Rollback: Leaving Women to Demons in Gene Wolfe’s Fiction

Gene Wolfe, living though Severian, re-experiences via Thecla’s characterization of him as not being worth enough to value highly for being what he thought he could only amount to her when he first met her, that is, simply a boy at hand, his own once being lured into the attentions’ of his mother and then dismissed by her when she was done using him as distraction and stimulant, i.e. Silk’s own role with his habitually depressed mother.¹ He repeats in fiction because he is drawn to repeat early traumas, but also because via fiction he can try and rework a remedy, a temporary remedy, to help him stabilize. As the psychohistorian Lloyd DeMause characterizes the functions of wars, fiction too can give the same feeling of being “‘in control and triumphing over feelings of rejection and helplessness.’” What he does is ally himself with a venue, with an entity, that Thecla would have felt as her primary antagonist in life, her mother.

Perhaps most especially notable in his later fiction, Wolfe tends to portray sort of an easy, fluid relationship between a male main protagonist and his mother, one lacking antagonism, but consistently situates ongoing antagonism in the daughter-and-mother relationship. Hence Remora when he meets his mother in mainframe is about their joyous re-uniting:

“Patera Remora’s mother came to see him,” Horn told Silk. “He’s been smiling at everybody. He told her he had his own manteion now, and he'd sacrifice and shrive and bring the Peace, and wouldn't have to work in the Palace any more. And she said it's what she'd wanted for him all the time.”

Hence Able when he meets his mother, the same:
“After that we sat long on the beach, naked together, and talked of the lives we had led, what it was to live and what it was to die. I was taken by the Aelf,” I told her, “to be playmate to the queen, for the Aelf live on, but few children come to them and any child born to them is a queen or king, as if every Aelf of the clan were mother or father.” “You were a king to me,” she said, “and to your father and your brother also.” “We played games in a garden wider than the world, and I sat at lessons with her, and talked of love and magic and a thousand other things, for she was very wise and her advisors wiser. At last they sent me into Mythgarthr. All memory of Disiri and her garden left me. Only now has it returned.” “You loved them.” I nodded. “Mother, you are wise. I knew I would not find Disiri here, for my love for her has not been lost. But those were lost—as lost as your scroll.”

Hence *Sorcerer House’s* Bax being simply delighted to discover his mother and being instantly ready to forgive her for abandoning him as a child:

“Exactly. I took you both to an orphanage here. I left you there and went back. Can you forgive me?” You cannot possibly know how I felt at that moment. I will not try to explain it, knowing that I would be certain to fail. I assured her—assured my birth mother—that there was nothing to forgive, and we embraced and wept.”

Hence, overall, the idealized portrait of the mother vis-à-vis the son-and-mother relationship: “A lot of it was from my mother, who passed away when I was six. I still remember her, though. How pretty she was and the songs she used to sing, and some of the stories she used to tell me” (*Land Across*). And also hence Merryn’s, Severian’s sister’s, highly antagonist relationship with her “mother,” the Cumaean: “you shame me, Mother,” while Severian, serving here as “good boy,” gets her accolades:
“In my sabretache, I have a book called The Wonders of Urth and Sky, and the story is told there.” “That is the wisest of all the books of men,” the Cumaean said. “Though there are few who can gain any benefit from reading it. Child, explain to this man, who will be a sage in time, what we do tonight.”

And also hence Long Sun’s Orchid’s shaming way of interacting with her girls: “‘Quiet! […]’ ‘Shut up you sluts!’” And also hence the only person who absolutely hates Cassie in Evil Guest is someone who sounds exactly how a certain kind of mother would rebuke and deflate her girls when she sensed they were attempting to gain revenge on her and/or gain independence from her via exploitation of their more alluring draw to men: “You danced a hornpipe in a grass skirt, with flowers on your tits. The very exemplar of royal dignity. As for me, I saw you in Kololahi. Your beachwear was amusing, I concede. It ought to have had a little skirt to hide your thighs.” And see, compared with Remora, how Hyacinth is greeted by her mother in mainframe, where the attention is on how distant their relationship previously was, with no details about any repair: “‘Hyacinth’s mother visited her, too.’ Nettle looked surprised. ‘I didn't think her mother was dead, Calde.’ ‘Neither did Hyacinth.’” They may have embraced and consoled, but it’s as easy to imagine the meeting as just another of Wolfe’s “there was no reply,” that is, an ostensible engagement and reproachment between two people where immediacy remains unavailable.

