

Short Story 110: The Cat

The Urth list — 17 messages, 5 voices, 26 Aug 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6648>

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Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 17:45

"The Cat" first appeared in the 1983 World Fantasy Convention program book and is reprinted in **Endangered Species**.

SUMMARY:

In the fifth year of Severian's reign, Odilo, who encountered Severian near the antechamber in **Claw of the Conciliator** and later serves as steward under him, listens to stories being told by cooks and servants on Hallowmass Eve (called "the full of the Spading Moon") as he goes to the kitchen to eat, kicking the chief cook out of his seat. Odilo's father was the same age as the Chatelaine Sancha, whom he then recalls as he thinks of a story to write down for posterity, inspired by the scary Halloween tales of the kitchen.

He describes Inire's proclivity for the young, and says no doubt that Sancha's maturity at a young age attracted him. Inire speaks to children he does not know, and "if her face and her answers please him, he may pause in the conduct of great affairs to tell her some tale of the worlds beyond Dis" which the child will forget at adulthood. If he has no time, Inire will give the child a toy, which women, children, and wise men "call magical." If Inire comes upon the child a second time and the toy is displayed as whole, and if, in lieu of a second toy, the child requests a story from Inire, they will become his "particular friend and pupil for so long as she — or more rarely he — may live."

Sancha becomes his friend when she is seven years old, and Odilo's father sees them walking together with her cat in her arms. He takes her to his specula, where beings can be materialized from ethereal waves or "circumfused to the border of Briah." Sancha tosses her cat into the circle of mirrors. The cat disappears. Inire promises to recover the cat, and soon rumors that Sancha is attended by "some fey thing" start. Things are broken and the bodies of sparrows presented to her. A scandal instigated by Sancha's mistress, the Chatelaine Leocadia, between the nearly thirty year old Lomer and the fourteen year old Sancha ruins her reputation and gets him sentenced to death, but his mistress, the Chatelaine Nympha, intercedes on his behalf. Sancha becomes a Chatelaine when her father wills her an estate in the south and she disappears for 50 years from the House Absolute, wedding the heir of Fors.

She returns as an old, bent, and hook-nosed woman, dissatisfied with her daughter-in-law, who calls her a witch. Her helper, Aude, is resentful that no one told her Sancha had a pet. Her spectral cat was even rumored to walk upon the keyboard of an electronic organ. Odilo attends her when Sancha lay dying. A dark paw print appears on her white bedspread, and beside it "a thing not unlike a doll." When it is pricked, it bleeds. Father Inire instructed that the figure be buried with Sancha, and Odilo orders the bedspread sent to the Chatelaine Leocadia, who had grown very dim of sight. "She has since gone blinde, and yet her maids report that she sees the cat, which stalks her in her dreams. It is not well for those of high station to involve the servants of their enemies in their quarrels."

COMMENTARY: The story is first and foremost a Halloween tale involving prominent and minor characters from **Book of the New Sun**. The old woman with a cat which has been transported to a different dimension and long outlives its normal life span becomes a witch consorting with evil astral spirits in scandal. In a way, the tale is justice for Lomer, the servant of Leocadia's enemy, tinged with irony from start to finish. The rather rotund and probably lazy Odilo forces the chief cook from his chair, and will later tell a tale to his son (the Odilo who appears on a boat with Severian at the end of **The Urth of the New Sun** and survives the deluge) in which he boldly confronts the fierce torturer who appears in the halls of the House Absolute. Severian's version of the story is of a rather obsequious and polite but fearful Steward who cooperates with him, but the Odilo who narrates "The Cat" is never aware that the torturer he saw is the Autarch he serves. Lomer still spent his entire life waiting in the antechamber for his case to be heard by the Autarch — so while he was spared death, his punishment was a life sentence of waiting.

