

And Another:

The Urth list — 17 messages, 6 voices, 19 Jul 2007

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4884>

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.

Paul B — 19 Jul 2007, 16:42

Thank you for clearing up the previous one, I'm heartened enough by that to try my luck again with another question: In Shadow, end of Ch. 2, when Severian describes his drowning vision, he says he saw Malrubius. However, at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer. The puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does. Let me know what you think!

My own speculations are thus:

Judging by his familiarity with the situation - he's confident enough to ask a clarification of something as ephemeral as a vision, so he must know what he's talking about - he's familiar with a version of Severian's story told at another time. However, the odd thing is that Severian doesn't appear in any time so close to his starting point. In fact, the closest documented time preceding his birth is the age of Typhon, when he travels down Gyll, isn't it? He does encounter a lot of boatmen then, some of whom become his disciples as the Conciliator, but that is so far removed that it seems unlikely that they preserved that minor a part of his tale. The first Severian's time traveling is undocumented as best I know, though apparently both S1 and S2 are Apu Punchau at some time, and since his tomb is in the necropolis it's possible that he has in fact visited some time period much closer to his birth and that's where the story diffuses from.

However, these are very vague. Even though Severian often bumps into echoes of himself, they are usually much more defined ones, that's why I'm curious if there's a better explanation.

Paul

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 19 Jul 2007, 17:37 · in reply to Paul B

Yes. The old man is ... I'm forgetting his name, but Dorcas' husband, and Sev's own grandfather, whom he meets again in the Gardens.

On 7/19/07, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you for clearing up the previous one, I'm heartened enough by that to try my luck again with another question: In Shadow, end of Ch. 2, when Severian describes his drowning vision, he says he saw Malrubius. However, at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer. The puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does. Let me know what you think!

My own speculations are thus:

Judging by his familiarity with the situation - he's confident enough to ask a clarification of something as ephemeral as a vision, so he must know what

he's talking about - he's familiar with a version of Severian's story told at another time. However, the odd thing is that Severian doesn't appear in any time so close to his starting point. In fact, the closest documented time preceding his birth is the age of Typhon, when he travels down Gyll, isn't it? He does encounter a lot of boatmen then, some of whom become his disciples as the Conciliator, but that is so far removed that it seems unlikely that they preserved that minor a part of his tale.

The first Severian's time traveling is undocumented as best I know, though apparently both S1 and S2 are Apu Punchau at some time, and since his tomb is in the necropolis it's possible that he has in fact visited some time period much closer to his birth and that's where the story diffuses from.

However, these are very vague. Even though Severian often bumps into echoes of himself, they are usually much more defined ones, that's why I'm curious if there's a better explanation.

Paul

Paul B — 19 Jul 2007, 17:45 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

The old boatman on the Lake of Birds? But how does he hear about Severian's story before Severian meets him? Or is he referring to some other event when he asks about seeing a woman beneath the water?

On 7/19/07, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

Yes. The old man is ... I'm forgetting his name, but Dorcas' husband, and Sev's own grandfather, whom he meets again in the Gardens.

On 7/19/07, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

Thank you for clearing up the previous one, I'm heartened enough by that to

try my luck again with another question: In Shadow, end of Ch. 2, when Severian describes his drowning vision, he says he saw

Malrubius. However,

at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained

clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course

Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer.

The

puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does.

Let me know what you think!

My own speculations are thus:

Judging by his familiarity with the situation - he's confident enough to ask

a clarification of something as ephemeral as a vision, so he must know what

he's talking about - he's familiar with a version of Severian's story told

at another time. However, the odd thing is that Severian doesn't appear in

any time so close to his starting point. In fact, the closest documented time preceding his birth is the age of Typhon, when he travels down Gyll, isn't it? He does encounter a lot of boatmen then, some of whom become his disciples as the Conciliator, but that is so far removed that it seems unlikely that they preserved that minor a part of his tale. The first Severian's time traveling is undocumented as best I know, though apparently both S1 and S2 are Apu Punchau at some time, and since his tomb is in the necropolis it's possible that he has in fact visited some time period much closer to his birth and that's where the story diffuses from.