The citadel is basically Severian’s original home, so a maternal dwelling, by which I mean one that partakes of the body of a mother in a literal manner, like how the Eucharist is a partaking in the body of Christ. ² Like all children, he only knows the father’s realm a bit later on, after becoming completely familiar with the mother’s, and for him this means the moment the text begins with, his telling of his meeting the strange, new, enticing Vodalus, who stands for things so different from what he had known, at an age where manhood beckons. And as most
Wolfe’s “homes” are overlorded by the mother not the father—see *Fifth Head*’s aunt running the mansion (like *Peace*’s Mr. Gold, the father is cloistered in his library, the one room no one is allowed into); see Silk's mother, a “virago,” a boss, over her household; see Orchid’s rulership of all her “sluts”; see the Trivigaunti’ rulership of Sinew’s town with Sinew, the previous leader, shunted aside; see Horn's mother being household matriarch on Blue while her father remained back home; see Mint’s dominant claim to the Calde’s Palace while her husband, even as serving calde, is still her second; see *Castleview*’s “castle” being owned by a mother whose husband is no longer in the picture for being newly dead and being sold to the person with control of the purse-strings in another family, another mother; see also that text’s horse-ranch being managed by the former head counselor, Lisa Soloman, serving solo as “man” over the place, while its co-owner “Wrangler” lurks outside tending to the horses and so much a stranger he seems a truant that must be excused for his odd and aggressive ways; see Echidna and Scylla as such powerful presences on the whorl with Pas, Echidna’s husband and Scylla’s father—whom we never encounter—not dead as it had seemed but certainly still dispersed into marginal creatures through the city; see Echidna, displacing the intended Pas, as being the god mostly worshipped on the settler’s new home, Blue; see the termination of the *Wizard Knight* where two queens and their female giants are in charge of the land, with the kings and/or most of the great knights all dead or departing; see *Soldier of the Mist*’s pronounced presence of female deities appearing on the landscape but spare offerings of the presence of male ones—his retreat away from his adult relationship with Thecla back into his boyish, subservient, “slavish,” as he calls it, relationship with the guild, is his borrowing not on his own beginning manly resources but upon Her known familiar momentous ones.
The reason the torture picked for her is the revolutionary is because Wolfe, feeling a need to restore equilibrium via the most deadly revenge he knows Thecla is susceptible to, wants to play to that part of her that is fundamentally antagonistic to her, that part that tells her to hate herself, her mother’s voice, so to what psychoanalysts call an “alter” kept alive inside her like she will at some point be alive within Severian, and give it as much energy as possible.³ It, this specific torture, wasn’t chosen so she could know what it is like for the autarch to have a traitor inside his realm, for however apropos and however much it might have been planned in advance by Wolfe, even if it hadn’t been, if some other course had originally been charted and seemed even more appropriate to apply to her, simply re-experiencing this feeling of being made to feel so valueless would have driven Wolfe to go off track and situate upon her this end and no other. We know this because again and again in Wolfe’s fiction, when the main protagonist he is living through is made to feel this way by a woman he has projected his mother onto, this level of abandonment and confirmation of his felt sense of worthlessness, a worthlessness that makes him feel he deserves the abandonment he receives, this is the play he makes: the woman’s mother returns, in one form or another, only not to give the joy a mother’s return gives Severian’s father Ouen but to cripple and defeat her; to either stop her knowing the thing that makes Thecla scream in Severian’s mind when he refers to its loss, the loss of ever possibly having her own children and her own household, or if she’s already in the process of knowing them, to make some effort to undue or make a hideous mockery of them.