Sancha's character is morally ambiguous — with the "face of a peri and eyes that were always laughing", she becomes one of Inire's favorites because of her hunger for knowledge rather than greed for toys, but her lack of regard for anything save herself is at times callous. When she sees the specula of Inire, which could "circumfuse" anything which enters them to the borders of Briah, "Then Sancha, doubtless thinking it a toy, cast her cat into the circle." Aude, the servant Odilo sets up for Sancha in her old age when she returns from her private estate, says "she believed the cat the only creature Sancha was ever to love, beyond herself". (A peri is a Persian spirit somewhere between angels and truly evil spirits — in earlier sources they were malignant, denied paradise until a suitable penance was performed, but in some tales are benevolent — female jinn are known as Peri if they are good).

The scandal between Lomer and Sancha ruin her reputation and force her to the South, where she becomes regarded as a strange old witch who has congress with "diakka" (a term used by the spiritualist Andrew Davis to denote amoral astral spooks). In her old age, Sancha returns to the House Absolute, bent and with a prominent hooklike nose that matches the description of Thecla's memories, angered that her daughter-in-law called her a **gligua**, a word for the mystery men of the Araucanian Indians of Chile who were said to divine the future and have control over rain, diseases, and even worms (Molina 88). (The use of this particular term also establishes a pretty good bit of linguistic evidence that Nessus is in South America, given Chile's location at the extreme southern coast).

The back story for this short tale is provided in **The Claw of the Conciliator**. Lomer's version of the story, told to Severian, agrees fairly well with the one we get in "The Cat":

?I am here by the malice of the Chatelaine Leocadia. I was seneschal to her rival the Chatelaine Nympha, and when she brought me here to the House Absolute with her in order that we might review the accounts of the estate while she attended the rites of the Philomath Phocas, the Chatelaine Leocadia entrapped me by the aid of Sancha. — They say she is dead now. But in my days she was a fine, healthy young woman. The Chatelaine Leocadia persuaded her to it, then caused us to be discovered, as Sancha knew she would. She was but fourteen, and no crime was charged to her. We had done nothing in any case; she had only begun to undress me.

Thecla's memories come to the fore, and Sev calls Sancha the Dowager of Fors.

"The Cat" reveals that "the Chatelaine Leocadia, who was said to have concocted the affair to injure Nympha, suffered nothing." At least, she does not suffer until Odilo sends the bedspread under which Sancha died to her ancient and blind mistress.

The story is also important in establishing the name of the Autarch fifty-five years before Severian ascends to the throne? Appian — though whether this is actually the Autarch Severian succeeds is doubtful, for there is no evidence that his reign lasted quite that long.

This tale is also intimately related to Inire's treatment of Domnina, Thecla's friend, related in Chapter 20 of **The Shadow of the Torturer**, "Father Inire's Mirrors". (Incidentally, Severian recalls it while walking with Agia in the Botanic Gardens — no doubt the properties of the glass and the light entering the Gardens bears a relationship to the mirrors of Inire in their bending of space and perhaps time).

In Thecla's story, she and her thirteen year old friend Domnina play between Father Inire's two great mirrors, and move candelabra to opposite ends of them. Inire appears and warns them there is "an imp who waits in silvered glass and creeps into the eyes of those who look into it." Thecla perceives this as an injunction against vanity, but Domnina asks if the imp is shaped like a tear. Inire indicates that the thing she has seen is someone else and invites her to return the next day to show her.

When Domnina is taken, Thecla plays with her dolls. When Domnina finally returns, her face is said to be as white as those of Thecla's dolls. She was guided through unfamiliar halls to a giant octagonal room painted with labyrinths. Inire steps through one and says that the fish is nearly caught. "You can watch the setting of the hook, and learn by what means his golden scales are to be meshed in our landing net." She sees a figure in the center of the enclosure moving up and down and from side to side and her own form reflected infinitely in the mirrors. She realizes that the fish was formed by the convergence of light of the eight mirrors. Here Inire lectures her on the idea of the Fish and the concept of traveling over great distances: "By what means may travel be effected when the point of departure is at an astronomical distance from the place of arrival?" He says that the fliers in the air are as to his mirrors as toy fliers are to those real ones, then that that things which move quickly become heavy, and are attracted to objects such as Urth more strongly. When these waves are positioned in such a way that the wave front is intensified, the light leaves the universe and re-enters at another place. "Eventually it will be a real being, if we do not darken the lamp or shift the mirrors. For a reflected image to exist without an object to originate it violates the laws of our universe, and therefore an object will be brought into existence."

