

"pristine" first chapter

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Jul 2003

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maa32 — 12 Jul 2003, 06:15

Just an offhand comment that many here will already know:

The mistake in identification between Drotte and Roche, coming early in the narrative, seems unlikely to be a mistake by Wolfe because of its prevalence as the opening scene. However (as someone who just completed a novel with a lackluster beginning that I'm still changing) sometimes the beginning is the easiest part to change. Indeed, we know that Wolfe switched the first chapter with the second chapter in his narrative. Which means that originally "Severian" would have been the first chapter, and we would have seen the drowning before the saving of Vodalus. There is so much in that first chapter that it is hard to believe that it might be a last minute revision, but the possibility does exist that it is the last thing Wolfe touched in his rewrite of Shadow of the Torturer.

My question is this: assuming that all of these mistakes in memory are valid, do they all point to something? Are any of them related to his use of the claw? Does anything connect them? What does it matter if Severian has an almost perfect memory as opposed to a perfect one? I like the idea that the previous iterations of Severian survive in his memories: he's lived the same stuff so many times that he remembers multiple timelines and only thinks that he actually remembers what happened to him. My favorite example is his recital of the poem of hiding: he changes from "Like glass grow to any eye" to "Like grass grow to any eye" from SotT to CotA. A typo? A Freudian slip? And then, if the Severian that comes to retrieve the coin is a different eye, changed through time and manipulation, does the coin simply appear to be counterfeit to his eyes? Could it be genuine all along, while Severian's primitive magic actually deceives his future self? Some odd stuff.

Do the changes make him look better? Not really. It just lets us know that his memory is fishy and may not be utterly accurate because his life has been extensively meddled with.

Also, on the topic of Silk confused as Malrubius: yes, Gurloe's fear in Chapter 19 of RttW was the primary area, but I also thought that Brother Porter saw Silk and thought he was Malrubius as well. I thought there were two occurrences of this. I'll look again.

Marc Aramini