

time warping of botanic gardens/ female flowers

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 18 Apr 2003

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maa32 — 18 Apr 2003, 06:12

I had always assumed that the thematic implications of the botanical gardens were to demystify Severian's facility in transcending time. Of course the religious sentiments expressed by Isangoma are from South America - they are also from a religious practice that forbid females from participating and actively sought to kill any females that saw the rituals. Their evil deity fits nicely with Agia.

As Agia and Severian approach the garden, she talks about the Conciliator being the master of time, then we get a big story about how the mirrors of father inire can actually fold space, or at least create beings of light where reflections meet. One of the properties of reflected light is that in a vacuum its movement would be indicative of the negation of time. These gardens are supposed to be thematically tied to different time periods. Notice what happens to Severian when he finds the one with the bush that will sprout the claw of the conciliator - the passage of time is negated for him, and he doesn't realize how long he's been there. Here, the claw meets itself for the first time - he is carrying it with him, and it is on the bush. To me, it seems clear that the mirrors bend time as well as space, and that in Wolfe the two are closely related. Remember that short story about the doll? I think Severian really casts a spiritual reflection back into the past that Isangoma can perceive - it is one of the properties of the conciliator, the master of time, as Agia just said. Wolfe also said that a reflected bit of light that left the universe would cause an object to be formed in the new universe to reflect it. Light from the past can therefore influence creation.

On a different tack, we know that the flowers of the text tell us something about the women who wear them. Thecla is associated with death lilies and death roses because she will die, and shoot up from her own grave in severian as those flowers bloom over graves. Agia is associated with the poisonous Avern because she is a poisonous woman who seeks out heat and excitement. Dorcas is a mutable expression of both experience and innocence, so she changes her flowers - she seems young but she is dead, she seems virginal but she has had a son and sleeps with her probable grandson, she seems faithful but she leaves Severian, etc.

Given that these women are associated with flowers (an association strengthened with the Long Sun books) does the fact that Agia's Avern is from outer space tell us anything about Agia? Remember that her brother wears a death's head mask, but after he removes it the straps are in place. The cacogens wear two masks - one of normality and one of ugliness to hide their beautiful faces. Is there any other indication that Agia might be extraterrestrial in nature? Or is that thematic link a dead end? Anybody commented on this before? I'm sure it's come up. Is Agia an evil Cacogen opposed to Inire?

Marc Aramini

JoshuaFalchion — 20 Apr 2003, 02:55 · follows maa32

I think that the suggestion that Agia is a cacogen is likely a thematic dead end, as you suppose, but it is an interesting one. The curiousness of the mask straps remaining is a good point. Also,

consider Hethor, who certainly was a sailor (on Tzadkiel's ship, presumably), and unless Agia was telling the truth (and she was a good liar, who fooled Severian for the most part), he possibly brought her and Agilus back with him from the stars ... Unfortunately, I consider these points suspect myself, and I continue to think Agia merely human, though an extraordinary one.

Joshua