

The Ascian's Shadow

The Urth list — 10 messages, 4 voices, 01 Aug 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3390>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

matthew.malthouse — 01 Aug 2002, 10:11

I can't find the thread this subject came up in a day or two ago but I chanced upon the matter last evening.

TCotA Ch 16. Ash is speaking to Severian:

"The men without shadows..."

"You call your enemies Ascians, which of course is not what they call themselves, because your fathers believed that they came from the waist of Urth, where the sun is precisely overhead at noon. The truth is that their home is much farther north."

As an allusion to the shadow of the torturer it seems inapt or perhaps ironic: the Ascians seem to have no lack of torturers despite the "perfection" of the rule of the Group of Seventeen.

Matthew

James Wynn — 01 Aug 2002, 15:35 · follows matthew.malthouse

Matthew malthouse wrote:

As an allusion to the shadow of the torturer it seems inapt or perhaps ironic: the Ascians seem to have no lack of torturers despite the "perfection" of the rule of the Group of Seventeen.

That is an -excellent- point! Except the title is not "The Shadow of **A** Torturer", it is "The Shadow of THE Torturer".

Is it "The Sword of the Lictor" where Severian describes the proper procedure in a public execution as requiring that he cast his shadow on the condemned (IIRC)? All Commonwealth torturers follow that ritual. All beings on Urth cast shadows - even the Ascians and their torturers. Only for Severian does his interposition before the Sun constitute a symbol.

"Shadows" in tBotNS represent the NEW SUN and the new order and future it brings. Only Severian is affirmed by the sun symbol and only he --the NEW Sun-- in coming ordinally and chronologically after the old Sun, brings death (in his shadow) as well as life (ie. All the people killed in the Deluge). That is Erebus' and Abia's hold on the New Sun's enemies - that the New Sun will destroy everything.

So.... The Ascians are shadowless. They repudiate the "shadow" (i.e. the destruction and change) of the New Sun, thus they serve (i.e. are "under") Erebus (the TOTAL Darkness of Death).

-- Crush

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 01 Aug 2002, 16:47 · follows James Wynn

Matthew, you wrote:

As an allusion to the shadow of the torturer it seems inapt or perhaps ironic: the Ascians seem to have no lack of torturers despite the "perfection" of the rule of the Group of Seventeen.

Correct ... as far as it goes.

But the shadow of the torturer (not some shadow of some torturer) does not fall upon them; they are not touched by the salvation Severian is to bring.

So much for universalism.

Adam Stephanides — 02 Aug 2002, 00:20 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

on 8/1/02 11:47 AM, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:

But the shadow of the torturer (not some shadow of some torturer) does not fall upon them; they are not touched by the salvation Severian is to bring.

So much for universalism.

Neither are 99.9% of the Commonwealth's population. And do we know that no Ascians survived? If a few people survived the destruction of the Commonwealth, isn't it probable that a few Ascians would also have survived? In fact, wouldn't Erebus, being aware (as Volenta was not) of what the New Sun's coming means, have prepared for it?

OTOH, if "the shadow of the torturer" is the death and destruction Severian brings, the Ascians certainly are touched by it.

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 02 Aug 2002, 00:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

on 8/1/02 10:35 AM, James Wynn at crushtv at HotPOP.com wrote:

"Shadows" in tBotNS represent the NEW SUN and the new order and future it brings. Only Severian is affirmed by the sun symbol

One of the Ascian's sayings also alludes to shadow imagery: "Behind everything some further thing is found forever; thus the tree behind the bird, stone beneath soil, the sun behind Urth." (ch. XI; p. 80, Timescape, ed.) This can't be an accident on Wolfe's part, though I don't know what its significance is.

Some of the Ascian's other remarks also seem to have a wider significance:

"How are the hands nourished? By the blood. How does the blood reach the hands? By the veins. If the veins are closed, the hands will rot away," (Ibid.) which Foila interprets as a reference to roads; whether intentional on the Ascian's part or not, this can be taken as a criticism of the Autarch's policy of closing the roads.

"[A] brave woman desires children, and not husbands." (ch. V, p. 33) Sure enough, very few of the women we meet in TBotS desire husbands; even Foila doesn't seem that eager to marry, despite organizing the storytelling contest herself.

The longish paragraph which Foila interprets as meaning that the stories by the skill of their telling, not their content, may be Wolfe's ironic comment on his own reception.

