

Palaemon != Severian; _TBOTNS-1_

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 May 1998

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David_Lebling — 04 May 1998, 13:31

re: Dan Parmenter, on Palaemon = Severian0

I don't think I buy that one. It's more in the nature of the scene in the typical coming-of-age story where the older mentor reveals, usually when the protagonist is in some hot water, that he too had trouble with the law/guild/church/whatever when he was a sprout. Of course, being part of a Wolfe story, it isn't presented quite that straightforwardly.

The plot outline that Wolfe alludes to in _Castle of the Otter_ is probably the story of Sev1's life, as far as it goes. Severian himself gives a few clues as to how Sev1 could have solved his dilemma, though my strong guess is that in Wolfe's original plot it wouldn't have come off quite so easily as Sev2 imagines. Thus, I disagree with mantis; I think Sev1 indeed met and loved Thecla in his own limited way, but did not have the, um, benefit of the analeptic alzabo to bring her to life later in his own mind. Or, even more probably, as Sev1 didn't have the Claw, his memories of Thecla wouldn't last, which Wolfe points out later in the story. Thecla's direct influence on his mind is important in the "revisions" that make him succeed at his task.

--viz

(david_lebling at avid.com)

Dan Parmenter — 05 May 1998, 12:07 · follows David_Lebling

From: David_Lebling at avid.com

re: Dan Parmenter, on Palaemon = Severian0

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I never said that Palaemon *was* Severian0 but rather that Palaemon could be thought of as a predecessor to Severian, someone who trod a similar path, but didn't quite make it as far. Remember, the scene that I cited was of Winnoc (the Pelerine slave) recounting being whipped by Palaemon. I think it's significant that the slave credits Palaemon with having sent him on the path of the straight and narrow (admittedly, as a slave) and when Severian tells him that Palaemon's advice was not part of the torture, he thanks him for the knowledge, another example of Severian's having done good inadvertently. The fact that the completion of the good deed involved Palaemon seems significant.

Incidentally, Palaemon's behavior and words when he sends Severian on his way are very odd. First he claims that Thrax is by the sea. Then he tells Severian to pay attention to his good advice but remarks that Severian would probably forget it all. Palaemon, who we are told elsewhere was fond of Severian for his perfect memory.

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But Severian1 presumably had the total recall. And besides, Severian does eventually get the picture that he doesn't need the claw to do what he does.

I'll admit that my hypothesis of Palaemon as the Severian of the never-written novella is far-fetched, but I'm still somewhat fond of the idea of Palaemon as a predecessor, not in the "timeline" sense but in the sense that there's no way that any Severian would ever learn mercy without Palaemon's actions. Severian receives a lot of help along the way, why not the direct help of a former teacher? If Severian is truly the sum of not only his own experience but the people who influenced him (and who still live on as Thecla does or as aquastors), then Palaemon is simply one of the many people who influenced him and who in some sense lives on in him. This is really not a very controversial observation.

But what about his odd comments? And where DID he get Terminus Est?

BTW, there's at least one passage that suggests that the first Severian may not have even been a torturer:

Book IV, Ch. 36:

"He too was reared by the torturers, I think."

The "I think" suggests uncertainty, but I won't dwell on it.

D