In Home Fires Skip and his wife have this plan that he would stay home on Earth, tend the home fires, make money, and his wife would voyage abroad across space and be, via military service, “the man,” an—to use a New Sun reference—eagle at flight to his, at best, rooster clung to home, counting the number of hens he has at his call for some sense of self-worth, something
he in fact does as part of his vision when he is fantasizing himself as knight. He sets himself up as a figure of ridicule, in pretending to be himself, as lawyer, an eagle overlooking the city, when he knows that his reader will know that his wife, as a military sniper, embodies that surveying and lordly creature more than any occupation one could come up with. It reads as compensation for an actually very insecure figure, who resolves again and again to throw himself into new military adventures to address some core sense of masculine insufficiency that can’t otherwise be quit no matter his romancing himself as knight or eagle, and no matter Wolfe’s helpful effort to situate him in a future environment where, as Dave Tallman observes, men are as patriarchal as they were in the 1950’s (“Home Fires: Cultural Differences,” WolfeWiki). When they reunited, Skip at least believes they will have some sort of perfect situation for themselves, with a lot of money now at hand: “We’ll be rich when I get back, and you’ll have a young contracta” (we end up learning that Chelle may or may not have been looking for that even as she pretended to be, for though she left him for the army in part because she was sick of their small studio apartment, sick of being confined to it and living only to “bitch” at him when he returned from work, she also left him for the army because it gave her a meaning, a glamour, that had been lost for her once she finished college, something she realizes might even have been her as much seeking glamour as seeking death, which, if true, would mean she left Skip for the same reason Dorcas leaves Severian: because a beckoning adult life brought upon her a feeling of abandonment for it meaning a fuller break with the past). But what they have in fact gotten for themselves is a situation where the man, Skip, cannot believe his wife could any longer be really attracted to him, for his being middle-aged and, by his assessment, unattractive physically, with his having, again, by his assessment, nothing a woman would be interested in other than his mind, and his being a weakling, someone who “possess[es] a superabundance of weakness [himself],”
especially compared to his wife, who is now not only military but was “the strapping lacrosse player, the glory of the women’s track team.” She has returned to someone she will cheat on for younger, more physically desirable and more masculine men: they are, as she is, courageous “lions” fighting on “god-forsaken planet[s].” Skip, and Wolfe, have thereby recreated for themselves the same sense of shame and humiliation inflicted on them when their own mothers, after focussing on them, could so casually dismiss them for other interests when they were done making use of them, a situation overtly depicted in “War Beneath the Tree”’s mother’s getting ready to indulge her interest in her new baby, and surely more important to her, receive it likewise from him, while emotionally discarding her previous, an event which left him feeling that he, like his last season of toys, had thereby been messaged to go away to some version of their doomed destination—the fireplace fire—to clear room (Able surely got that same message from his mother as well, which is why he’s sure he was as a boy always in the way of everyone, someone not really wanted, and it’s certainly the message Tack, from “Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories,” received, which is why amongst a group of women he foremost wants to be sure he “tr[jed] to stay out of the way”). And it’s a situation akin to Weer’s in Peace where his foster mother, his aunt Olive, who takes possession of him when his own mother flees him for an extended stay in Europe, uses him to accompany her everywhere she goes—as a form of baggage, that is—and also to fetch things for her while she luxuriates in her bath, and in the end of their stay together, abandons him as she would any other of her many tenants.

But they can remedy it through Wolfe’s ability to control subsequent narrative. He borrows on what staying and tending home means for him—a maintained link to the mother's world—and situates upon his wife the thing that, despite her confidence that it couldn’t be so, does hate her (she admits later she abused her via stark withdrawal or aggression terribly, not
only in never visiting her while she was at college but in other matters as well; she admits she
was a “bad mother”) and that she did all she could legally to irrevocably detach herself from, her
mother. Skip, in using his tending-to-home-fires money to, appropriately, resurrect her wife’s
original “home,” that is, her dead mother, the woman she divorced herself from, as “gift” to her,
is this text’s Severian’s touching a knob on the revolutionary. He thereby quits her use of law to
force separation from her by making “Law”—something he is a synecdoche of, in being himself
a lawyer—reverse her efforts, and defeating Death by making not battlefield technology but
“nurse” technology undue her death and make her another of Wolfe’s dead women who yet live.
He at some level tries to force himself to believe he was doing good for her, which again is what
he is doing, forcing himself, that is, in correcting her insistence that the only way she could as a
child find her way to love her mother was out of fear, by arguing to himself that her true feelings
were not fear but profound love for their being revealed in her “struggling through the crowds
to get to her.” But in a #metoo time when we hear her describe how she related to her mother:

“Yeah. I guess so. Or fear does. Like when we were digging in. People worked until—
you wouldn’t believe it. Fear made me clean up my room when I was a kid. Fear of what
Mother was going to say and keep on saying. Saying over and over again, with no
forgiveness. Not ever. I was afraid of how she’d look and how she’d scream and keep on
screaming. I couldn’t help hating her. Can you understand that?”

and are reminded of how Tack in “Island of Dr. Death and Other Stories” delineated his
relationship to his mother:

“She is awake, her eyes open looking at the ceiling, but you know she isn’t ready to get
up yet. Very politely, because that minimizes the chances of being shouted at, you say,