--Adam

matthew.malthouse — 02 Aug 2002, 10:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

On 01/08/2002 17:47:02 Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Matthew, you wrote:

As an allusion to the shadow of the torturer it seems inapt or perhaps ironic: the Ascians seem to have no lack of torturers despite the "perfection" of the rule of the Group of Seventeen.

Correct ... as far as it goes.

But _the_ shadow of _the_ torturer (not _some_ shadow of _some_ torturer) does not fall upon them; they are not touched by the salvation Severian is to bring.

So much for universalism.

The coming of the New Sun and the cataclysm caused by its unquiet arrival can hardly be just for the Commonwealth. What "salvation" can Severian bring that would not touch the Ascians?

On 01/08/2002 16:35:47 James Wynn wrote:

So.... The Ascians are shadowless. They repudiate the "shadow" (i.e. the destruction and change) of the New Sun, thus they serve (i.e. are "under")

Erebus (the TOTAL Darkness of Death).

Yet their repudiation avails nothing. They too live on Urth, will not one survive into Ushas?

Matthew

matthew.malthouse — 02 Aug 2002, 10:56 · follows matthew.malthouse

On 02/08/2002 01:20:54 Adam Stephanides wrote:

on 8/1/02 10:35 AM, James Wynn at crushtv at HotPOP.com wrote:

"Shadows" in tBotNS represent the NEW SUN and the new order and future it brings. Only Severian is affirmed by the sun symbol

One of the Ascian's sayings also alludes to shadow imagery: "Behind everything some further thing is found forever; thus the tree behind the bird, stone beneath soil, the sun behind Urth." (ch. XI; p. 80, Timescape, ed.) This can't be an accident on Wolfe's part, though I don't know what its significance is.

Some of the Ascian's other remarks also seem to have a wider significance:

"How are the hands nourished? By the blood. How does the blood reach the hands? By the veins. If the veins are closed, the hands will rot away," (Ibid.) which Foila interprets as a reference to roads; whether intentional on the Ascian's part or not, this can be taken as a criticism of the Autarch's policy of closing the roads.

It may be so. The Autarch in explaining to Severian says that the policy is bad, deliberately fostering stagnation. Yet the implication is that the Ascian's progress is a chimera (it may be explicit, I haven't the book with me today).

The Autarch speaks of human kind going again to the stars when it can carry with it some "wholeness". The Ascian's progress will not achieve this aim but I don't see how the stagnation of the Commonwealth fosters it.

Matthew

James Wynn — 02 Aug 2002, 15:08 · follows matthew.malthouse

On 01/08/2002 16:35:47 James Wynn wrote:

So.... The Ascians are shadowless. They repudiate the "shadow" (i.e. the destruction and change) of the New Sun, thus they serve (i.e. are "under")

Erebus (the TOTAL Darkness of Death).

Matthew Malthouse wrote:

Yet their repudiation avails nothing. They too live on Urth, will not one survive into Ushas?

True. But they ARE in league with Erebus ("the darkness of Death" - that is the literal definition of the word). The fact that the New Sun eventually overcomes the darkness does change with whom they through their lot.

After the Deluge, there is no more Ascia and the Ascians are no longer "shadowless". And if Erebus had won, there would be no New Sun and the Conciliator's title and *declared* destiny would have been academic.

Crush

And now, ---> stuff I typed which I have determined are irrelevant to my point:

-----If I were to derive theology from everything in tBotNS - a mistake - then I would say this rejects the posit that what each person believes his afterlife will be like is what it will be like (ala the 9-11 bombers are NOT currently being tended by 64 virgins). ----

James Wynn — 02 Aug 2002, 15:49 · follows James Wynn

I wrote:

The fact that the New Sun eventually overcomes the darkness does change with whom they through

their lot.

Of course I meant "does NOT change with whom they threw their lot"

-- Crush

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 02 Aug 2002, 19:02 · follows James Wynn

I observed that

But _the_ shadow of _the_ torturer (not _some_ shadow of _some_ torturer)

does not fall upon them; they are not touched by the salvation Severian

is to bring.

Neither are 99.9% of the Commonwealth's population.

Again, so much for universalism. But at least some are.

And do we know that no Ascians survived?

Mere survival is not the "salvation" I referred to; it is the regeneration of humanity which (according to the Hieros) will ultimately lead Urth-humans back to the stars. It begins not with Severian's bringing the New Sun, but with his ascending the throne (and, I think, its overt sign is his abolishing torture).