However, these are very vague. Even though Severian often bumps into echoes of himself, they are usually much more defined ones, that's why I'm curious if there's a better explanation.

Paul

Paul B — 19 Jul 2007, 18:02 · in reply to Paul B

To save time and answer my own question, re-examining the old boatman's tale does make it clear that it's the "other event" case, that is his tie to Dorcas. He's obsessed with finding her corpse and has a theory that they move around and wash down into the river (Ch12, Shadow). Thus, overhearing Severian's underwater experience he ties it to his unrelated quest and asks for clarification.

On 7/19/07, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com> wrote:

The old boatman on the Lake of Birds? But how does he hear about Severian's story before Severian meets him? Or is he referring to some other event when he asks about seeing a woman beneath the water?

On 7/19/07, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes <danldo at gmail.com> wrote:

Yes. The old man is ... I'm forgetting his name, but Dorcas' husband, and Sev's own grandfather, whom he meets again in the Gardens.

On 7/19/07, Paul B <pb.stuff at gmail.com > wrote:

Thank you for clearing up the previous one, I'm heartened enough by that to try my luck again with another question: In Shadow, end of Ch. 2, when Severian describes his drowning vision, he says he saw Malrubius. However, at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer.

The
puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he
does.

Let me know what you think!

My own speculations are thus:
Judging by his familiarity with the situation - he's confident enough
to ask
a clarification of something as ephemeral as a vision, so he must know
what
he's talking about - he's familiar with a version of Severian's story
told
at another time. However, the odd thing is that Severian doesn't
appear in
any time so close to his starting point. In fact, the closest
documented
time preceding his birth is the age of Typhon, when he travels down
Gyoll,
isn't it? He does encounter a lot of boatmen then, some of whom
become his
disciples as the Conciliator, but that is so far removed that it seems
unlikely that they preserved that minor a part of his tale.
The first Severian's time traveling is undocumented as best I know,
though
apparently both S1 and S2 are Apu Punchau at some time, and since his
tomb
is in the necropolis it's possible that he has in fact visited some
time
period much closer to his birth and that's where the story diffuses
from.

However, these are very vague. Even though Severian often bumps into
echoes
of himself, they are usually much more defined ones, that's why I'm
curious
if there's a better explanation.

Paul

Roy C. Lackey — 19 Jul 2007, 18:05 · follows Paul B

Paul B wrote:

Thank you for clearing up the previous one, I'm heartened enough by that to
try my luck again with another question: In Shadow, end of Ch. 2, when
Severian describes his drowning vision, he says he saw Malrubius. However,
at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his
tar-stained
clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course
Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer. The
puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does.

I don't see that the old boatman knows anything at all about what Severian saw. He just wanted
to know if the dead person Severian saw was a woman.

As for his identity; one theory, accepted by some and which does not involve time travel, is that
the old boatman is Dorcas' husband. He has been looking for her body for nearly forty years but

can't find it in the lake in the Botanic Garden upriver. He thinks her body may have washed out of the lake and moved downstream.

-Roy

Tony Ellis — 19 Jul 2007, 19:43 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Paul B wrote:

at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer. The puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does. Let me know what you think!

and Dan'l:

Yes. The old man is ... I'm forgetting his name, but Dorcas' husband, and Sev's own grandfather, whom he meets again in the Gardens.

This has been said before, and I'm not quite clear why everyone seems so certain. Yes, Dorcas's husband is looking for a woman underwater, and yes, he says that some bodies end up in the river, but isn't it a bit odd that Severian doesn't recognise the old man when he sees him again in the Gardens? And why would Dorcas's husband be wearing the tar-stained garb of a river boatman, when he's an ex-shopkeeper who owns a tiny skiff?

I've always assumed that the old man in tar-stained clothes, if he's spent his life on the river, has occasionally glimpsed, or heard, an undine - just as the boatman in CotA has. So when Severian is fished out of Gyll saying he's seen someone underwater, the old boatman assumes - correctly, as it happens - that Severian has seen the same thing.

Paul B — 19 Jul 2007, 20:39 · in reply to Tony Ellis

I think it's nigh impossible for someone to infer from what Severian said to Roche that undines were involved unless they knew what actually happened down there. The boatman from Citadel remarked how unique it was that he heard those voices on the river, so the undine phenomenon is probably not widely known at all. Furthermore, asked in response to Severian's mention of a name, Malrubius, which should rule out an undine since average Commonwealthers seem too afraid of them to do something like learn their names. As for the old man, it's not clear what his current job is, but he sure is poor, and he does own a boat of sorts that would still require tar to keep afloat.

On 7/19/07, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:

Paul B wrote:

at that point he's questioned by "An old man, a boatman from his tar-stained clothes" about it, the man asks whether he actually saw a woman. Of course Severian does see the undine, and hears Thecla, but doesn't answer.

The puzzling thing is the identity of the man, and how he knows what he does.

Let me know what you think!

and Dan'l:

Yes. The old man is ... I'm forgetting his name, but Dorcas' husband, and Sev's own grandfather, whom he meets again in the Gardens.

This has been said before, and I'm not quite clear why everyone seems so certain. Yes, Dorcas's husband is looking for a woman underwater, and yes, he says that some bodies end up in the river, but isn't it a bit odd that Severian doesn't recognise the old man when he sees him again in the Gardens? And why would Dorcas's husband be wearing the tar-stained garb of a river boatman, when he's an ex-shopkeeper who owns a tiny skiff?

I've always assumed that the old man in tar-stained clothes, if he's spent his life on the river, has occasionally glimpsed, or heard, an undine - just as the boatman in CotA has. So when Severian is fished out of Gyll saying he's seen someone underwater, the old boatman assumes - correctly, as it happens - that Severian has seen the same thing.

Tony Ellis — 19 Jul 2007, 22:40 · follows Paul B

Paul B wrote:

I think it's nigh impossible for someone to infer from what Severian said to Roche that undines were involved unless they knew what actually happened down there.

I'm not saying the boatman infers that undines are involved. I don't imagine he knows what an undine is. But if he has previously heard a woman's voice coming out of the water, or glimpsed something, then it would explain why he immediately jumps to the conclusion that a woman is what Severian has seen.

As for the old man, it's not clear what his current job is, but he sure is poor, and he does own a boat of sorts that would still require tar to keep afloat.

You're still not very likely to get tar-stained clothes poling a little boat around a lake. And in any case, no mention is made of Dorcas's husband having tar-stained clothes. The fact that Severian notices the river boatman's clothes are tar-stained but makes no such observation about the old man in the Gardens is another reason to assume they are two different people.

Paul B — 19 Jul 2007, 23:46 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to include, interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times. Interestingly, he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and in his similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny. The strongest evidence is still the man's clear reaction to the name of Malrubius. The old man from the lake would have a reason to expect someone to see a familiar face below water, but few others would. Nothing unfamiliar would have a name. Certainly not women speaking in strange tongues from the river. Finally, the stylistic argument would be that Severian seems to encounter the rest of his ancestors in these sorts of puzzles.

On 7/19/07, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:

Paul B wrote:

I think it's nigh impossible for someone to infer from what Severian said to Roche that undines were involved unless they knew what actually happened down there.

I'm not saying the boatman infers that undines are involved. I don't imagine he knows what an undine is. But if he has previously heard a woman's voice coming out of the water, or glimpsed something, then it would explain why he immediately jumps to the conclusion that a woman is what Severian has seen.

As for the old man, it's not clear what his current job is, but he sure is poor, and he does own a boat of sorts that would still require tar to keep afloat.

You're still not very likely to get tar-stained clothes poling a little boat around a lake. And in any case, no mention is made of Dorcas's husband having tar-stained clothes. The fact that Severian notices the river boatman's clothes are tar-stained but makes no such observation about the old man in the Gardens is another reason to assume they are two different people.

David Duffy — 20 Jul 2007, 07:19 · in reply to Paul B

On Thu, 19 Jul 2007, Paul B wrote:

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to include, interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times. Interestingly, he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and in his similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny.

I think that's a detail from Luria's description of his mnemonist, who IIRC had difficulty associating a profile view and frontal view of the same person.

David Duffy.

Paul B — 20 Jul 2007, 16:20 · in reply to David Duffy

Really. That's pretty interesting - is that documented somewhere?

On 7/20/07, David Duffy <David.Duffy at qimr.edu.au> wrote:

On Thu, 19 Jul 2007, Paul B wrote:

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to include, interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times. Interestingly, he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and in his similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny.

I think that's a detail from Luria's description of his mnemonist, who IIRC had difficulty associating a profile view and frontal view of the same person.

David Duffy.

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2007, 17:55 · in reply to David Duffy

Is this Isaac Luria the Spanish Qabalist you are talking about?

On Thu, 19 Jul 2007, Paul B wrote:

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to include, interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times. Interestingly, he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and in his similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny.

I think that's a detail from Luria's description of his mnemonist, who IIRC had difficulty associating a profile view and frontal view of the same person.

David Duffy.

Paul B — 20 Jul 2007, 19:10 · in reply to brunians at brunians.org

Hahaha, no, the Russian psychologist Luria about his mnemonist subject S. The day a kabbalist can say something meaningful about facial recognition will be an interesting day indeed.

On 7/20/07, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Is this Isaac Luria the Spanish Qabalist you are talking about?

.

On Thu, 19 Jul 2007, Paul B wrote:

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to include, interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times. Interestingly, he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and in his similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny.

I think that's a detail from Luria's description of his mnemonist, who IIRC had difficulty associating a profile view and frontal view of the same person.

David Duffy.

brunians at brunians.org — 20 Jul 2007, 19:39 · in reply to Paul B

OK then.

There are extensive bits about large face and small face (also large nose and small nose) in Qabalah (more properly it begins in Merkabah literature and the qabalah inherits it, but that's bisecting rabbits). And analagous bits in Indian systems, but you just get to expect that. These folks are on more about the face (and often other body parts) of God and similar things, not recognizing human faces. Meaningful is a term whose use varies.

.
Hahaha, no, the Russian psychologist Luria about his mnemonist subject S.
The day a kabbalist can say something meaningful about facial recognition
will be an interesting day indeed.

On 7/20/07, brunians at brunians.org <brunians at brunians.org> wrote:

Is this Isaac Luria the Spanish Qabalist you are talking about?

.
On Thu, 19 Jul 2007, Paul B wrote:

Well, Severian's attitude to details is famously bad - he tends to
include,
interpret and omit things liberally. It's furthermore not too
surprising
that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more
shrunk
and old since Severian's memory is provably faulty at times.
Interestingly,
he even mis-identifies himself on the funerary bronze in Shadow, and
in
his
similarity to Ouen, which in Citadel was described as uncanny.

I think that's a detail from Luria's description of his mnemonist, who
IIRC
had difficulty associating a profile view and frontal view of the same
person.

David Duffy.

Tony Ellis — 20 Jul 2007, 22:46 · follows brunians at brunians.org

Paul B wrote:

It's furthermore not too surprising
that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunk
and old

Less than two years have passed. No one changes that much that fast. And even if they did, a
similar amount of time passes between Severian's seeing another old man, Rudesind, in the

citadel and again at the House Absolute, and yet he has no trouble recognising him.

In fact, let's have a little context here: a few hours before meeting Dorcas's husband in the Garden, Severian sees Racho, a man he has previously met once, briefly, over a year ago. He recognises him instantly. Just after meeting Dorcas's husband, Severian meets Hildegrin, a man he has previously met once, briefly, and in bad light, nearly two years ago. He knows at once that he has seen him before.

And yet when Severian meets the old man in the Garden... nothing. Not a flicker of recognition, not a hint. Just about any faith I might have in the boatman-is-the-lake-man theory ends here.

The strongest evidence is still the man's clear reaction to the name of Malrubius. The old man from the lake would have a reason to expect someone to see a familiar face below water, but few others would.

