

Miles & Jolenta

The Urth list — 4 messages, 4 voices, 29 Oct 1998

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Alice Turner — 29 Oct 1998, 17:39

One strong argument against Miles and Jolenta's being actual siblings (or lookalikes) is that *Jolenta* doesn't look like Jolenta. The original is a plain serving girl whom Dr. Talos has endowed with artificial glamour. The artificiality is what is attractive to Jonas.

-alga

Peter Westlake — 30 Oct 1998, 00:16 · follows Alice Turner

At 17:39 1998-10-29 -0500, you wrote:

One strong argument against Miles and Jolenta's being actual siblings (or lookalikes) is that *Jolenta* doesn't look like Jolenta. The original is a plain serving girl whom Dr. Talos has endowed with artificial glamour. The artificiality is what is attractive to Jonas.

That's right. Anyway, what is all this about Miles looking like Jolenta? Severian doesn't show him Jolenta's face in the mirror, he shows him his own! That's how mirrors work, even on Urth - this is only a shaving mirror, not (half of) one of Hethor's portable teleporters.

Citadel, ch VI:

"What do you remember? Tell me all of it, and I'll tell you what I know, and what I can guess."

"Walking with you. A lot of darkness.... I fell, or maybe flew through it. Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes."

"A beautiful woman?"

He nodded. "The most beautiful in the world."

Raising my voice, I asked if anyone had a mirror he would lend us for a moment. Foila produced one from the possessions beneath her cot, and I held it up for the soldier. Is this the face?"

He hesitated. "I think so."

"Blue eyes?"

"...I can't be sure."

Condensed, this goes:

"Seeing my own face, ..."

"Was this the face?" - holding a mirror in front of him.

The face that he saw, in other words. The blue eyes Severian queries are the soldier's "honest blue eyes" (next page). The soldier appears to remember being Jonas, and Severian is asking him to compare the face he remembers seeing in the mirrors with his present face. It isn't physically the same, of course, but it keeps reminding Severian of Jonas, and the soldier can be forgiven for having the same problem, having been reprogrammed with Severian's idea of Jonas's memories. Nothing to do with Jolenta at all.

Sceptical Bear.

William H. Ansley — 30 Oct 1998, 01:10 · follows Peter Westlake

Peter Westlake <peter at harlequin.co.uk> wrote:

That's right. Anyway, what is all this about Miles looking like Jolenta? Severian doesn't show him Jolenta's face in the mirror, he shows him his own! That's how mirrors work, even on Urth - this is only a shaving mirror, not (half of) one of Hethor's portable teleporters.

Thank goodness (and evilness, to preserve duality)!

I am glad that someone else interpreted this passage in the same way I did, which seems to me to be the only sensible way to interpret it. In fact, I couldn't figure out what mantis was talking about when he stated his interpretation, until I went back and read the passage again. I suppose it is possible to read the passage his way, but I think to do so is to needlessly complicate matters. When Severian says, "Is this the face?" he is referring back to Miles's statement, "Seeing my own face [that is Jonas's], multiplied again and again" not to his vision of (a woman who might be) Jolenta.

The fact that Miles seems to have memories that belong to Jonas is mystery enough without creating new ones that I think Wolfe never intended or even thought of.

William Ansley

Tony Ellis — 30 Oct 1998, 09:58 · follows William H. Ansley

Sceptical Bear wrote:

Condensed, this goes:

"Seeing my own face, ..."

"Was this the face?" - holding a mirror in front of him.

Yup, that works for me.

Strictly speaking, I think the passage can be read either way: when Miles says "Seeing my own face, multiplied again and again. A girl with hair like red gold and enormous eyes", it -can- be interpreted as "seeing my own face... [which was that of] a girl with hair like red gold..." But it's a complicated interpretation, and I'm only too happy to be wrong in favour of a simpler one.

It's interesting that Mantis and I made the same misreading, though (if he'll accept that it -is- a misreading). There seem to be certain ambiguous passages in Wolfe that you either interpret one way or another the first time you read them, and that's how it gets hard-wired in your brain: it never even occurs to you on further readings that it might be read a different way. I'm

thinking of the rats' "writing" on the walls of Ultan's library, for example.