

memory and abstraction

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 May 1998

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Dan Parmenter — 07 May 1998, 08:51

From: David_Lebling at avid.com

I don't have a good explanation for why he first thinks Thrax is by the sea, but I think I can nail the other. Palaemon probably knows Severian as well as anyone, and has figured out (as we eventually do) that while he has an exceptional memory, he doesn't have terribly awesome analytical faculties. Again and again we see him _missing the point_, so Palaemon realizes that Severian won't get it, regardless of what he says, but he won't insult Severian by saying so.

I like your explanation. Especially because it has the ironic component that if, following Borges, we assume that people with perfect memories aren't very good at abstraction (Funes the Memorious' assigning names to numbers for example) and thus aren't the most analytical of people.

We've been around and around on this issue before; I'm in the camp that believes there was something different about Severian's memories of Thecla. Somewhere (where?) he states that the Claw brought her to life in his mind, and somewhere else it is stated that the analeptic alzado's memory effects don't last (this may be when the Old Autarch is explaining _his_ potion in Book IV). Severian's total recall isn't enough.

Perhaps the exact means are unimportant - perhaps it's "all of the above", the Alzado, his perfect recall and the powers within him (manifesting through the claw). It was necessary for Severian to gain her memories for various plot purposes, both grand and mundane. One of my favorite examples of the latter is when Severian is in the antechamber and his memory of Thecla's excursions with the other young exultants to poke the prisoners with cattle prods enables him to recall the location of a hidden door. In order for Severian to escape he had to experience the memory of the fact that Thecla was a torturer too (as everyone is after all).

Whatever role the exultants play in this future, it seems obvious that Wolfe doesn't think much of them. He seems to depict them as rich kids in search of thrills, through drugs (the alzado), torturing prisoners for amusement and occasionally plotting revolutions.

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

This refers back to the scene where the masters ask Severian if he wishes to become a journeyman. They want him to understand that if he quits before becoming a journeyman, people who meet him will say "He was reared by the torturers," but if he accepts elevation and then quits, people will say "He was a torturer." Perhaps Severian means that both he and Sev1 left the guild?

Yes, I think you're on the money there. But wait, there's more! (thank you Dr. T.)

I've been re-reading the short description that Wolfe gives of "The Feast of Saint Catherine", the proposed novella which grew into BOTNS and although we've speculated that perhaps this is essentially Sev0's story, I'm afraid I have to reject that hypothesis on the grounds that in that

story Severian is forgiven by the guild and becomes a Master. It isn't until *after* he's a Master that he receives the letter from Thecla and I don't think he ever was supposed to become Autarch. But the Sev0 of the actual BOTNS apparently made it to the Autarchy before returning to his guild to be elevated whether he wanted to or not.

From: tony.ellis at futurenet.co.uk (Tony Ellis)

For Dan Parmenter, and anyone else who hasn't seen them, I've scanned and uploaded the Bruce Pennington TBOTNS covers.
They can be found at:

Thanks!

Let's have your opinions, if any.

They're great! But I'm starting to wonder if these are the other ones I remember! Now we hear of a third set! Good heavens.