The presence of the doll which appears at Sancha's death and the imagery of Domnina associated with dolls after seeing the mirrors is interesting, but it seems more likely that this is the toy Inire gave to Sancha as a child, one linked especially to her.

LITERARY ALLUSIONS

When Jonas and Severian are incarcerated in the waiting antechamber of the Autarch, Jonas suddenly begins quoting Lewis Carroll's **Through the Looking Glass**: "The White Knight is sliding down the poker." Lomer's interminable fate of eternal waiting in the antechamber has a kind of dream-like terror, and the general feel of Father Inire with his magic mirrors definitely evokes Lewis Carroll's love of little girls and Alice's passage through her mirror. In "The Cat", we even see a slightly less tangible Chesire Cat, though it is "a gray cat, with many stripes of darker gray" originally. Inire's love of young children is a consistent motif throughout **The Book of the New Sun**, whether his interest be in Thecla's friend Domnina or the much older Sancha.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS:

When Domnina sees herself reflected in **The Shadow of the Torturer** as a series of infinite girls (while Thecla stays to play with her dolls), does Inire create a toy from those reflected light waves, based on the girls he brings to the mirror? Is the doll that appears when Sancha dies really just the gift he gave to her when she was a young child, and if so, is it based on her? Did she toss it into the mirrors with her cat?

CONNECTION WITH OTHER WORKS:

Unlike “The Map”, “The Cat” creates no continuity errors and casts Lewis Carroll and Halloween themes in the science fantasy Urth setting. The metatextual commentary of other Hollowmass stories have some relation to other Wolfe stories: “their talk had turned to all manner of ghosts and bogeys .. I heard such recounting of larva, lemurs, and the like as would terrify every child in the Commonwealth — and make every man in it laugh most heartily.” (See “Many Mansions” and **The Fifth Head of Cerberus** for further talk of larva, and the widespread presence of strange primates in **New Sun** is also a matter of some curiosity). It is intimately tied to its source material in **The Claw of the Conciliator** and consequently to the ending scenes in **Urth of the New Sun** that feature Odilo.

Davis, Andrew Jackson. **The Diakka and Their Earthly Victims, Being an Explanation of Much That is False and Repulsive in Spiritualism**. Boston: Colby and Rich, Banner of Light Publishing House, 1880.

Molina, Abbe Don J. Ignatius. **The Geographical, Natural, and Civil History of Chili, Vol. II**. Paternoster Row: Longman, Hurst, Reys, Orme, 1809.

Gwern Branwen — 26 Aug 2014, 18:59 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 1:45 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
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I found the thing 'not unlike a doll' to be quite mysterious when I first read it.

I thought that it might be the returned form of the cat, but since it was buried with Sancha and the cat is supposed to be haunting other people, that doesn't work.

The doll theory has a few problems: 1. we're never told that Sancha took the second, uncommon, path of being given a toy when Inire is too busy, are we? 2. where did the doll go all those years? Sancha tossed the **cat** in, not a hypothetical doll (and carrying both a doll and a cat sounds a bit excessive). 3. why did it bleed when pricked? 4. if it was a doll, why the odd phrasing 'a thing not unlike a doll'? In Wolfe, this means 'it looks a bit like but was definitely not a doll, can you figure out what it is?' 5. why bury a doll with Sancha?

