

Thecla's genealogy folio

The Urth list — 9 messages, 6 voices, 04 Oct 2006

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Roy C. Lackey — 04 Oct 2006, 06:56

I had not read Wolfe's essay "Books in _The Book of the New Sun_" before a few weeks ago, when I obtained a copy of PLAN[E]T ENGINEERING. Wolfe said something else in the essay about Thecla's four books that has caused me no end of annoyance. <g> He said, "[t]hey all must have something to do with Severian."

Thecla did not, of course, know anything about Severian when she requested the books. She just wanted help from her relatives and/or the Conciliator. Three of the books, as I outlined in my previous post, concern the Conciliator to a greater or lesser degree, so they necessarily have something to do with Severian. It's the folio with the genealogical charts that bugs me. I suppose I could fall back to the position that, since Severian comes to possess Thecla's memories and personality, anything that was important to her had something to do with him, but that's too easy and I can't make myself believe that's all there is to it. No, I think that Wolfe is suggesting that Severian and Thecla are blood relatives.

All of the attempts to link the two that I am aware of have speculated that they share a common parent, one that appears on stage in NEW SUN or is at least mentioned, however obliquely; that or they are related by someone only a generation or two removed from them. Maybe so, but I have yet to be convinced.

An alternative relationship might be suggested by the antiquity of at least two of the other three books and their connection to the Conciliator. The brown book dates back at least three or four centuries and Canog's book to the time of Ymar. Might it be that Thecla is related not so much to the apprentice Severian as to the Conciliator? Even if the connection is not recognizable or known to her?

Several times in the Urth Cycle it is implied that Severian makes (will make) trips into the past that are not related in the text. The Conciliator might have entered Thecla's family tree anywhen from Typhon's time onward.

It must be remembered that Severian made a big deal about how much his education was enhanced by the reading and studying of those four books. And even if he had not studied the genealogical charts, Thecla did and he had her memories. He might have gone into the past for the express purpose of making *come* true what he knew *had been* true. After all, someone also built that mausoleum and someone tinkered with the body count from time to time.

-Roy

Chris — 04 Oct 2006, 07:35 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Interesting - to be honest I can't think of any interpretation of that statement that really makes any more sense than what you just offered.

But, yeesh, the incest-factor is being a little overloaded here.

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-Roy

b sharp — 04 Oct 2006, 15:41 · follows Chris

So, if I understand correctly, Roy is suggesting that Severian's two greatest loves, Dorcas and Thecla, are his grandmother and his great, great etc....grandaughter? Surely there is some appreciable symmetry to that.

Do we need to rely on Severian making multiple time trips back to the Conciliator's era to allow him to father a child? After all, in the text, he has sexual congress with one person during that time. A big girl, rather than a tall girl but she has the dark, curling hair, doesn't Burgundofora? I

always thought her purpose in the story was too vague to account for her substantial role. Maybe Roy's idea ties in here?

Chris says:

But, yeesh, the incest-factor is being a little overloaded here.

Naturally I disagree. I don't think I'll be happy until all of Severian's sexual escapades are demonstrated as being with a family member. Curse of the Greek gods and all that.

-bsharp

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-Roy

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 07 Oct 2006, 03:59 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy Lackey writes:

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Meh. As far as I'm concerned, we can not even begin to address any possible genealogical connection between Severian and Thecla until we riddle out at least some of the latter's bloodline. Unfortunately, as we all know, she has only one named relative: half-sister Thea. This in itself makes the problem somewhat more complex since we must now try to figure out whether the parent Thecla and Thea share is their mother or father. Since I have no idea who the father(s) might be, I will instead attempt to pinpoint a possible candidate for mother--in my scheme the one parent both siblings share.

First, some basics. Thea and Thecla are exultants; it therefore seems likely at least one of their parents is an exultant. If it's their mother, she may be part of the autarch's seraglio of hostages--we do, after all, learn that Thecla is a member of the powerful northern clan; ergo, her mother's possible confinement at the Well of Orchids. Plus she must also be older. This, by far, eliminates many of the Chatelaines we meet or hear of in the narrative; most are contemporaries of the two half-sisters. (E.g., Domnina, Josepha, and the non-khaibit versions of Barbea and Gracia). Many of the other female exultants we meet are members of the Pelerines, who are celibate, and therefore also excluded. Among those remaining, who may be old enough and receive mention, I include the following: Leocadia, Nympha, and Lelia. But is there anything to connect any of these three exultant women to Thecla?

