

Severian's family tree

The Urth list — 24 messages, 9 voices, 13 Aug 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4688>

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.

b sharp — 13 Aug 2006, 16:26

Don Doggett wrote:

I am still not convinced that Dorcas is Sev's grandmother. Perhaps I'm just blind and stubborn, but it doesn't feel right to me at all. It makes no plot sense, no mythic sense, no moral sense, and it >hinges on such an obvious and ham handed revelation. It's just a dud to me.

Roy C. Lackey writes:

I don't want to get bogged down in the "Original Sin is carnal knowledge" issue, still less in the >morass of Severian's presumed familial inbreeding.....

I'm sympathetic to the view that Dorcas really isn't Severian's grandmother. It is only implied by some "ham handed" clues, but never revealed outright. Ouen's mother (and boatman's wife) is named Cas not Dorcas and there are no other nicknames used anywhere else that I know in BotNS (except Zak). In many years of reading I never saw any plot, moral or mythic significance in the incest angle either except.. "Uh...Oedipus?"

But lately I have seen significances, and finding plot, mythic and moral sense in that grandmotherly incest sways me to think it is the proper interpretation. "Cas" is used in the same way as "Zak" and is revealed to be a deliberate auctorial misdirection.

Regarding ham-handed clues, I think this follows a pattern of puzzle solution I see throughout BotNS. I liken it to those cryptogram puzzles you see in the newspaper. You are given a jumble of letters and the author solves one word for you. You then deduce rules and make intuitive leaps to decode the rest. The Last House as a time travel structure is another example of this puzzle solution. Wolfe tells us all about that one, then we are supposed to find the others. So Wolfe gives us one (or two) incest occurrences also.

So, in my recent attempt to map Severian's family tree I tried to assemble all the funny little clues I had noted through the years of reading but didn't understand. Added to these was the incidence of incest and twins (the Severian-Severa clue). During the process I became struck with just how many incidents of incest seemed to be implied and I wondered why.

Then I realized "Oh, Oedipus!". Oedipus, like Severian, was a pretty good guy. He had no idea he had killed his father and married his mother (until later in life). The reason he was set up to do those things is that he belonged to a cursed family. Even relocation and anonymous adoption in infancy couldn't break his family curse.

These Greek family curses were invariable brought on by a transgression against the gods. I don't see anything in BotNS suggesting Sev's family transgressed against the pagan gods/cacogens/megatherians whatever they are, in such ghastly scope as was done to put the curse on (for example) the House of Atreus in mythology. Maybe, if we ignore timeframe, we could say that Severian himself transgressed against them by being the Conciliator, by

defeating Ceryx, by helping depose Typhon and later killing him and by bringing a cleansing Judeo-Christian flood.

However I think we could also say, simply, that these alien beings, representing pagan gods, are by nature incestuous and that Severian's family tree was infected by the curse simply through a mating with one of them who took human form. This curse takes the form of relentless incestuous sexual attraction between all family members, no matter how close and familial or how distant and anonymous the family members might be.

I can't get family brackets in here but I'll try to discuss what I think is Severian's family tree in a later post. For now I'll just mention some questions regarding the story; some weird things which always bothered me, but are answered by an incest curse on Severian's family tree.

What is the plot purpose of Agia and Agilus' presumed incest?

Why are Severian and Juturna sexually drawn to each other?

Why are Dorcas and Jolenta sexually drawn to each other?

Why does Typhon masturbate while talking to Severian?

Why do Vodalus' followers hope they won't be eating another lesbian before eating Thecla?

Why does Severian twice deny/decry pedophilia between him and Little Severian, without accusation?

Why does Severian tell Ouen he can't tell him who he is or what he will become, after putting Dorcas in his care?

Why do Dorcas' dreams seem to say she committed suicide (drowning in a well) because of a crime against her child.

Why do Severian and Valeria have a celibate (or at least childless) marriage?

(to be cont.)

-bsharp

don doggett — 14 Aug 2006, 02:07 · in reply to b sharp

--- b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:

I can't get family brackets in here but I'll try to
discuss what I think is
Severian's family tree in a later post.

Argh! (Stamps feet in frustration) This is why I don't
watch television shows. But you have me, the hook is
firmly in my mouth. :)

For now

I'll just mention some
questions regarding the story; some weird things
which always bothered me,

but are answered by an incest curse on Severian's family tree.

Well, I for one am intrigued by this line of thought. I eagerly await your revelations.

Don

b sharp — 14 Aug 2006, 14:49 · follows don doggett

No, Don I can't leave a cliffhanger! Especially if the logic for this family tree ends up making sense only to me. Too much build-up. But I'll try to fit the whole thing in one post, leaving out some supporting evidence to be provided later if needed. I think there is some sketchy evidence for family ties among the pagan gods/megatherians of BotNS but I'll leave that out too, for now and focus on Severian's human family.

I think the central story of the family origin is told by the old guy in Casdoe's house regarding Fechin. Fechin has a tryst with a beautiful girl who sits in a window. Dorcas' earliest memory is of sitting in a window so I think the beautiful girl is her, and the family tree starts there.

There are hints that the old guy telling the story is really a woman, quite admiring of Fechin. Fechin, not being one to turn down opportunity, starts a side branch of Severian's family here. Fechin and this old woman had a daughter named Herais, she had twins Casdoe and Cadroe (of the 17 Stones) and Casdoe had twins, Little Severian and Severa.