The thing is clearly a homunculus of some sort. Re-reading the story, here is what I think happens: Inire encounters a charming pleasant child who is interested in the wider universe, does not give her a toy but a story, then takes her to show all his gadgets, when she impetuously (as children often do) does something rash and ill-considered as to toss her beloved pet into mortal danger and with it goes her childish innocence and ability to love possibly as a sacrifice to enable Inire to retrieve the cat partially as a spiteful spirit, with Sancha's lost moral traits returning at the very end as 'a lovely child just become a woman' and justly buried with her (shades of *_The Picture of Dorian Gray_*; the malign cat goes on to persecute Sancha's enemies.

Picking out some important quotes:

As every thinking man acknowledges, mighty powers move through this dark universe of Briah, though for the most part hidden from us by its infinite night. Is it not every man's duty to record what little he has glimpsed that may give light to it? And do not such idle tales as I heard by the fire but serve to paint yet blacker that gloom through which we grope?

This is quite a black opening and reason for Odilo to record what seems like a charming and harmless ghost story. Why is it so sinister? (Similar to "Suzanne Delage".)

She was (so my father said) an extraordinarily charming child, with the face of a peri and eyes that were always laughing, darker than most exulted children but so tall that she might have been supposed, at the age of seven or eight, to be a young woman of sixteen.

So, to set the scene: Sancha is a very nice child. Odilo's father has nothing bad at all to say about her, and she is a lovely child who appears to almost be a woman.

She meets Father Inire, whose attentions are worth having, but like most things worth having, come with risk:

Permit me to say at once that these children have often benefitted from his attention. It is true, perhaps, that they have sometimes suffered for it, but that has been seldom and I think by no means by his wish.

The dangers of the mirror system are also mentioned elsewhere:

In Thecla's story, she and her thirteen year old friend Domnina play between Father Inire's two great mirrors, and move candelabra to opposite ends of them. Inire appears and warns them there is ?an imp who waits in silvered glass and creeps into the eyes of those who look into it. Thecla perceives this as an injunction against vanity, but Domnina asks if the imp is shaped like a tear. Inire indicates that the thing she has seen is someone else and invites her to return the next day to show her.

With the mirrors, you truck with strange powers from out of time and space, whose effects may not always be physical (Lovecraft, anyone?). And remember Odilo's warning.

Inire speaks with her, but seems to not give her a doll, as the description implies gadgetreery:

some many-hued toy of the kind that wise men and humble men such as I, and all women and children, call magical...Should he find that the toy remains unbroken

Dolls wouldn't be particularly many-hued, magical, or easily-broken. This description doesn't fit the homunculus at the end, either. In particular, the incident seems to be Inire's *first* meeting with Sancha, when he has spare time after a long meeting, and Sancha has only her cat with her:

Such a pupil Sancha became, one winter morning when she was of seven years or thereabout and my father much the same. All her replies must have pleased Father Inire; and he was doubtless returning to his apartments in our Hypogeum Apotropaic from some night-long deliberation with the Autarch. He took her with him; and so my father met them, as he often told me, in that white corridor we call the Luminary Way. Even then, when my father was only a child himself, he was struck by the sight of them walking and chatting together, Father Inire bent nearly double, like a gnome in a nursery book, with no more nose than an alouatte; Sancha already towering over him, straight as a sapling, sable of hair and bright of eye, with her cat in her arms.

(Note again the very positive description of Sancha.)

Things go badly at the end. We don't know exactly what happens after the cat goes into the mirror; Odilo quite explicitly speculates and has no idea what actually happened:

Knowing Father Inire as I have been privileged to know him these many years, I feel certain he must have promised poor Sancha that he would do all that lay in his power to retrieve her pet, and that he

must have kept faithfully to that promise

So what **did** Father Inire do? The two of them must have done something to summon the spirit. Well, what often happens in order to traffic with and summon dark spirits... You sacrifice something.

On top of that, the summoned spirit seems pretty malicious:

So it became known, and quickly, that the girl Sancha was attended by some fey thing. When she and some friend sat alone at play, a pochette was knocked from a table and broken, or so it was said. On another occasion, a young man who sat conversing with Sancha (who must, I should think, have been somewhat older then) observed the ruffled body of a sparrow lying on the carpet at her feet, though she could scarcely have sat where she did without stepping upon it, had it been present when they began their talk.

