

Thecla and Thea

The Urth list — 10 messages, 5 voices, 07 Jan 2011

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5881>

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Andrew Mason — 07 Jan 2011, 20:00

(FWIW I think Wolfe addresses similar issues in BotNS. In Thecla and Thea we have "half-sisters" the relationship unexplained. But surely it means something. This is a society in which cloning occurs but is not mentioned in polite conversation. I think we can detect it from names given- a clone gets a name which is a derivation of the source. Carina-Catherine, Pelagia-Pega and perhaps a couple others. If Borski was to get anything from his "onomastics" he should have gotten this one. But he didn't. Hah! ;-)

I find this improbable, for a number of reasons, Thecla and Thea don't, I think, look enough alike to be source and clone - their differences are specifically mentioned; they do look alike, but it's a normal family resemblance. On the other hand they both have clones, whom we meet (who of course don't look exactly like them either, but there's an explanation of that in terms of blood transfusions, which won't work for Thecla and Thea themselves, as they are both of full exultant height). Then again, this naming convention is certainly used sometimes for people who are not clones - Agilus and Agia, Severian and Severa - while we don't have any clear examples of it being used for clones. (The closest, perhaps, is Thais, whose name does echo her source's, if as has been suggested she is Thea's khaibit, but in a rather different way.)

Might I suggest an alternative view that may have a similar import - that their mothers might have been source and clone? An exultant goes to court to become a concubine, taking her khaibit with her. Later she retires and gets married. What does her khaibit do then? Arguably, continues to go with her and becomes her husband's mistress. So they produce half-sisters.

David Stockhoff — 07 Jan 2011, 20:50 · in reply to Andrew Mason

Brilliant!

Of course, you have the potential problem of the khaibit offspring being neither legitimate nor exultant.

But that sort of thing can be solved just by ignoring it---if society at large only cares about the nobility of the sperm, there is no problem.

On 1/7/2011 3:00 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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Andrew Mason — 07 Jan 2011, 22:23 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff wrote:
Brilliant!

Thank you!

Of course, you have the potential problem of the khaibit offspring being neither legitimate nor exultant.

But that sort of thing can be solved just by ignoring it---if society at large only cares about the nobility of the sperm, there is no problem.

Well, the mother's genes are noble. And concepts of legitimacy vary between societies; if it's a recognised relationship (even if we don't talk about it) the children may count as legitimate.

David Stockhoff — 08 Jan 2011, 01:11 · in reply to Andrew Mason

Exactly. And since no one would be able to tell the real mother of a child anyway, there is no point in maintaining a distinction.

On 1/7/2011 5:23 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

David Stockhoff wrote:

Of course, you have the potential problem of the khaibit offspring being neither legitimate nor exultant.

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Well, the mother's genes are noble. And concepts of legitimacy vary between societies; if it's a recognised relationship (even if we don't talk about it) the children may count as legitimate.

Jeff Wilson — 08 Jan 2011, 01:20 · in reply to Andrew Mason

On 1/7/2011 2:00 PM, Andrew Mason wrote:

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I don't think that "half-sisters" is the right term, but I could see G.W. translating it as such. Fascinating idea, regardless!

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Lee Berman — 08 Jan 2011, 14:39 · follows Jeff Wilson

Andrew Mason:> Might I suggest an alternative view that may have a similar import -

that their mothers might have been source and clone? An exultant goes to court to become a concubine, taking her kahibit with her. Later she retires and gets married. What does her kahibit do then? Arguably, continues to go with her and becomes her husband's mistress. So they produce half-sisters.

I'm okay with this scenario. But I'm not sure it is necessary. My general idea or "theory" is just that there is unmentioned cloning going on and that given names will sometimes reflect its occurrence and that euphemism (like "half-sister") may be employed to disguise the relationship in polite conversation.

Somebody argued that Thecla and Thea are not identical. Nor are natural clones or what we call "identical twins". Actually the main difference between them, that we are hit with numerous times, is that Thecla has a "triangular face" while Thea has a "heart-shaped face". What is the difference between these shapes? I think the answer might be, "sunken cheeks".

There is a mysterious repeated theme of "sunken cheeks" in BotNS. I think it may be related to cloning and blood sharing on somewhat flimsy evidence: in a dream, we are shown a (heart-shaped) blood bat on the cheek of a young woman in a roomful of Thecla clones. In another dream, Thecla is revealed to have had her eyes enlarged as a child through application of poison extracts (belladonna). I think both dreams can be interpreted as Severian's realization of the foul practices used to create youth and beauty among wealthy women of the Commonwealth.

If Roy were here he would argue (as he once did) that the example of Pelagia-Pega is contradicting because Pelagia is an "armigette" and we only have evidence that exultant women are cloned so we must toss out this theory. I would argue (snarkily) that we have the evidence of armigette cloning with Pelagia and Pega. But I would argue more seriously that Cyriaca is an armigette and she seems to have a mysterious way of remaining youthful looking (as does Catherine/Katharine maid, another armigette height, dark-haired, strangled, ex-Pelerine).

Somebody wondered about Agilus and Agia. I'm not sure. But they are so identical in appearance one would suspect them of being identical twins. But we know that natural identical twins are always of the same gender. I think they could be evidence of unnatural twinship.

Somebody mentioned the character of "Thais" as a possible naming convention for a clone of Thea. Thea is too short to derive a saint name so this could be wordplay on Wolfe's part, Thais really meaning "Thea's" (her khaibit). There is some STRANGE stuff happening on that raft floating around at the end of the world. Thais gives sly looks. Odilo and Pega argue over the proper label of her relationship with Pelagia....