“How are you feeling this morning, Mama?”
we more readily recognize that what Skip was foisting back onto his wife was her foremost childhood predator. He was in a sense taking an abused child who escaped from what the psychoanalyst Bernard Brandchaft calls a situation of perpetual “pathological accommodation,” and recovering her for her predator, counting on the fact that since one is always drawn to find some means to achieve the love from your “bad mother” you never received, you’re very unlikely, along with show of your considerable fear, to not also show some eagerness to see her if she suddenly appear before you. To quick-footed seek her out through a crowd, actually means very little, just as a rape-victim showing sexual response while being raped doesn’t, because for this to change your status off of victim presumes on stereotypical conceptions of people’s responses common in ages where victim-blaming was the norm, in ignorance of the psychological tendencies perpetually victimized people end up adopting, but certainly can serve both Skip and Wolfe when they need to inflict revenge upon her but also, to keep themselves guilt-free, deny that their intent was an act of hate. Skip hatefully forces his wife’s childhood predator back onto her, and hatefully lectures her that if she chooses to hate her for what she did to her, then she is partaking in the “essence of evil.”

When Horn’s wife, Nettle, put attention onto her new baby, Sinew, it was the beginning of the end of all harmonious relations in their household. Happy times, were over. Horn always felt his mother shamed him in making sure she had mastery over whatever Horn was using to gain some kind of power outside of her own and thereby distinguish himself from her. Thus his remembering life-long his mother’s taking what he was making play with, in his case, puppets on strings, and staging a much more professional display of competence with them. And he was abandoned by her as someone worth love when he, in her mind, “selfishly” left her household (she reclaims his son when he ends up becoming successful on a planet where so many are
failing—thereby enhancing her narcissistic self-image—and when he also thereby ends up serving as a source of funds for her). And here his wife seemed to be confirming, in turning off of giving love to him and providing it to their new baby, that how he is reacting to experiences, how others’ actions affect him, isn’t worth anything, because he isn’t worth anything (Horn says he wasn’t even sure any of his children ever even loved him, and is surprised when some confirmation of it shows up).¹² He leaves her to seek out Silk, and when he returns to her he is now associated with the part of her that hates her, a mother-representative, Jahlee. Like Skip’s wife, Nettle had a mother to disown: her mother called her “Nettle” to let her daughter know what she thought of her, that is, as someone so hideous she was not worth loving.¹³ Mothers like that at some level don’t want their daughters to have children (Chelle for example is wary of being a mother, thinks she shouldn’t have children for surely being a “bad mother,” probably owing to her mother not wanting her to fully separate from her by having a child) because this means the daughter is not functioning to attend to her, to service her, in a Mucor-to-Maytera-Marble-Rose relationship, but rather focussing on her own needs and dreams, and successfully, despite her mother’s efforts to make her feel someone whom no one would want to claim for being so hideous. As such, Jahlee, in having preyed upon her beautiful boy Sinew, the object which would give Nettle the love her mother did not, was functioning analogous to how Nettle would have imagined her mother wanting to “relate” to her own child if she could ever get hold of him—either claim it for herself, or murder it (Jahlee, to some extent, manages both: via Krait, she gets her own “Sinew,” and as well, nearly kills Nettle’s). As Horn must have unconsciously accepted and desired, Jahlee functions not as daughter, not as their new daughter, which is how he introduces her as, but as Nettle’s aged mother returned, in being a death “shadow that covered her,” ready to claim everything Nettle hopes to keep away from her and own to herself, here now
including her husband! Like Skip, he “innocently” invites as gift something that has “anything behind it, any kind of murder.”