Every example is negative: destructive of things on tables, or littering dead creatures wantonly slain (pets don't go hungry, and certainly not spectral pets). There is no mention of, for example, sleeping on her lap or being petted.

Then Sancha changes, becomes scandalous and argumentative and ugly and without friends and depending on Father Inire's charity and attracts company only for the cheap thrill that there may be a ghost:

As for Sancha, Aude said she believed the cat the only creature Sancha was ever to love, beyond herself; but that, I think, was spite; and Aude was but a giddypate, who knew the Chatelaine only when she was old. ...They were discovered together in that state which is too easily imagined. Sancha's rank and age equally exempted her from formal punishment; her age and her rank equally ensured that the disrepute would cling to her for life. ...and no one was surprised, my father said, to hear soon after that she had wed the heir of Fors-it was a country family not liable to know much of the gossip of the court, nor apt to care greatly for what it heard, while the Chatelaine was a young woman of some fortune, excellent family, and extraordinary beauty ...she returned and requested a suite in this hypogeum, which Father Inire granted in observance of their old friendship. ...Her back was as bent as Father Inire's, her teeth had been made for her by a provincial ivory-turner, and her nose had become the hooked beak of a carrion bird. For whatever reason, her person now carried a disagreeable odor; she must have been aware of it, for she had ordered fires of sandalwood to counter it. ...Suffice it to say that she had borne several children, that her husband was dead, and that her elder son now directed the family estate. The Chatelaine did not get along well with his wife and had many disagreeable anecdotes to relate of her, of which the worst was that she had once denounced the Chatelaine as a gligua, such being the name the autochthons of the south employ for one who has traffic with diakka, casts spells, and the like. ...As the years passed, the Chatelaine Sancha had little need of birds or marmosets. The scandal was revived by doddering women who recollected it from childhood, and she attracted to herself a host of proteges, the daughters of armigers and exultants, eager to exhibit their tolerance and bathe in a notoriety that was without hazard.

She doesn't seem terribly loving of her family, and Aude's comment is probably right - **after** the incident, she could no longer love anyone. Something was lost in the incident, and I don't think it was just the cat.

Then the finale:

At the dying Chatelaine's cry, all turned to look at her. And all saw, as did I, that upon the snowy counterpane [bedspread] covering her withered body there had appeared the dark pawprint of some animal, and beside it a thing not unlike a doll. This was no longer than my hand, and yet it seemed in each detail a lovely child just become a woman. Nor was it of painted wood, or any other substance of which such toys are made; for when the physician pricked it with his lancet, a ruby drop shone forth.

By the strict instructions of Father Inire, this little figure was interred with the Chatelaine Sancha. Our laundresses having proved incapable of removing the stain left by the creature's paw, I ordered the

counterpane sent to the Chatelaine Leocadia, who being of the most advanced age was even then but dim of sight.

She has since gone blind, and yet her maids report that she sees the cat, which stalks her in her dreams. It is not well for those of high station to involve the servants of their enemies in their quarrels.

So as she dies, a silent homunculus reappears with the spirit, Father Inire (who knows what happened) orders it buried with Sancha and not otherwise, and the spirit goes on to haunt Sancha's enemy. (Open question: is it an accident that Odilo sends the haunted bedspread to Leocadia, who he noted 'suffered nothing', and closes with moralizing against Leocadia?)

At least, this seems to explain everything, puts the key action into an explicit lacunae (very Wolfe-like), and indeed justifies Odilo's otherwise-hyperbolic opening - sacrificing parts of your soul to dark cosmic powers to retrieve a pet is indeed something to warn inhabitants of the House Absolute against, inasmuch as they live in close proximity to Father Inire & his mirrors.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 19:19 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Sounds good. I did mean to imply it was something of her lost innocence, and of course odilo sends it to leocadia on purpose - he gets revenge for lomer and sancha.