There, in fact, is, and the connection may be a tip of the hat to one of the writers Wolfe claims to admire: the Russian emigré Vladimir Nabokov, who was as reknown in Lepidopteran circles as he was in literature. Thecla, of course, as mantis's LU reminds us, is a genus of delicately colored butterflies, the hairstreaks. But what those of us who've collected butterflies in our youth also may or may not remember is that there's a butterfly named Empress Lelia--a rather unlikely coincidence in my opinion. So is it possible that the two exultants are mother and daughter? Thecla, we remember, has been prophesized to someday occupy the throne--who better than someone who's the daughter of an "Empress"? 'Thecla' and 'Lelia' also observe Borski's cryptonymic association and there is an orchid named after the same Roman gens from whence Lelia derives. It seems equally apt that the name Lelia occurs only once and the end of a somewhat Byzantine and bizarre sentence; Wolfe, I believe, is particularly deceitful in this manner. And look exactly how her mention reads: "[Hethor] clutched his cap (reminding me of the morning when he had found me camping on the grass by Ctesiphon's Cross) and said, "I am the slave of my master, far-traveled, m-m-map-worn Hethor am I, dust-choked and doubly deserted," looking at me all the while with bright, deranged eyes, like one of the Chatelaine Lelia's hairless rats, rats that ran in circles and bit their own tails when one clapped one's hands." The rat biting its tail seems a castration image and may support the notion that the penultimate autarch is Thecla's father.

But as for how Lelia and someone from Severian's family are related, I know not. Perhaps all of the 1,492 Exulted Families derive from a single remote ancestor--the same way all of us are descended from King Arthur. They are, as Jonas tells us, the most recent to arrive on Urth and thus may not be as genetically diverse as the general populace, especially if prone to intermarriage.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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Roy C. Lackey — 07 Oct 2006, 19:24 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:

Meh. As far as I'm concerned, we can not even begin to address any possible genealogical connection between Severian and Thecla until we riddle out at least some of the latter's bloodline. Unfortunately, as we all know, she has only one named relative: half-sister Thea. This in itself makes the problem somewhat more complex since we must now try to figure out whether the parent Thecla and Thea share is their mother or father. Since I have no idea who the father(s) might be, I will instead attempt to pinpoint a possible candidate for mother--in my scheme the one parent both siblings share.<<

You just ruined what I was writing! <g> I was bringing up some of the same points, even the King Arthur bit. I agree, it would help if we knew who the parents were of the half-sisters, but I can't even be sure which parent they have in common, much less who that person is. I think I know where most of the information relevant to their parents is in the text, but I can't put it together so that it makes sense. I can think of arguments against them sharing either parent.

First, some basics. Thea and Thecla are exultants; it therefore seems likely at least one of their parents is an exultant.<<

Both sisters are specified to be exultants in that CLAW appendix. It also states that one must be born an exultant and that one remains an exultant for life. But there is no indication of the social status of half-breeds, which may or may not be relevant.

If it's their

mother, she may be part of the autarch's seraglio of hostages--we do, after all, learn that Thecla is a member of the powerful northern clan; ergo, her mother's possible confinement at the Well of Orchids.<< [snip]

Agreed.

[snip]

The rat biting its tail seems a castration image and may support the notion that the penultimate autarch is Thecla's father.<<

He can't be, because Thecla's father died sometime before her arrest (and I don't buy Borski's dodge of that fact). And the autarch wasn't an exultant.

Immediately after saying that all the books must have something to do with Severian, Wolfe gave the example of the book with the enameled pictures, the coming encounter with Dorcas and her family's past manufacture of cloisonne. I don't know if that's a left-handed hint that Severian and Thecla are related on Dorcas's side of the family, or just that he and Dorcas are related (this was 1984), or both or neither.

Dorcas was very petite and I don't think her husband was tall. Severian draws attention to his height (perhaps too much so) both early and late in NEW SUN, yet he's not really particularly tall, even among people he meets. For example, Drotte, Roche and Ouen are all about his own height. And a true exultant male, such as Ultan, is a head and a half taller. Both Thecla and Thea were taller than Severian.

Borski suggested that the Starost Egino might be Thecla's stepfather. Maybe.

Here are some of the "facts" that have to be accounted for:

It seems that *both* sisters are hostages, since Gurloes said that Thea had "fled" the House Absolute to be with Vodalus. The autarch needs only one hostage per family, so holding both sisters suggests to me that they represent two distinct family branches, even if Thea was not also among the "inner circle" of concubines.

Which sister is the older? Severian told Thea that Thecla had told him that, if she were released, she would move to the country and refurnish the old estate from which she took her title (the chateau). That seems to indicate that the place was hers to do with as she pleased. Her father was dead, so the estate had evidently fallen to her. I don't know if that means that her mother was also dead, or if the mother just didn't figure in the line of inheritance. But what is interesting is that Thea replied that that house now belonged to her, but she couldn't claim it, presumably because she was a fugitive. I'm not sure what that implies about Thea's relationship to Thecla's father.

