

Ouen's Catherine

The Urth list — 10 messages, 5 voices, 14 Oct 2006

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Roy C. Lackey — 14 Oct 2006, 00:59

One of Severian's first actions upon returning to the Citadel as autarch was to kidnap Ouen. Even if I concede that Severian knew or had reason to suspect at the time that Ouen was Dorcas's son, it wasn't until the innkeeper said that Ouen looked much like an older Severian that Severian made any sort of connection between himself and the waiter. At that point he questioned Ouen about past brushes with the law and a past relationship with a "dark woman".

What "dark woman" did Severian have in mind, and what did he know, or suspect, about her and this look-alike waiter? I can only conclude that he came to this conversation with a prior notion about a certain dark woman and her relationship to himself. The only female who fits the bill is the tall, slender, dark maid who acted the part of Holy Katharine on feast day. But what justification did he have for such a notion? I don't see it in the text. I don't see any indication in the text prior to this scene at the inn that he thought that the maid, or someone who looked like her, might be his mother.

Only after being questioned did Ouen say that her name had been Catherine. Can you hear the difference in spelling between the spoken "Catherine" and "Katharine"? I can't, and I don't think Severian could either.

It seems that it was on this second visit to the inn that Severian first realized that Dorcas was his grandmother, and then only after first concluding that Ouen was his father. Two revelations about his lineage in one day.

But I doubt that the maid who played Katharine was actually his mother. Others have speculated that the maid was a khaibit, which may be so. If true, then the woman for whom she was a khaibit was likely Ouen's Catherine. Nothing at all was mentioned about Catherine's height, which is unusual for Severian to omit. If Ouen's Catherine was an exultant, that helps account for Severian's height. (I know that little of this is original to me; I'm just trying to figure out Severian's family tree.)

It is always assumed that the "order of monials" Catherine ran away from was the Pelerines. That may also be true, but being tortured to death is hardly an apt or likely consequence of deserting a voluntary religious order. Catherine's real 'crime' may have been deserting the inner circle of the autarch's most valuable hostages. As Gurloes said, some bold chatelaines traded places with their khaibits. Severian was born about the time the Old Autarch opened the whore house, when the autarch no longer had any practical use for any sort of concubine.

The khaibit maid's 'crime' may have been complicity in Catherine's schemes, and her punishment her perpetual participation in the torturers' annual feast. Catherine may have tried to hide for a time among the Pelerines, or she may have affected the role, just as Cyriaca later adopted the costume for a party and fooled Severian.

If Catherine was an exultant, then it must be through her that Severian is related to Thecla's

family. I don't know if it's possible to figure out who Catherine's parents were.

-Roy

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 14 Oct 2006, 12:48 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Sat, 14 Oct 2006 10:59:32 +1000 "Roy C. Lackey"

<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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or

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her relationship to himself.

I took this to be just a simple deduction by Sev: He realizes first that Ouen must be his father, then since Ouen is fair & he (Sev) is dark, Sev's mother must have been dark also (is that valid genetics?).

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order.

Maybe there's an analogy with Cyriaca's circumstances. Something like: by running from the Pelerines and taking up with a low-life, Catherine brought discredit to Somebody Important (her father?) and exemplary punishment upon herself. Sev's mother as Thecla's aunt?

Or: a sister/daughter/whatever of a rebel, she had been consigned to the Pelerines under a suspended sentence of death, which became effective upon her escape. Sev's mother as Vodalus' sister?

Actually, I don't think there's enough information to do very much with any of this. I think we are supposed to see an echo of Sev's mother in Cyriaca, but the woman herself is lost.

David DiGiacomo — 14 Oct 2006, 16:23 · follows thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

Only after being questioned did Ouen say that her name had been Catherine.

Can you hear the difference in spelling between the spoken "Catherine" and

"Katharine"? I can't, and I don't think Severian could either.

What language are they speaking?

I always thought of it as future Spanish, in which case there might be more of a difference between, say, Caterina and Katarina (the latter being a foreign name).

Jeff Wilson — 14 Oct 2006, 22:24 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com wrote:

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<rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

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dark, Sev's mother must have been dark also (is that valid
genetics?).

It is, at least among historical humanity. Dark hair is dominant over light, with red incompletely
recessive to dark and incompletely dominant over light. Of course observed expression is
subject to length and summer bleaching, though in the time of Urth, you'd need much greater
exposure to sun for the latter; sailors and fishermen on the water for most of each day might
qualify, as might people working near still-functional lightning-powered machinery, or in well-lit
galleries of paintings, or making frequent flyer trips above the clouds and ground clutter.

You'll need to track eye color as well as well, dark eyes are likewise dominant over light, with
exotics like violet and hazel similar in role to red.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 14 Oct 2006, 22:33 · in reply to David DiGiacomo

David DiGiacomo wrote:
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"Katharine"? I can't, and I don't think Severian could either.

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more of a difference between, say, Caterina and Katarina (the latter being
a foreign name).

Possible; what is "G.W."s reasoning for using Latin in the text, again? The passage where the
ambiguity of English is ridiculed indicates they aren't speaking English, nor the similarly
ambiguous Hebrew, nor Chinese-descended logograms to write with.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 16 Oct 2006, 03:25 · follows Jeff Wilson

I concur with others who always felt Severian asks about a dark haired woman because his own
hair is dark and Ouen is fair.

Roy writes:

But I doubt that the maid who played Katharine was actually his mother.
Others have speculated >that the maid was a khaibit, which may be so. If
true, then the woman for whom she was a >khaibit was likely Ouen's
Catherine.

