (Severian) -- then "in the broadest sense" both are in the same institution.

What interests me now is to see if there are any more hints as to a connection between the Towers and a Cathedral. As you know, the early chapters of Shadow are loaded with sacramental imagery. When I have the time, I'd like to explore this a bit more -- unless someone else does so and posts it.

Nutricious Nutria