

On the allocation of blankets

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 02 Jun 2010

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Tony Ellis — 02 Jun 2010, 18:14

I really don't think it's that convoluted. Everyone except Thais can see that it is only Odilo's old-fashioned gallantry that is making him refuse the blanket he badly needs. Severian's "why don't you use it until I'm ready for it?" is transparently a way of getting him to take it without losing face.

Thais doesn't say anything until Severian has said this, so most likely she was about to say "I could do with another blanket, if it's going spare."

Odilo would never have accepted the blanket after that, so the compassionate Pega, who has already taken a shine to him, quickly shuts Thais up.

Scott Cooper — 02 Jun 2010, 23:05 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Right: just because it's Wolfe doesn't mean it has to be convoluted. I strongly agree with that.

I hadn't thought of your interpretation, and it fits the text well. What's more, it explains why the first word out of her mouth was "I," and relates it to the foregoing passage where Pega is talking to Odilo in a low voice. On the other hand, asking for a *second* blanket would have been extraordinarily selfish. Do we really have any indication she's -- not just that selfish, but that indifferent to what people think of her selfishness? She'd be like Jolenta, in that case.

If we're going with a "not convoluted" explanation, then I'd go with my #3, i.e. what she's about to say is "You can share MY blanket any time, big boy" or words to that effect.

My reason for thinking there might be a "convoluted" interpretation was the following principle of Lupine exegesis: where there's a mystery, there's a clue. I think we can agree there's some mystery about Thais. The typical Wolfe clue is (I assert) a minor detail which, if you even notice it makes you ask "why did he even include that?" The whole Odilo/Pega/Thais episode only occupies a few pages, and, looking within it for such a detail, I found the elbow-in-the- ribs episode. That's why I thought it a question worth asking.

Also, incidentally:

Are you sure old fashioned gallantry would have prevented Odilo from accepting the blanket after Thais asked for it? What he's displayed towards her up to that point isn't gallantry -- it's irritation. I think a more likely explanation why he wouldn't accept the blanket if she asked for it is that he suspects she's of exultant caste (but suspects, too, that she's only pretending to be.) I think his irritation's provoked by that ambiguity: it's just the sort of thing that would get on his nerves.

On 6/2/10, at 2:14 PM, Tony Ellis wrote:

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Tony Ellis — 03 Jun 2010, 11:02 · follows Scott Cooper

Do we really have any indication she's -- not just that selfish, but that indifferent to what people think of her selfishness?

She's cynical, secretive... and a prostitute, with all the hardened self-interest that implies. Works for me.

If we're going with a "not convoluted" explanation, then I'd go with my #3, i.e. what she's about to say is "You can share MY blanket any time, big boy" or words to that effect.

Also a good explanation. But as I say, Thais doesn't start to speak until *after* Severian has said he doesn't need his blanket — whereas if Wolfe only wanted to show that blanket-sharing was her agenda, he could have had her speak up before. The implication is that whatever she was about to say was prompted by the possibility of a spare blanket.

There's also the matter of aesthetics. Pega has taken a fancy to Odilo. Pega protecting Odilo, with a sharp elbow to the ribs of the self-interested Thais, is a nice payoff to this little vignette. Pega elbowing Thais simply for impropriety... is not.

Are you sure old fashioned gallantry would have prevented Odilo from accepting the blanket after Thais asked for it?

That's how Odilo seems to me - but it's how Odilo seems to Pega that matters.