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Messianic Figures in Science Fiction: A Comparative Study of Thomas Jerome Newton (The Man Who Fell to Earth) and Severian The Torturer (The Book of the New Sun)

Messianic figures occur frequently in science fiction. In this paper, I contrast two such messiahs. First, Thomas Jerome Newton, from Walter Tevis' "Man Who Fell to Earth." Newton, an alien, comes to Earth on a mission to save the people of his dying world, Anthea. Second, Severian the Torturer, from Gene Wolfe's "Book of the New Sun." Severian lives in a distant future where the sun is dying. It can be restored, but only by a messianic and prophesied figure: "The Conciliator." To accomplish this, the Conciliator must travel to an alien world and prove mankind's worth to the satisfaction of alien overlords. Thomas Jerome Newton begins optimistic to the point of arrogance, and fails in his mission as he is corrupted by life on Earth and succumbs to hedonism and despair. Severian, by contrast, begins corrupted by his upbringing among Guild of Torturers, but succeeds in fulfilling the role of Conciliator.

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