Odilo strongly resembles his father, the steward Severian knew from long ago. We have Pega-Pelagia. We have Thea-Thais. And we have Severian who is a twin and who we are pretty sure has multiple version of himself running around. I think it would make an appropriate symmetry if all four future gods on that raft were, in some manner, cloned.

Jeff Wilson — 08 Jan 2011, 15:26 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 1/8/2011 8:39 AM, Lee Berman wrote:

If Roy were here he would argue (as he once did) that the example of Pelagia-Pega is contradicting because Pelagia is an "armigette" and we only have evidence that exultant women are cloned so we must toss out this theory. I would argue (snarkily) that we have the evidence of armigette cloning with Pelagia and Pega. But I would argue more seriously that Cyriaca is an armigette and she seems to have a mysterious way of remaining youthful looking (as does Catherine/Katharine maid, another armigette height, dark-haired, strangled, ex-Pelerine).

Whos there - the Katharine maid can't have been been strangled, since she is either alive or some sort of non-neck-dependent robot. And if she and Catherine are the same person,

Catherine can't have been strangled either.

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Jerry Friedman — 08 Jan 2011, 16:52 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com>

SOmebody argued that Thecla and Thea are not identical. Nor are natural clones or what we

call "identical twins". Actually the main difference between them, that we are hit with

numerous times, is that Thecla has a "triangular face" while Thea has a "heart-shaped face".

What is the difference between these shapes? I think the answer might be, "sunken cheeks".

To pick a nit, a heart-shaped face seems to be one with a narrow chin but wide at the top. A triangular face is wider than usual at the bottom and narrower than usual at the top. (I wouldn't describe that shape as "triangular", but what do I know?) The Web sites I've looked at are

<http://www.visual-makeover.com/face.htm>

http://beauty.about.com/od/bestcutsbyfaceshape/ss/heart_face_hairstyles.htm

<http://www.thehairstyler.com/features/articles/hairstyles/the-right-hairstyle-for-your-triangular-face-shape>

There is a mysterious repeated theme of "sunken cheeks" in BotNS.

With no evidence, this can be a difference between the Commonwealth and our society. We have the Hollywood ideal of sunken cheeks (high cheekbones), which look emaciated to cultures that see beauty in person rather than in photographs. (Cyriaca's comments on Severian may contradict this.)

I think it may be related

to cloning and blood sharing on somewhat flimsy evidence: in a dream, we are shown a (heart-

shaped) blood bat on the cheek of a young woman in a roomful of Thecla clones.

In another dream,

Thecla is revealed to have had her eyes enlarged as a child through application of poison extracts

(belladonna).

Another nitpick: It enlarged her pupils, not her eyes, right?

That dream sounds familiar, but I couldn't find it with Amazon book search (and I have no idea where it might be).

I think both dreams can be interpreted as Severian's realization of the foul practices

used to create youth and beauty among wealthy women of the Commonwealth.

...

In my opinion, temporarily dilating pupils with belladonna is much less foul than creating clones for exploitation.

Somebody wondered about Agilus and Agia. I'm not sure. But they are so identical in appearance one

would suspect them of being identical twins. But we know that natural identical twins are always of the same gender. I think they could be evidence of unnatural twinship.

...

I know twin brothers who I can't tell apart, but they assure me they're fraternal twins. ("Two placentas", one of them said.) I admit that the fact that they always wear turbans doesn't help, but still, Agia and Agilus could be like them but different sexes. I'm not saying they can't have been created artificially. I doubt one of the Khalsa brothers will scream if the other dies (a long time from now, I hope) in his absence.

Jerry Friedman

Lee Berman — 09 Jan 2011, 03:16 · follows Jerry Friedman

Jeff Wilson: In other words, a completely different woman than the one named was strangled?

I don't claim to "know". But that's the question of identity which is being raised, I think- is a clone a "completely different woman"? The face of all these Catherine-versions seem to tear at Severian's heart. Valeria's too. Make of that what you will.

Catamites have been popular subjects of excruciations over the ages,

Master Malrubius probably mentioned them during school.

Nah, even the Pelerines don't frown on the frequent man-boy love they observe among the troops.

What's weird is that Severian refuses to acknowledge his own likely experience, even providing unsolicited denials to his readers and to the Pelerine. I think the answer is that Severian, (at his deepest core) is an avatar of Gene Wolfe. And Gene Wolfe has 20th century middle class American values rather than the medieval, male-guild raised values we'd expect Severian to have.

It's the odd bits of common observation that Severian seems to know despite being raised in the tower, even before he gets Thecla's memories, that puzzle me.

I agree with this. My answer is generally that we don't know whether Severian is interpreting his adventurers as a boy apprentice or as the later autarch-author. Seems like he switches back and forth a bit.

Jeff Wilson — 09 Jan 2011, 13:11 · in reply to Lee Berman

On 1/8/2011 9:16 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

Catamites have been popular subjects of excruciations over the ages,
Master Malrubius probably mentioned them during school.

Nah, even the Pelerines don't frown on the frequent man-boy love they observe among the troops.

"This apparatus, no longer functional or maintained, was greatly and widely feared in its time despite being reserved for use on catamites and their patrons. A Master Irenaeus had it moved to this far corner after several clients became hysterically resistant while being led within sight of it during one particularly busy winter. Yes, Drotte?"

"Master, what are catamites?"

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