Going back to Dorcas and Fechin, I've previously noted clues showing that Fechin is also Rudesind (and Father Inire) so that is important to this whole train of thinking. I assume that Dorcas' first child was Ouen. He thinks she died during childbirth when he was young kid. Rudesind says his wife died soon after a second girl child was born. So Ouen had two younger sisters. If Dorcas' death was actually suicide, it might make sense if (per family curse) Dorcas felt weird sexual feelings toward her children. Suicide might make further sense if Dorcas realized her husband was a philandering cacogen disguised as a human.

Since Ouen was sent off, by his father, at a young age to be a potboy then we must assume the two girls were sent off as well. A likely place to send them, in the closed universe of BotNS, would be the Pelerines. The story has two dark haired women, roughly the same age, who both left the Pelerines as young women. These are Catherine (who plays St. Katherine) and Cyriaca. If these two sisters spent a lot of time together as postulants then we can guess one reason they had to leave the Pelerines, given the family curse. Though Cyriaca says it was her interest in men that did it.

Cyriaca mentions an uncle who dealt in rare books. She spent long hours with this uncle, hearing stories about the secrets of the universe which nobody else really knows. This galactic knowledge might be a clue as to who this uncle really is. The incestuous family curse suggests Cyriaca might have had a child or two after spending too much time with dear old uncle (but before her marriage and her move to Thrax).

When Cyriaca is spared by Severian, she seems quite comfortable about making a living in Nessus, as though she was familiar with the place. Her age and the fact that she can sew suggest that she is the mother who bequeathed the used clothing store to Agia and Agilus. Agia mentions owning a misericorde, which is a slim blade used for battlefield mercy killings. This sounds like a weapon for a Pelerine. Agia also uses the crooked blade from Thrax and these two weapons both suggest a connection between Agia and Cyriaca. Robert Borski has suggested

that a golden aureole around the heads of Agia and Agilus denote their cousin status to Severian, the New Sun. If Agilus is seen as an Icarus figure, son of a Daedalus figure (Inire), his death comes from coming too close to the (new) sun.

Catherine seems to be sequestered somewhere in the Citadel. She doesn't seem to age, year to year, suggesting she has a kaibit close by to help her retain youth. It also suggests she has a powerful, probably exultant, husband to provide such a luxury. I think it is the Castellan. Her kaibit's name is Carina, or some diminutive of Catherine similar to that. The family incest curse would make sexual things happen between Catherine and Carina.

Catherine ran off at some point, met an attractive guy named Ouen, not knowing they were siblings, separated in early childhood nor about her family incest curse. She was forced to return to the marriage and the Castellan did not, at first, suspect her subsequent pregnancy belonged to another man. Her twins, Severian and Severa, were raised in the Citadel until the adultery was discovered a few years later. After that they were sent to be raised with the Torturers and Witches.

Catherine was not killed by the Torturers for her transgression but her look-alike kaibit, Carina, was, though much later, when Severian is a youth.

Severian sees a dark haired woman (Contessa Carina in the Play) in a pale gown, with that face that always haunts him, being escorted along the Path of Air on Flood Day (returning her to her proper time and place). This same dark haired woman in a pale gown is seen by Severian in the grave dug up by Hildegrin and Vodalus in the opening scene of the story. Her livid face suggests the means of her death was Allowin's Necklace the torture device which is described in such detail. (or perhaps it was Catherine who was killed and Carina later took her place playing St. Katherine; hard to tell with clones).

Either way, it was this dark haired woman in a pale gown who was eaten by Vodalus' followers the time before Thecla. Apparently she had lesbian tendencies and the Vodelerii hope Thecla is not also a "tribade" (a vain hope I think, given her "half sister" Thea).

Thecla talks about her time up at the northern villa before she became a concubine. Now a villa is the secondary, country estate of a noble family. Her primary estate is never mentioned, but twice, after Severian shares her memories, it is hinted she had an early childhood being raised in the Citadel. So maybe the Citadel is the primary estate and her parents are Catherine and the Castellan. For a while I thought this meant Thecla was really Severa. But I couldn't find any evidence to explain the name change or why she wasn't raised by the witches. So I have come to assume Thecla was the product of a birth separate from Severian.

Thecla's choices of books tie her to Severian's family. The enamel paintings on one evoke the cloisonne of Dorcas' family. The Wonders of Urth and Sky (is that the title? sorry my books are not here) is reminiscent of Cyriaca and her uncle. Devotionals could show a link to the Conciliator. A geneology book suggests her ties to the Castellan.

One thing though. Severian sees the face of the dead woman in the grave (Carina) in the face of Ultan. Maybe Catherine met Ultan in her travels around the Citadel. He is a curator, like Rudesind and so, like all curators, associated with Father Inire. An Ultan connection could be the reason Thecla is so knowledgeable about books. The fact that a bull and a swan are part of a dream sequence involving Thecla's father makes me think Father Inire (Zeus-like in his pursuit of human women) is involved in her siring and that perhaps the Castellan was once again cuckolded, never discovering this one.

I'm ambivalent regarding how Thea fits in. Since twins run in this family she could be a twin to

Thecla. But then why call her "half-sister"? Thea's name is a diminutive of Thecla so she could be a kaibit. Either way, Thea was given her own kaibit whom we see in the House Azure and in the House Absolute. Thea is too short a name to diminuate so I think her kaibit's name was, at first, "Thea's", evolving into Thais. Somehow Thais escaped through the Path of Air and ended up on the raft with Pega and Odilo after the flood.