Readers might wonder why it is that Severian, after fleeing Thrax and fearing that a pack of soldier muscle is in pursuit of him—a situation which to Wolfe readers makes him seem to us temporarily akin to Wat in Devil in the Forest—discovers first-thing into the mountains he flees to a situation where another person is also being hounded by a pursuer, who in a sense, is also a pack of them, intent to catch and kill her. The reason is related to why Severian, who had just tasted the forbidden fruit of freedom from his guild, suddenly immediately after finds himself in a situation where he becomes the person who serves justice on other people’s sins and/or failures, first the peltast, then Baldanders, and then Agia and Agilus; it relates to dispersion of a crime, to not just Severian’s but Wolfe’s, using him as alter-ego, need to immediately put into other people so he can feel less susceptible to retribution for an act he did that felt empowering but also like it would earn retribution. Severian had been speaking to Dorcas and encouraging her to abandon her past origins and have faith in the new identity, the new life, she was forging with him, when she was doing everything she could to make it seem to herself that she was obliged to return to her home base, her past life, and all its barely-still.remaining arrangements, and that her new life was only death. Speaking for new life, redeeming it, rather than for obligation to the old-known—something he is doing here even as previously he allowed representation of himself as an emblem of old ways, for the rightness of the torturer’s guild in face of arguments for its abolition—he feels like he might have earned rebuke from his own mother in that it amounts to his own perhaps not seeing his her in every woman he meets and thereby keeping her alive, something Wolfe has told us he does, but mourning her, in preparation for leaving her behind (Dorcas is not one of the women Severian projects his mother onto,
however, for it’s height and large breasts that do it, of which she has neither). He had previously tried to do what Dorcas is trying to do when he answered the master torturers as to whether he would remain with them and pursue a life as a torturer or not; he had tried to portray any life outside the guild as meaningless. But no longer. And so he, for doing this, and also for freeing Cyriaca, who, in her desire to be seen as valuable by someone of high status, is much more an Agia than a Thecla, and in fact is very close to a Severian in that he sought the same in “courting” Vodalus, spoke for the right to change roles and experiment outside destined route. Through his more enabled part-self, Wolfe, he feels the need to foist his situation onto a woman he summons into the plot, Casdoe, who has abandoned her mother for her own house and family, to spare himself some load of this fear. Casdoe wonders if Severian, owing to him having been in Thrax, had known her mother, who lives there. Severian hadn’t, but he will here serve as her agent as he allies himself, in a fashion, with the creature at her door trying to kill her and lay waste to the ideal-in-its-perfection household she had forged for herself independent of her mother, who wasn’t kept with her like her father in her remote “thatched” home, but dispatched away at Thrax. It’s presumptuous, for it’s not just a home that is insecure to the threat of wild beasts but one secure to drop-ins from family. (It’s also blasphemous in that it shuts out those whom Wolfe’s protagonists like to claim are irrevocably always connected to you, and that you are obliged to honour—your parents.) Or normally it is, until a god-creator of “your” universe—here, Wolfe—needs to close that safe distance off so “you” not only get at your door the beasts “you” might expect to find in the wilderness, but the mother you didn’t.

Casdoe humiliates Severian, makes him feel his life isn’t worth much to her, in choosing not to assist Severian against the alzabo. She doesn’t pass down to him a lamp so he can better fight the creature, and instead fosters in her protection and care another stranger, Agia. She
favours some other, with no more claim to her loyalty other than being with her slightly longer, over him. As revenge, he allies himself with the alzabo, whose “love,” like Chelle’s mother’s, is really more a form of devourment, and lets him half eat her before expiring. This is *Sword of the Lictor*’s Severian’s touching a knob on the revolutionary, it is this text’s Severian’s own allying himself within the mother. Hence, he too is to be included as amongst those “within” the alzabo, who, as devil, as beast, is a version of Jahlee, someone who ingests people to develop personalities within herself, to be launched at abandoning women who shame him with their lack of interest in them.

In the *Wizard Knight*, Wolfe situates himself within an environment where again a woman seems to court him but only to make use of him and then abandon him. Idnn is a princess who, like Thecla with Severian, courts a lower-status boy, Able, for her own purposes. Thecla sought someone to pass the time with, but maybe also someone who’d do what he admits he could have done for her, possibly twice—escape with her—and Idnn seeks out Able because he might be the kind of knight who could recover her out of her own doomful situation of being sacrificed to a devouring monster so her father can regain the rank he had lost, an inverse of the Disney tale’ *Dragonslayer* where the “king” is doing everything he can to not have his daughter be sacrificed to a “dragon.” It is worth noting that what Able does in response to her request that he marry her is quite different from Severian’s reaction to Thecla’s possible possession of hope that he might rescue her in that he allows himself to convey to her overtly his anger at her for using him, but otherwise it’s the same because it means his unwillingness to help her out, in protestation in most part out of his ludicrous inadequacy to the task. Just as Severian argues to himself that: “Were I such a hero as we had read of together in old romances, I would have released her that very evening, overpowering or drugging the brothers on watch. I was not, and I
possessed no drugs and no weapon more formidable than a knife taken from the kitchen.”