I don't see how this is strong evidence for either side of the argument over the other. A young man has just been pulled from the river, unconscious and near death. When he wakes up he says he saw someone he recognised. If the boatman is the old man from the Gardens then yes, he might assume Severian was talking about seeing a dead body. But equally, if the boatman is someone who has heard or glimpsed a mysterious woman in the water, he might assume that this young man saw the same thing as he was drowning, mistaking it in his duress for someone he knew.

My undine theory isn't conclusive, and I don't pretend it is. If someone has a more plausible explanation for why the boatman assumes Severian has seen a woman under the water, I'm all ears. But "because he's really the old man from the Gardens, and Severian just doesn't recognise him" isn't it.

Paul B — 20 Jul 2007, 23:23 · in reply to Tony Ellis

That is well, but all it shows is what is already known, that Severian is capable of impressive recall much of the time. In fact, since Severian clearly takes pride in his memory, he makes specific mention of these feats. However, it is just as clear from the examples I gave that his memory, especially for faces, is spotty at times. (Another interesting one is that he mis-identifies a clone (!), according to the Autarch in Citadel, of Thecla in the House Azure as a peasant girl pretending to be Thecla, in Shadow) When Severian's memory fails him he doesn't notice it till later, if at all, so no mention gets made. Thus, if he didn't realize he met the old man before, of course he wouldn't have anything special to say about meeting him again on the Lake of Birds.

On 7/20/07, Tony Ellis <tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> wrote:

Paul B wrote:

It's furthermore not too surprising that he mis-identified the old man some years later as he grew more shrunken and old

Less than two years have passed. No one changes that much that fast. And even if they did, a similar amount of time passes between Severian's seeing another old man, Rudesind, in the citadel and again at the House Absolute, and yet he has no trouble recognising him.

In fact, let's have a little context here: a few hours before meeting Dorcas's husband in the Garden, Severian sees Racho, a man he has previously met once, briefly, over a year ago. He recognises him instantly. Just after meeting Dorcas's husband, Severian meets

Hildegryn, a man he has previously met once, briefly, and in bad light, nearly two years ago. He knows at once that he has seen him before.

And yet when Severian meets the old man in the Garden... nothing. Not a flicker of recognition, not a hint. Just about any faith I might have in the boatman-is-the-lake-man theory ends here.

The strongest evidence is still the man's clear reaction to the name of Malrubius. The old man from the lake would have a reason to expect someone to see a familiar face below water, but few others would.

I don't see how this is strong evidence for either side of the argument over the other. A young man has just been pulled from the river, unconscious and near death. When he wakes up he says he saw someone he recognised. If the boatman is the old man from the Gardens then yes, he might assume Severian was talking about seeing a dead body. But equally, if the boatman is someone who has heard or glimpsed a mysterious woman in the water, he might assume that this young man saw the same thing as he was drowning, mistaking it in his duress for someone he knew.

My undine theory isn't conclusive, and I don't pretend it is. If someone has a more plausible explanation for why the boatman assumes Severian has seen a woman under the water, I'm all ears. But "because he's really the old man from the Gardens, and Severian just doesn't recognise him" isn't it.

Tony Ellis — 21 Jul 2007, 14:31 · follows Paul B

Paul B wrote:

However, it is just as clear from the examples I gave that his memory, especially for faces, is spotty at times

I could dispute those examples, in the unlikely event that anyone is interested. :-)

When Severian's memory fails him he doesn't notice it till later, if at all, so no mention gets made. Thus, if he didn't realize he met the old man before, of course he wouldn't have anything special to say about meeting him again on the Lake of Birds.

My problem with this oft-invoked line of argument is that you can prove anything by saying "ah, but on this particular occasion, Severian's memory failed him." How do you know, for example, that Severian hasn't mis-remembered the actual post-drowning incident, and the age and appearance of the Gyll boatman?

Presumably you think that generally, Severian's memory is reliable. In which case, why should we think that it has failed him when he meets the old man in the Garden? We can't say "because the old man is also the Gyll boatman," because we don't *know* that he's also the Gyll boatman. To say so would just be circular reasoning:

"Severian doesn't recognise the boatman because on this occasion his memory has failed him, which we know because he doesn't recognise the boatman."