Valeria is sequestered in the Citadel like Catherine. Valeria's clothes and Catherine's name are both described as old fashioned. Both Catherine's and Valeria's face tear at Severian's heart. We never see Valeria's family, only a servant, so her mother might be Catherine and perhaps her father is, this time, the Castellan. Severian marries Valeria but they don't have any children in 10 years of marriage. Assuming they aren't using birth control I think it argues for a celibate marriage. Severian's newly acquired Autarchial knowledge seems to have made him wise enough to start realizing who his family members are. And incest seems to be under an even stronger taboo on Urth than on Earth. Despite all the allusions to incest it is never openly mentioned. Not by Severian to his trusted anonymous readers and not even by corrupt, criminal and soon to die Agilus.

So the last empty slot in the family tree is for Severa, Severian's twin sister. Merryn, as a dark haired witch, is one candidate but there doesn't seem to be any mutual sexual attraction noted. Wolfe could have corrected this in the Short Sun encounter if needed but he didn't. Moreover I think Merryn's stretched facial skin suggests she is a recipient of beauty treatments and is much older than Severian.

So in some ways by default, we are left with Jolenta as Severa. Jolenta is probably a stage name, she is from Nessus and she's only been a waitress for a month so she could have been raised by the witches. She doesn't seem much like a former witch, though. And I don't like that she is so stupid. All of Severian's other family members seem at least a little bit intelligent, able to talk at length about topics other than their own immediate wishes. Also, I think at some point, even a dumb girl would say, "Hey, Severian, funny coincidence, my real name is Severa".

But Jolenta does have sex with Severian, and sexual play with Dorcas. She does have some gold in her hair like Dorcas and Agia and Agilus. And eventually Severian decides he loves her (though she has to remain unconscious before he starts to feel that way ;-)) So, grudgingly, I'll have to go with Jolenta as Severa.

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 17 Aug 2006, 04:02 · follows b sharp

At the root of this family tree is the transformation of an old man into an old woman. I can see no textual justification for such a change of gender.

In any event, a review of the brief first appendix to CLAW, which deals with social classes, puts a severe strain on some of these presumed relationships. There we are told that the caste of exultants is a closed group, meaning that one must be born to it. The sisters Thea and Thecla are there specified to be exultants, which means that they must be the products of exultant parents. There is no indication in the text that either Catherine or the Castellan were exultants. Little Inire absolutely was **not** an exultant; he is specified to be a cacogen. The likelihood of some combination of these three as parents of the half-sisters is dubious.

The Citadel is the historical seat of power for the autarchs, and remains in Severian's day largely their private bailiwick. The Castellan is the military commander of the fortress. Appian told Severian, just before they boarded the doomed flier, that there were none among the exultants he could trust. An exultant would not have occupied such a position.

Valeria is specified in the appendix to be an armiger, which means that her family were armigers. They were poor, so poor that they drank the same cheap tea that the torturers gave to their prisoners, and their towers were in ruins. At her first meeting with Sev she said that her family had "given many castellans to the Citadel, but the last had died generations ago". She goes on to say that, "No one of my blood carries a sword now against the enemies of the Commonwealth". The Castellan who acknowledged Sev as autarch near the end of CITADEL was an old soldier and very much alive. It is impossible that he was Valeria's father.

-Roy

b sharp — 18 Aug 2006, 02:34 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy, thanks for the good feedback. I had considered all but one of your objections previously and I'll try to address each of them.

At the root of this family tree is the transformation of an old man into an old woman. I can see no >textual justification for such a change of gender.

Well, not the root, but more a side branch. Considering the old person in Casdoe's house as female is based on two things. One is Severian's general unreliability as a narrator. Others in the past have documented his numerous mistakes in identification so I won't list them here. I think this is an example of Severian misperception in part because this old person talks about Fechin the way a woman might, admiring, attracted, forgiving of imperfections and even major faults. The other misperception clue is Gene Wolfe's descriptive writing in this section. The other people in Casdoe's house never show any acknowledgement that the old person exists. The exception is one brief inaudible comment to him/her made by Casdoe. If not for that I was willing to consider this old person as an eidolon/aquastor- visible only to Severian- it is that extreme. So I take that refusal of other characters acknowledging this character as a puzzle clue. Doing that removes the use of identifying pronouns for the old person and it just seems...weird (to me). A Wolfe pointer saying "here, look here for a clue!".

Next regarding the Castellan:

Appian told Severian, just before they boarded the doomed flier, that there were none among >the exultants he could trust. An exultant would not have occupied such a position.

Well, yes and no. The Autarch cannot trust the exultants, which is why he keeps their daughters hostage in ceremonial concubinage. So he has some measure of trust and control over them in this manner. Obviously the exultants hold positions of power in the Commonwealth. I would think the Castellan of the Citadel would be powerful enough for the Autarch to want his daughter(s?) to serve in the capacity of concubine. Moreover in the Claw appendix on Commonwealth social classes, the Armiger section says,

"The armigers seem much like the exultants, though on a lesser scale. Their name indicates a >fighting class, but they do not appear to have monopolized the major fighting roles in the army"

The Castellan's height is not given, so I submit the possibility he is an exultant.

I base my assessment of the Castellan as stepfather to Severian based on this memory of Severian's:

"I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged the >hooves of my father's mounted guard".

I take this to mean that Severian and Thecla shared a childhood in the Citadel. Only the Castellan would have a mounted guard there, I think. If Severian and Thecla are family related, as other clues suggest, I decided they must share a mother and perhaps a father/step father. I admit I'm not happy with such convolutions but when you are making a family tree, you have to fill in the empty spaces with your best guess. Perhaps others can explain these clues in a better way.

I still wonder about Severian seeing that face of the woman in the grave in Ultan's face. Ultan is another exultant, though he has obscured eyes as do certain other suspicious characters in the book.

Roy notes:

Little Inire absolutely was **not**an exultant; he is specified to be a cacogen.

True but I consider many cacogens to be capable of shape shifting. Tzadkiel's example makes me think that shapeshifting may not be a matter of an individual rearranging his face and body into different shapes. We never see the various incarnations of Zak actually transform from one shape/size to another. We do see a portion of giant Tzadkiel break off to become a human sized version. Perhaps each incarnation of Zak is formed in this way- a new piece of Tzadkiel broken off to become a new shape. The same thing could be happening on Urth with Megatherians (remembering that "therian" means shapeshifter). Multiple versions of the same greater being might be appearing, here, there....everywhere, in different sizes and appearances.

I agree most with Roy's objection to Valeria's place in the family tree. I appreciate him reminding me about some things:

Valeria is specified in the appendix to be an armiger, which means that her family were armigers. >They were poor, so poor that they drank the same cheap tea that the torturers gave to their >prisoners, and their towers were in ruins. At her first meeting with Sev she said that her family >had "given many castellans to the Citadel, but the last had died generations ago".

I agree that Valeria is of armiger status and so is Catherine, based on her height as Severian describes it. But the description above doesn't jibe with Catherine as her mother nor especially with the Castellan as her father. So I am forced (thanks to Roy ;-)) to go with Plan B for Valeria. That she is not a family member of Severian's. So regarding the celibate marriage hypothesis, Plan B says Severian can only become sexually interested in a family member.

Which would mean Pia is a family member...and Severian does compare her to Dorcas. And Daria should be a family member...she has red hair...a possible clue? Burgundofora also a family member?...no clues there that I can see. Apheta....I don't even want to try with that "insect" :)). Well, pretty weak but that's why it was Plan B. Perhaps others will have better luck with certain portions of the family tree.

-bsharp

Mark Millman — 18 Aug 2006, 02:51 · in reply to b sharp

Dear bsharp:

I believe that the memory of Severian that you quote (copied below) exemplifies his

habit of slipping into Thecla's personality without warning. This happens throughout BotNS, though less, I think, in `_Urth_`.

I read it this way:

[Severian] I played again with pebbles
in the courtyard beside the fallen
curtain wall, as Thecla dodged
[Thecla overcomes Severian] dodged the
hooves of my father's mounted guard.

That is, the "mounted guard" is that of Thecla's father, and not Severian's. The doubling of "dodged" above is deliberate, as it's not clear where the shift of personalities occurs. A memory of Severian's that echoes with one of Thecla's prompts her personality to appear and briefly to overtake Severian's.

Best,

Mark Millman

On Thu, 17 Aug 2006, b sharp wrote:
[snip]

I base my assessment of the Castellian as stepfather to Severian based on this memory of Severian's:

"I played again with pebbles
in the courtyard beside the
fallen curtain wall, as
Thecla dodged the hooves of
my father's mounted guard".

I take this to mean that Severian and Thecla shared a childhood in the Citadel. . . .

[snip]

Roy C. Lackey — 22 Aug 2006, 05:47 · follows Mark Millman

My old `_Webster's_` defines "chatelaine" this way: "1. the lady of a castle; mistress of a chateau." "Chateau" is defined as: "1. a French feudal castle.
2. a large country house, especially one in France."

b sharp wrote:

Thecla talks about her time up at the northern villa before she became a concubine. Now a villa is the secondary, country estate of a noble family. Her primary estate is never mentioned, but twice, after Severian shares her memories, it is hinted she had an early childhood being raised in the Citadel. So maybe the Citadel is the primary estate and her parents are

Catherine and the Castellan.

In chapter VIII of SHADOW, the Chatelaine Thecla spoke to Severian about Gurloes having allegedly sent some people to the House Absolute to fetch her some more clothes:

"I already have, and he says he sent some people to the House Absolute to fetch them for me, but they were unable to find it, which means that the House Absolute is trying to pretend I don't exist. Anyway, it's possible all my clothes have been sent to our chateau in the north, or one of the villas. He's going to have his secretary write them for me."

This statement makes several things clear. One is that Thecla's "primary estate" is not there in the Citadel. Her family had more than one villa, and their primary estate seems to be a northern chateau.

Thecla's family apparently had a villa in the area of Thrax. Severian confirmed something Cyriaca had said near the end of their conversation together (SWORD, chapter XII) by calling up a memory of Thecla's dealing with a "country villa -- half manor and half fort". Forts -- to say nothing of castles -- usually have defenders.

The memory "as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard" could easily apply to mounted guards at a family villa or at the chateau.

But this is all secondary. The one insurmountable problem of the Castellan being Thecla's father is the fact that the Castellan was alive and Thecla's father was dead. One of Thecla's surfaced memories: "my father had given a ball for me each year until his death". (CITADEL, chapter XXIII, last paragraph)

-Roy

Matthew DeLuca — 22 Aug 2006, 06:08 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Was it ever established that Catherine was Thecla's mother? I'm not saying your wrong but I'm just trying to catch up on established theories and the archive system is so confusing and unwieldy to use.

On Aug 22, 2006, at 1:47 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

My old _Webster's_ defines "chatelaine" this way: "1. the lady of a castle;

mistress of a chateau." "Chateau" is defined as: "1. a French feudal castle.

2. a large country house, especially one in France."

b sharp wrote:

Thecla talks about her time up at the northern villa before she became a

concubine. Now a villa is the secondary, country estate of a noble family.

Her primary estate is never mentioned, but twice, after Severian shares her

memories, it is hinted she had an early childhood being raised in the Citadel. So maybe the Citadel is the primary estate and her

parents are

Catherine and the Castellan.

In chapter VIII of SHADOW, the Chatelaine Thecla spoke to Severian about

Gurloes having allegedly sent some people to the House Absolute to fetch her some more clothes:

"I already have, and he says he sent some people to the House Absolute to fetch them for me, but they were unable to find it, which means that the House Absolute is trying to pretend I don't exist. Anyway, it's possible all my clothes have been sent to our chateau in the north, or one of the villas. He's going to have his secretary write them for me."

This statement makes several things clear. One is that Thecla's "primary estate" is not there in the Citadel. Her family had more than one villa, and their primary estate seems to be a northern chateau.

Thecla's family apparently had a villa in the area of Thrax. Severian confirmed something Cyriaca had said near the end of their conversation together (SWORD, chapter XII) by calling up a memory of Thecla's dealing with a "country villa -- half manor and half fort". Forts -- to say nothing of castles -- usually have defenders.

The memory "as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard" could easily apply to mounted guards at a family villa or at the chateau.

But this is all secondary. The one insurmountable problem of the Castellan being Thecla's father is the fact that the Castellan was alive and Thecla's father was dead. One of Thecla's surfaced memories: "my father had given a ball for me each year until his death". (CITADEL, chapter XXIII, last paragraph)

-Roy

b sharp — 23 Aug 2006, 15:05 · follows Matthew DeLuca

Matthew DeLuca asks:

Was it ever established that Catherine was Thecla's mother?

Unfortunately for those interested in Severian's family tree, it can't even be said that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother.

I made my guess that Catherine is Thecla's mother based largely on that one cryptic passage:

"I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged

the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

Mark Millman interprets it this way:

[Severian] I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged[Thecla overcomes Severian] dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

Robert Borsky also thinks this is Thecla taking over in mid-sentence. For years I reluctantly had the same interpretation. Reluctantly because elsewhere in the text, Severian and Thecla's memories tend to get their own paragraphs. In this passage, Severian and Thecla trade memories, sentence by sentence, each one set apart with the word "Again". Midsentence switching seemed contrary to the mood I felt Wolfe was trying to set and too confusing. If the sentence had to be split why not word it: ".....as Thecla, I dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard".

My mind was set to the opposite in a re-reading of Urth where I found Severian saying something about, "my childhoods in the Citadel". Plural childhoods? The other childhood wasn't Appian's was it? It could be other memories but combined with the cryptic passage..... Perhaps that very important passage above should be read just as it was written: that Severian, in his first memory as a child, remembers Thecla in the Citadel. (I spent an hour last night trying to re-find that plural childhood statement in Urth but couldn't. Am I delusional? Help!)

So if Thecla was a child in the Citadel then perhaps her mother was Catherine, sequestered in the Citadel.

Roy makes some good objections against the Castellan being Thecla's father, including that her father is said to be dead (now Roy, that is told in a dream sequence, and those are not to be trusted, right? ;-)). There are some small hints that Ultan could be involved here (books, obscured eyes, a family resemblance). Perhaps he is a better candidate for true father and assume the owner of the northern chateau and villas remains an unnamed stepfather.

Roy also raises the good question of Thecla's exultant status and height. Catherine is clearly of armiger height and thus makes a good mother figure for Severian. Could she have produced a child as tall as Thecla with an exultant father?

All this isn't very satisfying, but neither is just resigning, ignoring many clues and saying, "okay, Thecla is just a chance acquaintance of Severian's. No family connection, no incest, nothing important here." Maybe "my childhoods in the Citadel" includes Severian's and Reechy's (Ymar's) memories? I dunno.

Perhaps someone, someday, can come up with a truly cohesive family tree for Severian. Or maybe some people's hope will come true and Gene Wolfe will reveal his notes. Please Gene! It will stay right here in the archive...nobody else will ever know....

-bsharp

Matthew DeLuca — 23 Aug 2006, 16:30 · in reply to b sharp

See I interpret the "childhoods in the Citadel" as a reference to the theory of multiple Severians, It also could be the memory of Ymar (UOTNS) and other Autarchs who are now part of Severian.

We have to take into the fact that Severian and Thecla consistently crossed each other's planes of consciousness. Then after the infusion of the Autarchs we have multiple people writing through one man who is "cursed with memory"

On Aug 23, 2006, at 11:05 AM, b sharp wrote:

Matthew DeLuca asks:

Was it ever established that Catherine was Thecla's mother?

Unfortunately for those interested in Severian's family tree, it can't even be said that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother.

I made my guess that Catherine is Thecla's mother based largely on that one cryptic passage:

"I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

Mark Millman interprets it this way:

[Severian] I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged [Thecla overcomes Severian] dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

Robert Borsky also thinks this is Thecla taking over in mid-sentence. For years I reluctantly had the same interpretation. Reluctantly because elsewhere in the text, Severian and Thecla's memories tend to get their own paragraphs. In this passage, Severian and Thecla trade memories, sentence by sentence, each one set apart with the word "Again". Midsentence switching seemed contrary to the mood I felt Wolfe was trying to set and too confusing. If the sentence had to be split why not word it: ".....as Thecla, I dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard".

My mind was set to the opposite in a re-reading of Urth where I found Severian saying something about, "my childhoods in the Citadel". Plural

childhoods? The other childhood wasn't Appian's was it? It could be other memories but combined with the cryptic passage..... Perhaps that very important passage above should be read just as it was written: that Severian, in his first memory as a child, remembers Thecla in the Citadel.

(I spent an hour last night trying to re-find that plural childhood statement in Urth but couldn't. Am I delusional? Help!)

So if Thecla was a child in the Citadel then perhaps her mother was Catherine, sequestered in the Citadel.

Roy makes some good objections against the Castellan being Thecla's father, including that her father is said to be dead (now Roy, that is told in a dream sequence, and those are not to be trusted, right? ;-)). There are

some small hints that Ultan could be involved here (books, obscured eyes, a family resemblance). Perhaps he is a better candidate for true father and assume the owner of the northern chateau and villas remains an unnamed stepfather.

Roy also raises the good question of Thecla's exultant status and height. Catherine is clearly of armiger height and thus makes a good mother figure for Severian. Could she have produced a child as tall as Thecla with an exultant father?

All this isn't very satisfying, but neither is just resigning, ignoring many clues and saying, "okay, Thecla is just a chance acquaintance of Severian's. No family connection, no incest, nothing important here." Maybe "my childhoods in the Citadel" includes Severian's and Reechy's (Ymar's) memories? I dunno.

Perhaps someone, someday, can come up with a truly cohesive family tree for Severian. Or maybe some people's hope will come true and Gene Wolfe will reveal his notes. Please Gene! It will stay right here in the archive...nobody else will ever know....

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 23 Aug 2006, 17:38 · follows Matthew DeLuca

b sharp wrote:
(I spent an hour last night trying to re-find that plural childhood statement in Urth but couldn't. Am I delusional? Help!)

The passage you refer to is on page 284, chapter XL, of URTH. It is one of those that can be, evidently, interpreted more than one way.

"When I spoke to Tzadkiel beside the brook, I strove to be as brief as I could; but she would not allow it, urging me down this byway and that one until I had told her of the small angel (of whom I had read in my brown book) who had met Gabriel, and of my childhoods in the Citadel, at my father's villa, and in the village called Famulorum near the House Absolute."

I read it this way: "Childhoods" refers to the set of memories Severian retains. They are, respectively, his own in the Citadel, Thecla's at the villa, and Appian's in the village.

-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 23 Aug 2006, 19:22 · in reply to Matthew DeLuca

B,

I have always taken "my childhoods in the Citadel" to refer to the many lives he remembers as heir to the line of Autarchial memories.

The business about changing personality in mid sentence? I think this is indication that Sev's personality/memories are getting more confused with the passage of time -- ultimately one hopes he will merge them all into a single persona, but he's got trouble in the meanwhile.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

Daniel D Jones — 23 Aug 2006, 21:56 · in reply to b sharp

On Wednesday 23 August 2006 11:05, b sharp wrote:

Matthew DeLuca asks:

Was it ever established that Catherine was Thecla's mother?

Unfortunately for those interested in Severian's family tree, it can't even be said that Dorcas is Severian's grandmother.

I made my guess that Catherine is Thecla's mother based largely on that one cryptic passage:

"I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

Mark Millman interprets it this way:

[Severian] I played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged[Thecla overcomes Severian] dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

I recently moved and my books are still packed, so I can't research this myself at the moment, but what's the reason for assuming that Thecla takes over mid sentence? Why can't the entire sentence be read as Thecla's memory:

"I [Thecla] played again with pebbles in the courtyard beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

don doggett — 24 Aug 2006, 01:42 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Even if b sharp is correct in his interpretation, Ymar is a more likely candidate for the shared memory than Thecla, as his childhood is definitively established in the citadel.

Don

"Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> wrote: b sharp wrote:

(I spent an hour last night trying to re-find that plural childhood statement in Urth but couldn't. Am I delusional? Help!)

The passage you refer to is on page 284, chapter XL, of URTH. It is one of those that can be, evidently, interpreted more than one way.

I read it this way: "Childhoods" refers to the set of memories Severian retains. They are,

respectively, his own in the Citadel, Thecla's at the villa, and Appian's in the village.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 24 Aug 2006, 05:23 · follows don doggett

Don Doggett wrote:

Even if b sharp is correct in his interpretation, Ymar is a more likely candidate for the shared memory than Thecla, as his childhood is definitively established in the citadel.<<

Severian doesn't have Ymar's memories. The only more-or-less intact memories he acquired came from the directly-ingested flesh (plus analeptic) of Thecla and Appian. The chain of autarchic memories inherited from Appian grows weaker and weaker the further removed the memory of a particular autarch is from the present.

Severian, interrupting his narrative to directly address the reader at the time he was writing, wrote:

"Ymar is dead, and such memories of his as lived for a time in the blood of his successors are long faded.

"So mine in time shall fade too." (SHADOW, chapter XVII)

That's why he "spent weary days in reading the histories of my predecessors". (ibid., previous page) That's where he got the anecdote about Ymar and the dog. Such accounts were stark and very unsatisfying to him.

-Roy

don doggett — 24 Aug 2006, 06:19 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

--- "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Severian, interrupting his narrative to directly address the reader at the time he was writing, wrote:

"Ymar is dead, and such memories of his as lived for a time in the blood of his successors are long faded.

"So mine in time shall fade too." (SHADOW, chapter XVII)

This assumes that Severian is a reliable narrator, but there have been serious signs that his identity is severely (no pun intended) compromised. I don't believe he knows which memories are his or whose they are either. And this is not grasping on my part; the easiest way for an author (Wolfe) to hide things is to have the narrator say things that he thinks are true but aren't and then belie them with what the reader observes. This happens constantly in SS and LS and I think it happens often in NS as well. IMO (flawed as it may well be) direct statements of belief by any of Wolfe's protagonists are completely unreliable. Besides, if Sev is like any of Wolfe's other multiple

personality characters, there are certainly more than just Thecla and Appian in his head. But, I'm not saying that Sev's memories of his "childhoods in the citadel" are shared with Ymar, just that that's a more likely scenario than he and Thecla sharing such a memory. I actually think that your interpretation is the correct one, "childhoods" describing three separate places.

argumentatively yours

Don

b sharp — 24 Aug 2006, 11:18 · follows don doggett

Daniel D. Jones asks:

but what's the reason for assuming that Thecla takes over mid sentence?
Why can't the entire >sentence be read as Thecla's memory: "I [Thecla] played again with pebbles in the courtyard >beside the fallen curtain wall, as Thecla dodged the hooves of my father's mounted guard."

The reason is, in the beginning of Shadow, Severian says his earliest memory is of stacking pebbles by the curtain wall. Fallen curtain wall definitely suggests the crumbling Citadel. So adding Thecla definitely added something to Severian's memory. But was it Thecla's memory or a memory of Thecla?

Thecla taking over in midsentence seems to be the majority view of those weighing in but it still seems wrong to me. That breaks the established structure of the paragraph. Also, why is the the word "Thecla" used? Why wouldn't it be:

...I played again with pebbles, I dodged the hooves....

Regarding this passage in Urth- "and of my childhoods in the Citadel, at my father's villa, and in the village called Famulorum near the House Absolute."

Roy says:

I read it this way: "Childhoods" refers to the set of memories Severian retains. They are, respectively, his own in the Citadel, Thecla's at the villa, and Appian's in the village.

Don says:

Even if b sharp is correct in his interpretation, Ymar is a more likely candidate for the shared >memory than Thecla, as his childhood is definitively established in the citadel.

I have to agree with both Roy and Don, which definitely takes a large bite out of the theory that Thecla had a childhood in the Citadel, leaving only the passage above from Claw, which only I interpret that way.

It does add a little to my vague idea that the "first" Severian might not have been a version of himself in another iteration of Urth but instead, Ymar. I think Dan'l once hinted that he considers the possibility that Ymar was an ancestor to Severian.

Which brings to mind the important question of why Wolfe chooses to both start and end BotNS with Severian mentioning his lifelong presentiment of his future. Is it because the memories of a previous iteration echo through time? Is it because Severian was/will be a time traveller? Is it because when Severian was born, his white fountain star (which is an aspect of himself, related to Bethlehem's star?) was already in existence and hurtling toward Urth?

-bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 24 Aug 2006, 17:41 · in reply to don doggett

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed? I thought Appian was rather further back in the history of the Commonwealth, and that Sev's predecessor was (deliberately?) left unnamed.

--Dan'l

On 8/23/06, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

--- "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

Severian, interrupting his narrative to directly address the reader at the time he was writing, wrote:

"Ymar is dead, and such memories of his as lived for a time in the blood of his successors are long faded. "So mine in time shall fade too." (SHADOW, chapter XVII)

This assumes that Severian is a reliable narrator, but there have been serious signs that his identity is severely (no pun intended) compromised. I don't believe he knows which memories are his or whose they are either. And this is not grasping on my part; the easiest way for an author (Wolfe) to hide things is to have the narrator say things that he thinks are true but aren't and then belie them with what the reader observes. This happens constantly in SS and LS and I think it happens often in NS as well. IMO (flawed as it may well be) direct statements of belief by any of Wolfe's protagonists are completely unreliable. Besides, if Sev is like any of Wolfe's other multiple personality characters, there are certainly more than just Thecla and Appian in his head. But, I'm not saying that Sev's memories of his "childhoods in the citadel" are shared with Ymar, just that that's a more likely scenario than he and Thecla sharing such a memory. I actually think that your interpretation is the correct one, "childhoods" describing three separate places.

argumentatively yours

Don

Do You Yahoo!?

Tired of spam? Yahoo! Mail has the best spam protection around
<http://mail.yahoo.com>

Roy C. Lackey — 25 Aug 2006, 04:32 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Dan'I asks:

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed? I thought Appian was rather further back in the history of the Commonwealth, and that Sev's predecessor was (deliberately?) left unnamed.

Appian isn't mentioned by name in NEW SUN. The name is used in the related short story "The Cat", in ENDANGERED SPECIES. (p.-215, paperback)

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 25 Aug 2006, 05:46 · follows Roy C. Lackey

b sharp wrote:

Thecla taking over in midsentence seems to be the majority view of those weighing in but it still seems wrong to me. That breaks the established structure of the paragraph. Also, why is the the word "Thecla" used? Why wouldn't it be:

...I played again with pebbles, I dodged the hooves....

I agree that the passage, as it appears in print, is clumsy. It bothered Borski, as it bothered you. It bothers me. I don't know if the fault is Wolfe's or the printer's or even that it is a mistake at all.

Nevertheless, it isn't enough to put Thecla in the Citadel as a child. In addition to the evidence I've presented so far, there is this.

We know that Thecla was born in the House Absolute. (Vatic Fountain prophesy) We know she was living in a wing of the House Absolute at age 13. (Domnina episode) (Not incidentally, Thecla seemed to be living there with her mother at that time. At least, it was her "mother's servitrix" who answered the door for poor Domnina.)

I mentioned before that Thecla's family had a villa near Thrax. That is where she spent at least part of her early childhood, probably up to the time of puberty. The proof is in the very first memories inherited from her that came to Severian after eating her flesh. From the penultimate paragraph of chapter XI in CLAW:

"Just when I despaired--she was there, filling me as a melody fills a cottage. I was with her, running beside the Acis when we were a child. I knew the ancient villa moated by a dark lake, the view through the dusty windows of the belvedere, and the secret space in the odd angle between two rooms where we sat at noon to read by candlelight."

