

Severian's Christianity

The Whorl list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 23 Jun 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/whorl/363>

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Peter Cash — 23 Jun 1997, 10:29

Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> (Nutria) wrote:

I don't want to get into an Alga-Nutria war, but once again I need to bring in Gene's own statement, to me, that Severian is not a Christ figure but a Christian figure. That's from the horse's (pardon, wolf's) mouth.

With respect, I flat-out don't understand how it can be so. A Christian is, by definition, a follower of Jesus Christ. (This is the minimum criterion, you can pile on as much theological baggage as you wish.) Christ is unknown in Severian's universe, so Severian cannot follow him. Therefore, Severian is not a Christian.

There is, perhaps, some ambiguity in what Wolfe told you. Perhaps he meant that though Severian is in no way meant to be Christ or someone like Christ (this would make the New Sun books heretical, after all), he is trying to live a Christ-like life. You don't have to be a Christian to do this--you don't even have to know who Christ is. But if you are doing it, then you may be said to have a "Christian characer".

Like Scripture, an author's words may require exegesis...

Rock

Michael Straight — 23 Jun 1997, 13:50 · follows Peter Cash

On Mon, 23 Jun 1997, Peter Cash wrote:

Jim Jordan <jbjordan at gnt.net> (Nutria) wrote:

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Perhaps Wolfe is thinking of something like this: If a character can be said to be a "Christ figure" by playing a role in the story analogous to the role Christ plays in the Christian story, then a character can be a "Christian figure" by playing a role in the story analogous to the role a Christian plays in the Christian story.

The most literal definition of the word 'Christian' is 'little Christ', so Wolfe may be saying that Severian is a 'lesser replica' of Christ rather than a 'conscious believer and follower of Christ.'

Others have pointed out that Severian seems to fill the "Christ figure" definition in several ways (working miracles, saving the world), but the things that most often cause a character to be compared to Christ are sacrificial death or suffering for others and some form of death, burial,

and resurrection. Using those two criteria, I'd say Silk (ObWhorl!) fits the bill for "Christ figure" more than Severian, and neither one fits as well as, say, Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* (trying to dredge up a "Christ figure" from high school English classes and probably getting the name wrong) or Tolkein's Aragorn.

Wolfe may also be thinking that, to be a "Christ figure" in the Urth multiverse, one would have to literally be the Increate (aka the Outsider) Incarnate. Maybe, as a Christian, Wolfe dislikes the idea of any character but Jesus being called a "Christ figure".

-Rostrum

MoreObWhorl: Interesting how stories about the Outsider found their way into the religion of Viron which Scylla had created as a parody.