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She doesn't seem terribly loving of her family, and Aude's comment is probably right - *after* the incident, she could no longer love anyone. Something was lost in the incident, and I don't think it was just the cat.

Then the finale:

At the dying Chatelaine's cry, all turned to look at her. And all saw, as did I, that upon the snowy counterpane [bedspread] covering her withered body there had appeared the dark pawprint of some animal, and beside it a thing not unlike a doll. This was no longer than my hand, and yet it seemed in each detail a lovely child just become a woman. Nor was it of painted wood, or any other substance of which such toys are made; for when the physician pricked it with his lancet, a ruby drop shone forth.

By the strict instructions of Father Inire, this little figure was interred with the Chatelaine Sancha. Our laundresses having proved incapable of removing the stain left by the creature's paw, I ordered the counterpane sent to the Chatelaine Leocadia, who being of the most advanced age was even then but dim of sight.

She has since gone blind, and yet her maids report that she sees the cat, which stalks her in her dreams. It is not well for those of high station to involve the servants of their enemies in their quarrels.

So as she dies, a silent homunculus reappears with the spirit, Father Inire (who knows what happened) orders it buried with Sancha and not otherwise, and the spirit goes on to haunt Sancha's enemy. (Open question: is it an accident that Odilo sends the haunted bedspread to Leocadia, who he noted 'suffered nothing', and closes with moralizing against Leocadia?)

At least, this seems to explain everything, puts the key action into an explicit lacunae (very Wolfe-like), and indeed justifies Odilo's otherwise-hyperbolic opening - sacrificing parts of your soul to dark cosmic powers to retrieve a pet is indeed something to warn inhabitants of the House Absolute against, inasmuch as they live in close proximity to Father Inire & his mirrors.

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Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 19:33 · in reply to Marc Aramini

The other issue is that if Inire has done something to get the cat back that costs the good part of her soul and innocence, it makes Inire truly a diabolical figure. His strict order to bury the doll with her lead me to speculate it is her callous action of throwing the cat that might have done the damage to her innocence, because she is peri-like before Inire ever meddles with her. A very ambiguous mystical description.

Do we view Inire as diabolical?

Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 19:37 · in reply to Marc Aramini

That darkness and gloom of creation Gwern mentioned is evoked is because this is a Halloween story dressed as sf/fantasy, for what it's worth.

On Tuesday, August 26, 2014, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
The other issue is that if Inire has done something to get the cat back that costs the good part of her soul and innocence, it makes Inire truly a diabolical figure. His strict order to bury the doll with her lead me to speculate it is her callous action of throwing the cat that might have done the damage to her innocence, because she is peri-like before Inire ever meddles with her. A very ambiguous mystical description.

Do we view Inire as diabolical?

Gwern Branwen — 26 Aug 2014, 19:40 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 3:33 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
The other issue is that if Inire has done something to get the cat back that costs the good part of her soul and innocence, it makes Inire truly a diabolical figure. His strict order to bury the doll with her lead me to speculate it is her callous action of throwing the cat that might have done the damage to her innocence, because she is peri-like before Inire ever meddles with her. A very ambiguous mystical description.

Inire is an ambiguous character all along; remember he is not human, and is partially responsible for the destruction of Urth and murdering millions/billions of people for the sake of a higher goal.

The sort of scenario I had in mind is Inire tells Sancha she has done something irreversible, and Sancha angrily demands that Inire do *something*, she *loves* her cat above anything, and Inire asks whether she's willing to pay the price and she says something like (how many stories or movies or novels have we seen this scene in? the ill-considered statement to the wizard/magician/god/fae...) 'I don't care whether it costs me my childhood, bring back my cat!' And so he does.

"The people who wrote the mediaeval ballads," answered the priest, "knew more about fairies than you do. It isn't only nice things that happen in fairyland."
"Oh, bosh!" said Flambeau. "Only nice things could happen under such an innocent moon. I am for pushing on now and seeing what does really come. We may die and rot before we ever see again such a moon or such a mood."
"All right," said Father Brown. "I never said it was always wrong to enter fairyland. I only said it was always dangerous."

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<http://www.gwern.net>

Gwern Branwen — 26 Aug 2014, 19:46 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 3:37 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:
That darkness and gloom of creation Gwern mentioned is evoked is because
this is a Halloween story dressed as sf/fantasy, for what it's worth.

That's an out-of-universe reason for the setting yes, but look carefully at Odilo's introduction: he tells us it's Halloween and he's heard silly false stories:

I heard such recountings of larva, lemures, and the like as would terrify every child in the Commonwealth-and make every man in it laugh most heartily.

But even though those stories of larva and lemures are false, there still are dark powers and things in the universe, and Odilo has witnessed them. To let people think that dark stories are false is itself a failing:

And do not such idle tales as I heard by the fire but serve to paint yet blacker that gloom through which we grope?

So Odilo has a responsibility:

As every thinking man acknowledges, mighty powers move through this dark universe of Briah, though for the most part hidden from us by its infinite night. Is it not every man's duty to record what little he has glimpsed that may give light to it?...I am therefore determined to set down here, for the enlightenment (as it may be) of my successors and whoever else may read, the history, whole and in entire in so far as I know it, of a series of incidents that culminated (as I believe) this night ten years gone.

And so he tells us the story of Sancha and her brush with the dark mighty powers hidden by infinite night (but reachable through mirrors).

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Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 19:49 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

So is "hooking" that golden fish dangerous? I always wondered if this was related to the new sun, though the fish is considered a minor mirror dweller. Inire might be literally closer to the larva and lemurs mentioned at the start of the tale than a figure from faerie. I haven't read the end of new sun in perhaps fourteen years - I need to this week.

On Tuesday, August 26, 2014, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:
On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 3:33 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com>
<javascript:;>> wrote:

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"All right," said Father Brown. "I never said it was always wrong to enter fairyland. I only said it was always dangerous."

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Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 19:51 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

I don't think the larval- lemur talk is a silly tale. I think it references the hieros and hierodules. Odilo just doesn't know about that.

On Tuesday, August 26, 2014, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:
On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 3:37 PM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com>
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And so he tells us the story of Sancha and her brush with the dark mighty powers hidden by infinite night (but reachable through mirrors).

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<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 26 Aug 2014, 20:12 · in reply to Marc Aramini

The parallel between Inire and mr smith in a solar labyrinth seems apt. That solitary child lost in the maze at noon when the maze itself disappears ...

On Tuesday, August 26, 2014, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com> wrote:

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On Tuesday, August 26, 2014, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net
<javascript:_e(%7B%7D,'cvml','gwern at gwern.net');>> wrote:

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gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Jeffery Wilson clueland.com — 27 Aug 2014, 03:21 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 8/26/2014 12:45 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

In Thecla's story, she and her thirteen year old friend Domnina play between Father Inire's two great mirrors, and move candelabra to opposite ends of them.

I believe there are a couple of mistakes here.

"I was thirteen, Severian, and I had a friend named Domnina...."

Thecla was thirteen, Domnina's age is not given.

"You must take my word for it that at one place in the Hall of Meaning there are two mirrors."

The mirrors here are never referred to as Father Inire's. Indeed, Domnina's sighting of a liminal being in them surprises him and his demo takes place at the many-mirrored chamber, so it is unlikely the two mirrors in the Hall of Meaning are specially associated with Inire any more than any other feature of the House Absolute is.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< http://www.tamut.edu/cil >

Marc Aramini — 27 Aug 2014, 05:52 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson clueland.com

Thanks I will look it over again.

On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 8:21 PM, Jeffery Wilson clueland.com < jwilson at clueland.com > wrote:
On 8/26/2014 12:45 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< http://www.tamut.edu/cil >

Marc Aramini — 27 Aug 2014, 06:00 · in reply to Jeffery Wilson clueland.com

Do you think my assessment of the problematic timeline in The Map is accurate? It's been years and years since I read New Sun - going through it again now. Ironically I know New Sun perhaps more poorly than any other work by Wolfe at this point in time.