Able—amazingly, to the Wolfe reader, since he so self-evidently is in fact that kind of knight out of romance Severian argues could only be one one would expect to rescue a princess in distress—argues to both himself and to Idnn that he is a poor resource to seek out for the help she needs:

“I nodded. “I understand, My Lady. But I wasn’t going to speak of your duty to Lord Beel. I asked you to listen to reason. Duty’s like honor. It lies outside it. You want me to rescue you, you say. By rescue you mean I’m supposed to carry you off to Candyland, where your every wish will be granted. I know no such place, and I wouldn’t know how to get there if I did.” Idnn had begun to cry again, sobbing like the little girl she had been only a year or two ago. “You don’t think much of knights. Most of the knights at Sheerwall didn’t think much of me. Look at me. My armor is still rusty from tramping through the forest in the rain and sleeping wherever I could. Wistan’s been instructing me in the best ways to get it bright. My own squire left me in disgust. Half my clothes have been borrowed from Sir Garvaon and his men. Your father gave me this horse. I have no land and no money, and if I were to get one of those manors you think are miles beneath you, I’d be as happy as your father could ever be to see you a queen.”

Wolfe has here touched a knob on the control panel of the revolutionary, because now Idnn is already anticipating that some foreign alien object—for her, the Angrborn king—will insert something inside her that results in her own body destroying her. The revolutionary did this to Thecla:

“Since then, I can’t control my hands … I can if I think about it, if I know what they’re doing. But it is so hard, and I’m getting tired.” She rolled her head away and spat blood.
“I bite myself. Bite the lining of my cheeks, and my tongue and lips. Once my hands tried to strangle me, and I thought oh good, I will die now. But I only lost consciousness, and they must have lost their strength […]”

and Idnn knows this is her fate once the giant king rapes her:

“You have not seen King Gilling receive a bride. He will lie upon his back, his member standing.” Hesitantly, Toug nodded. “Disrobed, I will love it as if it were a dwarfish man. I will draw staring eyes and a smiling mouth. I will anoint it with sweet oils, cozen and kiss it, beg its love. Gilling will reply, speaking for the dwarf I kiss. Erupting it will bathe me in semen, and I will praise and kiss the more, saying how happy it has made me and begging it not to go.” “Lady Idnn will not do that.” Toug spoke as confidently as ever in his life. “If I do not, or show disgust by any word or act, I will die,” the false Idnn told him. “I will not be the first to perish so, you may believe. Do you think she cannot bear him a child?” Toug managed to say, “I don’t want to talk about this.” “His semen will violate her. When she grows big with child, know you how big she will grow?” The false Idnn began to swell. Toug shut his eyes but found he saw Idnn still, her body monstrous, misshapen, and surmounted by a weeping face. Unseen hands stripped away her clothing and opened her from breast to thigh. He pressed his hands to his eyes to shut out the blood; she writhed behind their lids, trembled, and lay still.”

The Angrborn king is I believe at some level thought of as a maternal entity by Wolfe, and so Able’s leaving Idnn to her dark fate is as much his bonding to the maternal threat whose door she is being dragged to as is Severian’s leaving Casdoe to be devoured by the alzabo who showed up at her door. The kings in the text are aloof characters. One feels this with Arnthur (stipulated as “stern” and as having “no friends”) and the Valfather (the wanderer). And even as
one doesn’t with the all-in-gold-prince that emerges from the East, his being part of their collective “Sons of Dragons” conflates them all in our mind with the Eurocentric picture of Asian culture as of “Oriental despotism,” and therefore as belonging to the feminine, as defined by luxury and sensuousness, to the West’s stoic masculinity (in *Pirate Freedom* Wolfe defines the West against the Spanish Empire the same way), and so he likely isn’t taken by the reader as a “king” at all despite being depicted as having a “fatherly” tone. (The appearance of the Sons of Dragons, with their “minister with the whip,” and their “minister with the forked staff,” in fact reinforces our sense of King Gilling as himself “Eastern” in this respect, for he keeps to himself ministers described as viziers.) Gilling wants to be courted, he wants to be flattered and offered “pretty” jewels and gems as presents; he wants to be “anointed with sweet oils,” as if himself a lady luxuriating in his-own-produced “Persian” bathhouse; he stages contests where knights offer themselves to be killed for his favour; and people seek to please him for if they fail they will instantly murdered. In most respects he is most similar to the princesses and the Queens in the text (and to specific women characters in other texts of Wolfe’s, like *Peace*’s Aunt Olive), and most especially to Disiri, who wants her hero only when he’s come back to her worthy, someone well-presented for court as both knight and bearer of a great sword bedecked with jewels that everyone else would envy but that he offers only her; as someone for whom being “Queen” isn’t enough but only “Goddess”; and who first knew Able in an environment which, if this is more a screen memory than a real one, was one where if he didn’t please, he didn’t live:

“I do.” Until that moment I had not known I remembered. “I thought they wiped those memories away, Uri, but they only hid them under the message. She had a palace, and big trees were its towers. Her garden lay around them, a garden of wildflowers, mosses, little springs, and rivulets. I was stronger than she was, but I was careful to take no advantage
of it, and she punished me when she was displeased, striking me with her little hand.” I laughed at the memory. “It was like being kicked by a bunny, but if I giggled she’d threaten me with her guards, Mossmen with swords who watched over us. They’d have killed me if she ordered it, but she never did.”

The text further also conflates the two in that both Gilling and Disiri take other people’s children to them as sacrifices. Gilling takes Beel’s Idnn and Disiri takes Toug senior’s Toug. Idnn expects to be maimed in the process, and Toug, with his loss of speech, is maimed.

The text offers no references as to how Idnn related to her mother, but for me she is understood at some level by Wolfe as in the same position of all those who even ostensibly have, not Chelle’s self-described “bad mothers” but even some version of child psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott’s “good mothers,” whose conveyed goodness is always suspicious of being a split-object in the mind of the character portraying them in that whatever narrative they are involved in also features so many dark mothers who would so conveniently serve to “carry” not only their own but the good mother’s darkness also if they actually in truth happened to possess some portion themselves, for her being plotted as the “sacrifice” from the good home made in fairy tales to a “monster” that dwells in a bad one that considered psychoanalytically are always versions of exactly the same place. This idea, that the home and the destination with its overt monster that await one in a fairy tale are actually an embodiment of the same parental home, is something psychoanalyst Bruno Bettleheim argues in *Uses of Enchantment*. He writes: “In ‘Little Red Cap’ the house in the woods and the parental home are the same place.” “They’re experienced quite differently,” he writes, because one represents the prepubertal girl whereas the other represents the pubertal. His argument seems to be an argument for not recognizing the split-off darker parental intentions within the parent in Idnn’s case, for certainly, in now being
sixteen, she is a different person than she was previously within her home in her now broaching an age Wolfe seems to focus on as meaning for both boys and girls, adulthood. But Bettleheim also argues for understanding both the grandmother and wolf in the tale, two beings not split between one prepubertal home and one pubertal home but contained within the same home, as variations of the same person, which suggests that the childhood’ and the monster’s homes differ not only because that child who exits within each is on either side of an age and status divide. Specifically, he argues:

“In ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ the kindly grandmother undergoes a sudden replacement by the rapacious wolf which threatens to destroy the child. How silly a transformation when viewed objectively, and how frightening—we might think the transformation unnecessarily scary, contrary to all possible reality. But when viewed in terms of a child’s ways of experiencing, is it really any more scary than the sudden transformation of his own kindly grandma into a figure who threatens his very sense of self when she humiliates him for a pants-wetting accident? To the child, Grandma is no longer the same person she was just a moment before; she has become an ogre. How can someone who was so very kind, who brought presents and was more understanding and tolerant and uncritical than even his own mommy, suddenly act in such a radically different fashion? […] Unable to see any congruence between the different manifestations, the child truly experiences Grandma as two separate entities—the loving and the threatening. She is indeed Grandma and the wolf. By dividing her up, so to speak, the child can preserve his image of the good grandmother.”

If one conjectures that both the mother from the childhood home and the grandmother in the visited one are those whose bad-mother qualities are contained in the wolf, then one needn’t
imagine that even in the prepubertal home Idnn actually knew an idyllic one, and you can presume that the relationship when a child is actually most influenced by their mothers, the age far before the time that Freudian analysts like to place it, was one involving a mother dangerous enough that to preserve the image you need to have of her, someone receptive and loving, very early into a child’s life they will already be practicing splitting, à la Melanie Klein’s conception of the child’s developmental process. Bettelheim indeed actually makes this same argument himself. Describing a not-yet-five-year-old, he writes:

“One day in a supermarket this girl’s mother suddenly became very angry with her; and the girl felt utterly devastated that her mother could act this way toward her. On the walk home, her mother continued to scold her angrily, telling her she was no good. The girl became convinced that this vicious person only looked like her mother and, although pretending to be her, was actually an evil Martian, a look-alike impostor, who had taken away her mother and assumed her appearance. From then on, the girl assumed on many different occasions that this Martian had abducted the mother and taken her place to torture the child as the real mother would never have done.”

