

Heliotropic Plants

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Jul 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/943>

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Dan Parmenter — 09 Jul 1998, 11:09

From: m.driussi at genie.com

Re: Atrium of Time as a time travelling structure. The usual disclaimers apply: your mileage may vary, etc. John Clute mentions it glancingly in one essay on Wolfe (1983) and directly in the famed Catherine essay (1986). Others have mentioned it, I'm fairly certain. The clues are: Valeria's clothing seems out of time; her lineage is so ancient that it may stretch back to Ymar; the place she lives in does not exist on any maps, nor can it be found from aerial survey or reached in any other way than by the one true path through the maze (exactly like the trail to Last House); and not the least, we know that the Atrium is not named for the sundials--the sundials were put there =because= it is the Atrium of Time.

The only map we hear about is the one at the end of CITADEL. I always assumed that the fact that it isn't there was due to the fact that the map probably dated from a time when the citadel was still a spaceport.

"...and there were towers on that map that are not in the Citadel, and towers in the citadel that were not on that map."

So it's not just the Atrium of Time that's missing. But that's only the explanation for the purposes of plot, it doesn't necessarily invalidate what you say.

Of course as far as I know, we never get a clear picture of how big the Citadel is. It's interesting to note that Valeria herself doesn't know about the Matachin Tower except as a legend ("the Tower of Torment" she calls it).

D

Peter Stephenson — 10 Jul 1998, 09:10 · follows Dan Parmenter

Dan Parmenter wrote:

The only map we hear about is the one at the end of CITADEL. I always assumed that the fact that it isn't there was due to the fact that the map probably dated from a time when the citadel was still a spaceport.

That's always seemed obvious to me, at least after I realised the place was a spaceport which took a decade or so, because...

"...and there were towers on that map that are not in the Citadel, and towers in the citadel that were not on that map."

...that's surely because the `towers' have flown in and out since, maybe carrying passengers to the odd whorl. (If it's the `Citadel of the Autarch', did it cease its true purpose when the Autarchs came along? That's quite symbolic.) So the Atrium of Time doesn't seem to fit with the spaceport age.

The Atrium, and the whole final chapter where it appears, have always had to me a very strong symbolic quality, a Proustian summing up of all the themes of time that have gone before --- read the chapter and you'll see the references to everything: night and dawn, the corridors of time, Severian's personal journey, the two Severians and their footprints a year apart in the passages (that gives me goose-pimples), his double in some alternative time cycle (or however you look at it), his time-travellings and eventual death, the seasons, clocks and sundials, the 'time-worn' walls, age (Father Inire), his own 'antique' titles, the changes time have made in the citadel... I seriously cannot think of a better thematic summary in English prose fiction, all in a few short pages.

The history of the Atrium, at the centre of all this, seems almost irrelevant, except that nothing on Urth ever is. Rather than time-travelling, I would see it as rather more fixed in time, a still point about which time moves, wearing it but hardly changing it. I can vaguely remember a reference to it, in an episode when Jolenta and Severian are in a boat, that probably helps, but the books, as usual, are at home.

Time we both take up our lives.
corncrake