

Concerning Severian's Lacunae; also, "Later, dudes"

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 17 Jun 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/821>

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Dan'l Danehy Oakes — 17 Jun 1998, 14:41

Adam (who seems to write at my level, as opposed to some of you

folks who are waaay over my pointy bald head) wrote:
2) What does this quirk

...specifically, his habit of leaving out some critical detail at the time of narration and mentioning it only later, if at all...

tell us about Severian? Other quirks

in his narration have been explained by his allegedly perfect memory, but I don't see how that would account for this.

Actually, it's pretty easy to attribute it (within story context; outside story context, it's Wolfe's delight in torturing the reader

-- "puzzling you is the nature of my game," as the Stones' Lucifer sang) to Severian's allegedly (and that is just the right word; I strongly suspect his memory is quite fallible) perfect memory by noting that Severian claims (no, I do not have a page ref handy -- not that it would do any good, I have the h/c) that his memory is so complete and intense that he sometimes gets lost in it, it becomes as present to him as the present; given this, it seems quite likely that he might simply forget(!) that he has not mentioned some detail, and _especially_ an important detail, which seems perfectly "obvious" to him.

Side note. Are we in fact certain that Sev and Thecla _were_ lovers? The first time I read those passages I was quite convinced that they were fantasies on Severian's part, or perhaps on the part of the Sev+Thecla combined personality. While I am no longer convinced that this is so, I am far from convinced that it is _not_ so.

But then, what _are_ we certain of in the Wolfean shadow(!)play...

I'm going to be away from my office and from e-mail for rather over a month, starting this evening; so if anyone respond to this (or anything else I've blithered lately), don't be offended if I don't reply for a while...

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes	First Amendment Pop Quiz:
Staff Curriculum Developer	
Oracle World-Wide Education	Is it all right to shout
e-mail ddanehyo at us.oracle.com	"movie" in a crowded firehouse?
phone 650.506.0793	

William H. Ansley — 18 Jun 1998, 00:06 · follows Dan'I Danehy Oakes

tell us about Severian? Other quirks in his narration have been explained by his allegedly perfect memory, but I don't see how that would account for this.

Actually, it's pretty easy to attribute it (within story context; outside story context, it's Wolfe's delight in torturing the reader

Somewhere in TBotNS there is a passage where Severian compares the relationship between torturers and their clients to that of men to women and authors to their readers. (Maybe I am combining two separate passages.)

I won't touch the men vs. women thing (though I don't buy it totally; just call me naive) but I don't think that, in general, the author vs. reader thing holds up. A good many authors, at least among those who write for a living, must be very anxious to please their readers, so they will keep on buying their books. Perhaps the ones with "artistic integrity" don't care if anyone reads them, but I don't think they are trying to drive people away, in most cases. (Of course I realize that torture may attract as well as repel, at least for the sake of argument.)

I also realize that just because Wolfe has Severian say something, it doesn't mean Wolfe himself holds it as a truth. (He has elsewhere referred to readers as masters to the authors' slaves.) But in the case of author vs. reader I do think it is true (or much more true than usual) in the case of Wolfe vs. us. As evidence, just look at this list.

The fact that we keep coming back for more may say something about us, but it definitely attests to Wolfe's skill. He is definitely a grand master.

William Ansley

P.S. If anyone can think of a way I could have qualified my statements above even *more* that I actually did, please let me know.