The maid playing St. Katharine doesn't change appearance year to year in Severian's memory,
which I think suggests she is making use of a kaibit rather than her being one. Can her
unchanging appearance be ignored? This maid is described as being of armiger height. If she

was the kaibit of an exultant wouldn't she be exultant height? I know some argue the blood transfer is what increases height but that is non-text speculation. I do see some evidence that a kaibit is the twin of her mistress but the blood donation causes a hollow cheeked look.

I agree with Thalassocrat that we are supposed to see an echo of Severian's mother in Cyriaca. There is a good chance they were both ex-Pelerines. Cyriaca was sentenced to die for the crime of cuckolding a high official; perhaps Severian's mother also? Who was the dark haired woman with a livid face in the coffin in the first chapter? I think the only two "pale gowns" in the story belong to the woman in the coffin and the woman Severian sees on the Path of Air.

I had considered that whoever was in the coffin had played St. Katherine for years and then was replaced after her death. But when Severian participates in the mock execution, he freezes, and the maid coolly prompts him to continue as though she was very familiar with the ritual. For these reasons I've felt that the maid is the real Catherine and it is a kaibit in the coffin.

Thea's heart shaped face has a sharp chin that matches Severian's, but so would Thecla's triangular face. Are hollow cheeks an issue here?

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 16 Oct 2006, 07:26 · follows b sharp

bsharp wrote:

The maid playing St. Katharine doesn't change appearance year to year in Severian's memory, which I think suggests she is making use of a kaibit rather than her being one. Can her unchanging appearance be ignored? This maid is described as being of armiger height. If she was the kaibit of an exultant wouldn't she be exultant height?

I know of no examples in the books of any class other than exultants having khaibits. The maid who played Holy Katharine was not as tall as Thecla. The other women who are presumed to be khaibits -- the whores at the House Azure -- were likewise not so tall as their originals.

Severian believed (or at least conveyed the impression of belief) that his mother was tortured to death when he was very young. That a dead woman could or would make an appearance, unchanged, from year to year is no less remarkable than that a khaibit should do it.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 16 Oct 2006, 23:32 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

bsharp wrote:

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An sufficiently wealthy exultant lady could have a series of khaibits, each one sustaining her youth and beauty for a few years, then replaced by another, newer one. Thus Holy Katharine could be played by a succession of clones, each one serving for a few years before being replaced by one that much younger, so that the onlookers who only see "her" for a few minutes each year notice no particular difference in age.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

b sharp — 17 Oct 2006, 13:05 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy writes

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I'm not the first to consider that Severian's mother did not die shortly after his birth as most torturers' mothers did. My conjecture that armigers might use kaibits comes from the sketchy evidence of Cyriaca's preserved appearance and the Pelagia-Pega pairing. I was foolish to forget the kaibits in the House Azure (at least Thecla's) are shorter than their mistresses. Making Ouen's Catherine an exultant nicely explains Severian's dark hair, pale skin and height (Jolenta/Severa's height also?).

I just can't ignore the circular connection between four characters: The woman in the coffin has dark hair and a pale gown. The woman on the Path of Air ("Carina" in the Play) has dark hair, a pale gown, a dark (olive) complexion) and an oval face (like Pelerines) which tears at his heart. The maid who plays Katharine has a dark complexion, a face like a pool of still water (a mirror? oval?). Valeria has dark hair and a face that tears at Severian's heart. Valeria and the maid are of armigette height; we don't know the height of the other two mystery women.

So, perhaps this scenario works: Exultant Catherine, with a dark, oval face, runs from the Pelerines, hooks up with Ouen and then is locked up in the Citadel. Her kaibit is forced to remain in the Citadel and perform as Saint Katharine. The kaibit becomes married to an armiger in a tower off the Atrium of Time and produces Valeria. After giving birth to twins, Catherine manages to escape her cell (with the help of an apprentice?) and travel the catacombs to the Atrium of Time where she is able to escape to the future using a time portal and the Path of Air. However, she is forced to return the way she came and is given back to the torturers twenty years later where her sentence (Allowin's necklace?) is carried out just before Chapter 1 of Shadow opens.

Unfortunately, if Catherine is an exultant it excludes Cyriaca from being her sister, and thus Agia and Agilus from being Severian's cousins. But, what the heck. Maybe someone can reconcile all this stuff. Someday.

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 19 Oct 2006, 05:54 · follows b sharp

bsharp wrote:

However, she [Catherine] is forced to return the way she came and is given back to the torturers twenty years later where her sentence (Allowin's necklace?) is carried out just before Chapter 1 of Shadow opens.

I think it would be rather strange that the torture and death of a woman who looked just like the maid who annually played Holy Katharine would have gone unnoticed and unmentioned by Severian and every other member of the guild. Besides, the torturers buried their "clients in the lower reaches of the necropolis". The woman whose body was taken by Vodalus was buried higher up the hill, among the statuary.

Unfortunately, if Catherine is an exultant it excludes Cyriaca from being her sister,

Not necessarily. They might still have been half-sisters.

and thus Agia and Agilus from being Severian's cousins.

I just don't see any text-based connection that links Cyriaca with the twins, but there are some things that weigh against a connection. Cyriaca was apparently a postulant traveling in the southern part of the country with the Pelerines at her time of menarche. Sometime in her last year with them before making her final commitment, she ran away from the order (sound familiar?) and went home. The Pelerine outfit she wore to the archon's party still fit her, so she must have been full grown when she left the order. So she must have spent several years with them.

I don't think she had the time, motive or opportunity to have ever owned and operated a rag shop in the slums of Nessus. But, more importantly, Agia said that their mother had "bequeathed" the shop to the twins. I take that to mean that their mother was dead.

-Roy