I can, offhand, think of only one time Thecla spoke of Thea when they were both children together -- the sewing of Josepha's doll. On the other occasions where Thecla's childhood surfaces, there is no indication that Thea was around. If they were not together much as girls, that suggests that they grew up in different households.

As I've said before, one of Thecla's memories is of her running naked by the Acis, presumably as a child. The map in PE shows exultant villas on the southwestern shore of Lake Diuturna and states flatly, "Thecla was here as a child". The Acis is nowhere near the lake. Again, no mention of Thea at either place. Neither does it seem that Thea was living with Thecla in the suite at the House Absolute at the time of the Domnina incident, when Thecla was 13. But Thecla's "mother's servitrix" was there, so presumably the mother was alive then.

What a mess!

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 07 Oct 2006, 22:15 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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This, at least, is explainable as evidence of the use of flyers by the exultants other than strictly between their estates and the Autarch's demesne. Exultant children could easily have memories of trips to anywhere their parents dared take them in the course of their ruling and schemeing.

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Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 08 Oct 2006, 03:14 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Sat, 7 Oct 2006 14:24:47 -0500, "Roy C. Lackey" <rclackey at stic.net> said:

As I've said before, one of Thecla's memories is of her running naked by the
the
Acis, presumably as a child.

Well, I'd be lying if I said I hadn't wondered about Abdiesus being either Thecla's or Thea's father. Thrax is on the Acis, and Abdiesus--an exultant--rules it as Archon. What better way to secure his loyalty than to hold one (or both) of his daughters hostage back at the House Absolute? It seems likely Thecla would rouse herself from the mnemonic bed she shares with Severian if he were her father, but maybe less so if he were half-sister Thea's; then again, she does stir when Severian is given a paper coin, which is his ticket for admission to the ridotto: "He extended his hand, holding delicately, as though he feared it would flutter from his fingers, one of those disks of stiff paper, no bigger than a chrisos and lettered in gold leaf with ornate characters, of which I had often heard Thecla speak (she stirred in my mind at the touch of it), but which I had never before seen." But how likely is it that such disks are coin-of-the-realm so to speak and used for invitations elsewhere/everywhere? And could the actual reason Thecla makes her presence known involve her recognition of Abdiesus as either her or Thea's father? Severian may be misinterpreting the reason for her arousal, and as far as that goes, no one is worse at recognizing kin than our torturer hero.

Abdiesus is butt-ugly, so the physical resemblance seems muted; still, as my own daughters resemble their mother, this is no impediment. Nor can I find any age distinguishing characteristics that suggest Abdiesus may be too young. And just as Thecla has eyes that may have been enlarged by "the application of minute amounts of certain poisons during childhood," Abdiesus has "large eyes rimmed with dark flesh."

Further questions I'm unable to answer. Has Abdiesus been Archon long enough in this scheme? Would Palaemon send his beloved protege--who's directly responsible for Thecla's suicide--to serve as lictor under the man who may be her father? A nice bit of irony if so; just as is Sev's sparing Cyriaca from her death sentence. But if Thecla's biological father is dead, as suggested by the text ("my father had given a ball for me each year until his death" [unless this is some female autarch's memory--a suggestion I do not like], it does not seem possible he's Thecla's father. Therefore, he may well be Thea's. Isn't there evidence Abdiesus is actually co-operating with the rebels, perhaps even sharing a corpse or two with his daughter and Vodalus?

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - Does exactly what it says on the tin

Roy C. Lackey — 12 Oct 2006, 19:24 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

I wrote:

No, I think that Wolfe

is suggesting that Severian and Thecla are blood relatives.

Come to think of it, I might be wrong about that. There is another way that Thecla's family tree can have something to do with Severian without his being related to her by blood. It might be that he is related by blood to Thea, by way of whichever parent Thea does not share with her half-sister.

This gives some purpose to Thea's often mentioned heart-shaped face. Such a shape necessitates a sharp chin. Severian confirmed Cyriaca's guess that he also had a sharp chin. This shared facial characteristic may be Wolfe's way of showing a genetic link. If this is correct, it also avoids the incest issue.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 12 Oct 2006, 19:42 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 10/12/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

If this is correct, it also avoids the incest issue.

And, as we all know, Wolfe would never involve Severian in anything as tawdry as incest.

Hhh. Hhhm. Heh. Heheh. BWAAAAHAHAHAHAHA!

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

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

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks