

The Book of Typhon Part One - Severian's ancestry

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 Nov 2002

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Don Doggett — 25 Nov 2002, 07:13

Howdy y'all,

A few posts back, someone wrote that they wished there was a Book of Typhon and a Book of Piaton. Well, I don't know about the second but I'm beginning to believe that the entire Sun Cycle might be the first. I wonder if Typhon (excluding Pas) is not the best concealed major character in fiction ever. And while my reading of King Jesus pointed me in this direction (rightly or wrongly), I don't think it's necessary at all to my speculations. On what? Severian's ancestry, to start.

Let me start by saying flat out that I don't believe that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother or that Ouen is his father. To me, that is such a big red herring that we could all eat fish taco's for a month. It's always bothered me and I'll state the simple reason why. Incest. I cannot believe that Wolfe would have his main character commit incest, knowingly or unknowingly, and especially without any good reason. And there is no good reason (unless you want to establish Severian as Antichrist, which I don't believe) for Severian to sleep with his grandmother. If she was his mother, there's the Oedipus parallel. If his sister, there's the marriage of Pharaoh and his Sister (and other parallels I can't think of). If his daughter, there's the story of Noah. If someone can point out a mytho-symbolic instance of grandson-grandmother incest then I will rethink this. Otherwise I will never be convinced.

Especially when there are two better alternatives which fit much more snugly into Severian's mythos. There is the obvious Jesus parallel where Joseph/Ouen is the "father" (though God is the real father) and Mary/Katharine (which means "pure") is the virgin/pelerine mother. There is also the Arthurian parallel where Sir Hector is Arthur's "father" through the intervention of Merlin/Inire? and the real father is Uther the King (Monarch). Either fit better than the Dorcas and Ouen alternative.

Before I get too deep into this, let me say that I have a lot of puzzle pieces and a fair amount of them fit together, but I don't have a comprehensive picture and I'm confused by some things. Mainly I'm confused by the relationship between Ymar and Severian, and because of this I'm unable to make the precise connection I'd like between either Ymar and Typhon or Severian and Typhon. That said, I'm sure there is a strong familial connection between the three and I'm equally sure that the Sun Cycle is also a very complex dynastic novel in addition to it's other mind boggling functions. What I'm saying is any help would be appreciated.

There are four things that tie Ymar to Severian strongly in my mind.

The first is that they are both sheltered by the Guild. The second is that they both go on to be Autarch and travel to Yesod. Third is the anecdote about Ymar following the dog (which I think is the real point of Severian's relating it, in spite of his elaborate attempt to explicate it's meaning), and the fourth is in Ymar's title: the Almost Just. As in James the Just, brother of Jesus. I also discovered that ymar is supposedly Hebrew for ox, though I have no idea what relevance that has.

One or both of them is Typhon's son. My reasoning for this is in the Tale of a Boy Called Frog. In this tale, Spring Wind/typhoon/Typhon fathers twin sons with a princess whose father had given her over to an order of virgin priestesses (hmmm?). I would add that Spring Wind is the son of Early Summer and the juice of a red flower (fire? a rose? the old sun?) "No, I was not born as I

am, or born at all, as you meant it." The sons are set adrift on a stream (the brook madregot?) One of the sons is taken in by wolves and sheltered by the Black Killer (the Guild?) and goes on to rule. "Here is the red flower. In his name I rule." Severian's coat of arms contains the red flower, as does the mausoleum of his boyhood. This implies some sort of dynastic tie between the two. And Severian's memorial stone in "Urth" says "by Right the First Man of Urth" By right of what? No one knows whether he's the one to bring the New Sun. Maybe it's by right of blood, by his tie to the Monarch. My problem is, is this Severian the story is talking about or is it Ymar? Are they brothers? Are they the same person? Is one a clone of the other? If Severian is this son then it seems likely that Katharine and Kypris are one and the same. If Ymar is the son then Kypris is surely his mother. My pet theory is that Ymar is Typhon's son and Severian is his (Ymar's) clone. This allows Katharine to give a virgin birth and allows Severian to be his own father. This dynastic theory also meshes nicely with Greek mythology, which as Peter Green states in his introduction to Apollonius of Rhodes Argonautica (univ. of california press, p.22) ". . . has as background a complex genealogical web of intertwined family relationships. . . ." Whatever the answer, the one thing I am absolutely positive of is that Dorcas is in no way an immediate member of Severian's family. Which brings another question. Does he know his ancestry? (I think yes. Valeria most likely told him.) If he does, why is he hiding it?

Don

Hubert Rogers — 25 Nov 2002, 08:53 · follows Don Doggett

This is a really interesting alternative to the Dorcas theory which seems far to simple and without any substantial implications to me. I especially like the "Tale of a boy called Frog" parallels, which I don't think can be mere coincidence.

----- Original Message -----

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Perhaps he's hiding it because he realised that he had killed his own father. That might make him ashamed enough not to mention it directly but instead provide us with the clues to work it out.