On Tue, Aug 26, 2014 at 8:21 PM, Jeffery Wilson clueland.com < jwilson at clueland.com > wrote:
On 8/26/2014 12:45 PM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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Lee — 27 Aug 2014, 06:29 · follows Marc Aramini

He takes her to his specula, where beings can be materialized from
ethereal waves

After being tossed in, is this cat alive or dead? I can't help but

think some of this story is a veiled nod to Schroedinger.

to tell her some tale of the worlds beyond Dis?
or circumfused to the border of Briah.

Father Inire is an alien, but we are never told (openly) from which

ship he arrived on Urth. I think both these lines hint at Tzadkiel's

Ship.

I found the thing 'not unlike a doll' to be quite mysterious when I
first read it.

There is another character from BotNS who has a thing for "dolls" or "paracoita" or
"scopolangia" or "genicon". Hethor uses all these terms.

I'll go out on a limb, but not too far, to suggest that Hethor came from Tzadkiel's ship. He
admits to being a mutineer and Severian sees someone who looks a lot like him among the
"jibbers" on the Ship.

Given that Father Inire and Hethor are the two "mirror masters" and if both came from
Tzadkiel's Ship, I find a suggestion that these two characters may be one and the same
(perhaps in the way that Zak and "tinker bell" are the same as Tzadkiel.

It is usually assumed that Hethor is a fellow assassin with Agia. But if he shares the purposes of Father Inire, perhaps his actions are not truly murderous but rather for the purpose of observation and testing of this immortal demi-god on Urth who doesn't quite know who he really is (yet). Earlier, Hethor seemed very admiring and worshipful of Severian and it seemed sincere.

In his letter to Severian, Father Inire mentions being up north with the Ascians and by this and other clues, some think the Jungle Shaman is an appearance by Father Inire. Is it a coincidence that Hethor happens to be there too?

Gerry Quinn — 27 Aug 2014, 14:13 · in reply to Marc Aramini

On 26/08/2014 20:33, Marc Aramini wrote:

The other issue is that if Inire has done something to get the cat back that costs the good part of her soul and innocence, it makes Inire truly a diabolical figure. His strict order to bury the doll with her lead me to speculate it is her callous action of throwing the cat that might have done the damage to her innocence, because she is peri-like before Inire ever meddles with her. A very ambiguous mystical description.

It seems to me that *something* came back, but (like Domnina's friend) it was not exactly her cat, and it held on to a piece of her soul somehow.

My first thought was that it needed that to keep it on Urth, but that doesn't really work, as somehow it attached itself to Leocadia, by way of the unremovable pawprint on the counterpane.

One other thing: in old age Sancha developed a disagreeable odour, which she countered by burning sandalwood. Any significance?

- Gerry Quinn

Gwern Branwen — 27 Aug 2014, 15:22 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On Wed, Aug 27, 2014 at 10:13 AM, Gerry Quinn <gerry at bindweed.com> wrote:

One other thing: in old age Sancha developed a disagreeable odour, which she countered by burning sandalwood. Any significance?

Hard to say. It could be a reflection of her age and old-person smell: sandalwood is an old perfume and scented smoke source, but it also has some medicinal uses including as a fumigant, but it also has a lot of religious connotations (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sandalwood#Uses>) with neopaganism apparently considering it good for exorcism & purification. So it *could* be there to block the cat spirit, explaining why the cat doesn't seem to make itself known during the second stay at the House Absolute.

gwern
<http://www.gwern.net>

Marc Aramini — 27 Aug 2014, 15:27 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

Well, it does a little bit, because aude complains nobody told her the chatelaine had a pet.

On Wednesday, August 27, 2014, Gwern Branwen <gwern at gwern.net> wrote:

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