-Roy

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 25 Aug 2006, 16:38 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 8/24/06, Roy C. Lackey <rlackey at stic.net> wrote:

Dan'l asks:

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed? I thought Appian was rather further back in the history of the Commonwealth, and that Sev's predecessor was (deliberately?) left unnamed.

Appian isn't mentioned by name in NEW SUN. The name is used in the related short story "The Cat", in ENDANGERED SPECIES. (p.-215, paperback)

That story establishes, if I'm not mistaken, the following:

1. Odilo the Steward tells the story in the fifth year of Severian's reign.
2. Odilo is not a young man (he has known Inire for "many years").
3. Odilo's father Odilo served the Autarch Appian.

This implies to me that Appian reigned sometime within the past sixty or seventy years. He thus might have been Severian's immediate predecessor, but against this I set Severian's mentions of Appian in New Sun proper; Severian never says anything that can absolutely date Appian, but he speaks of him as in the past tense, as one speaks of an honored monarch of the past.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.

However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 25 Aug 2006, 18:08 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Fri, 25 Aug 2006 09:38:09 -0700, "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <danldo at gmail.com> said:

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed? I thought Appian was rather further back in the history of the Commonwealth, and that Sev's predecessor was (deliberately?) left unnamed.

Appian isn't mentioned by name in NEW SUN. The name is used in the related short story "The Cat", in ENDANGERED SPECIES. (p.-215, paperback)

That story establishes, if I'm not mistaken, the following:

1. Odilo the Steward tells the story in the fifth year of Severian's reign.
2. Odilo is not a young man (he has known Inire for "many years").
3. Odilo's father Odilo served the Autarch Appian.

This implies to me that Appian reigned sometime within the past sixty or seventy years. He thus might have been Severian's immediate predecessor, but against this I set Severian's mentions of Appian in New Sun proper; Severian never says anything that can absolutely date Appian, but he speaks of him as in the past tense, as one speaks of an honored monarch of the past.

The old autarch was honey steward before his elevation to the Phoenix Throne. ("Paeon, who trained me, who was honey-steward fifty years gone by.")

The Latin word for bee is "apis."

The dots seem connectable.

And while ostensibly a similar case could be made for at least one other saintly exemplar (Melito), when Severian, after being rescued on the battlefield of Orithyia by the mammoth-riding androgyne, sees "a man with the horns and muzzled face of a bull," this may be (as Borski notes) an attempt by Wolfe to further link the old autarch with the Egyptian ox-god, Apis.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

--

<http://www.fastmail.fm> - A no graphics, no pop-ups email service

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 25 Aug 2006, 19:24 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

On 8/25/06, Rex Lycanthrosaurus <lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm> wrote:

On Fri, 25 Aug 2006 09:38:09 -0700, "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes"
<danldo at gmail.com> said:

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed? I thought Appian was rather further back in the history of the Commonwealth, and that Sev's predecessor was (deliberately?) left unnamed.

Appian isn't mentioned by name in NEW SUN. The name is used in the related short story "The Cat", in ENDANGERED SPECIES. (p.-215, paperback)

That story establishes, if I'm not mistaken, the following:

1. Odilo the Steward tells the story in the fifth year of Severian's reign.
2. Odilo is not a young man (he has known Inire for "many years").
3. Odilo's father Odilo served the Autarch Appian.

This implies to me that Appian reigned sometime within the past sixty or seventy years. He thus might have been Severian's immediate predecessor, but against this I set Severian's mentions of Appian in New Sun proper; Severian never says anything that can absolutely date Appian, but he speaks of him as in the past tense, as one speaks of an honored monarch of the past.

The old autarch was honey steward before his elevation to the Phoenix Throne. ("Paeon, who trained me, who was honey-steward fifty years gone by.")

The Latin word for bee is "apis."

The dots seem connectable.

And while ostensibly a similar case could be made for at least one other saintly exemplar (Melito), when Severian, after being rescued on the battlefield of Orithyia by the mammoth-riding androgyne, sees "a man with the horns and muzzled face of a bull," this may be (as Borski notes) an attempt by Wolfe to further link the old autarch with the Egyptian ox-god, Apis.

--

Rex Lycanthrosaurus

lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

--

<http://www.fastmail.fm> - A no graphics, no pop-ups email service

Jeff Wilson — 25 Aug 2006, 19:59 · in reply to b sharp

b sharp wrote:

True but I consider many cacogens to be capable of shape shifting.

Tzadkiel's example makes me think that shapeshifting may not be a matter of an individual rearranging his face and body into different shapes. We never see the various incarnations of Zak actually transform from one shape/size to another. We do see a portion of giant Tzadkiel break off to become a human sized version. Perhaps each incarnation of Zak is formed in this way- a new piece of Tzadkiel broken off to become a new shape. The same thing could be happening on Urth with Megatherians (remembering that "therian" means shapeshifter). Multiple versions of the same greater being might be appearing, here, there....everywhere, in different sizes and appearances.

I think you're going way too far here. We see *one* ET who shapeshifts, and that only in the afterthought book, URTH, while others demonstrate their reliance on mechanical disguises.

Greek therion (??????) means wild animal or beast, while the Latinised megatherium has been used to as the name for prehistoric mamals whose fossils indicate much larger stature than their historical counterparts, including a giant sloth that doubtless serves as the inspiration for that seen at the Well. The other existing connation of megatherian would be "great beast" as Aleister Crowley styled himself. Thus, Lives of the Seventeen Megatherians would make sense only as a compilation of biographies of those most notoriously presented as black magicians, as perhaps including those who went on to use medical science in the guise of thaumaturgy to give themselves superior capacities, like Baldanders and perhaps Abaia or Erebus.