However Bettelheim is not articulating exactly what I arguing was true for Idnn, for he believes that the splitting that occurs is inevitable for all children, normalizing it to some extent owing to their seeing the change in their mothers as they either see them wet themselves or simply in “deny[ing] the youngster something he wants.”¹⁹ Bettelheim published Enchantment in 1975, and in a contemporary age of #metoo we’re more aware that both his example of how the grandmother reacts to a child’s wetting herself and the mother’s repeated scolding and telling her she’s no good, were not actually minor infractions of parental conduct but harassment suggestive of a much deeper menace, but he clearly doesn’t mean it this way. He means it in the 1970s way,
where these occurrences could persuade many as simply normal incidents of childhood, and so
certainly doesn’t mean anything so ostensibly preposterous as their being versions of Idnn’s
being sent to an “ogre” to be devoured for it being an accurate reflection of the insane level of
hatred and desire for murder mothers could feel towards their children. To him, even as a mother
and grandmother might be experienced as transmogrifying in attitudes towards their children and
grandchildren from benign to overtly hostile, and even as he never presumes a child is
misinterpreting a mother’s motivations, as Freud had it in his belief in children’s libidinal drives,
the darkest motivations, the desire to devour and kill, are never in the mother but rather in a
child’s own imagination, which must then be projected out. In discussion of Pirate Freedom and
I think as well with Wizard Knight, Wolfe has written that he aims at non-beautified, uncensored
tales, in part to show just how, despite ostensibly being home to profound virtues, also how
dangerous they were, how unsparing, and Bettleheim argues for the same, but so for us to keep in
contact with how dark children’s drives are and how they will remain even if the outside world
ever became as benign as a Disney fantasy. He writes, we need to keep in our awareness how
“violent, anxious, destructive, and even sadistic a child’s imagination is.” So for Bettleheim, the
child’s fear of being devoured, reflected in fairy tales, is a reflection of some part of themselves;
it owes to their “oral aggression.” However, portraying children like this should be seen as proof
that Bettleheim is incorrect in assuming that with adulthood we loosen and abandon our need to
save our parents by splitting off their darker sides, because this presumption of children
obviously continues to work to save them.

Idnn being dispatched to King Gilling is a version of the childhood sourcing of other
fairy tales like “Hansel and Gretel” and “Beauty in the Beast” as well. The witch “you’re” being
sacrificed to so the family can eat (“Hansel and Gretel”), or a Beast “you’ll” be abducted within
so a death-sentence can be abated (“Beauty and the Beast”), are monsters “you’ve” already
known, for being versions of “your” own mothers. These are all fairy tales which overtly argue
children as being sacrificed by their parents to alleviate a curse that has afflicted them, which is
how Idnn rightly understands what’s happening to her as, rather than accommodate him, she
deconstructs the “sanitizing” understanding of her situation her father would prefer she adopt —
she’s not really being made a Queen by her father Beel but being forced by him into being one of
the pieces of treasure they are carrying on their mules that will end up badly broken and
discarded after use, so he can regain a better status for himself that existed before a dark curse set
in.

There is much to explore in Wolfe’s texts about lands that are operating under a dark
curse, for it’s typical of so many of them, including throughout in the Wizard Knight, with its
plague of Osterling invasions and bandits on the rampage, and including the drought in Long
Sun, and in the short, un-supplying sun of New Sun, and in the overpopulation afflicting
Borrowed Man and Interlibrary Loan, as well as in numerous short stories which read,
purgatory. What is it about Wolfe that he needs to initiate texts which begin with this loss of
previous amplitude? Why, so many, under a curse? It’s to be found in this essay’s brief
exploration of Casdoe’s own “crime” of individuation, whose further elaboration will be
discussed in a subsequent essay, but it must be first be remarked that many of his texts carry
environments that are not so much curses for individuation but repairs of curses which delineate
how one feels once, for safety, individuation has been surrendered and a curse has been lifted.
It’s not always comfortable for Wolfe’s alter-egos when they associate back with their dark
mothers to destroy a woman who has shamed them, or when they do so to undo some previously
incurred individuation. They’re temporarily relieved, certainly. And Wolfe, existing through
them, feels temporarily relieved, but the bunch of they are in the bind of feeling feminized, of being caught in “female poisons,” in the way that troubles so many Wolfe protagonists when for example they feel they’ve too readily agreed with the predator mother’s point of view (see for example Able’s need to prove his masculinity after seeing things Kulili’s way; see Severian’s man-handling a powerless victim—a projected self—after eagerly seeking to find himself within the caretaking folds of the Pelerines’; see There are Door’s Green’s breaking he-man North’s nose after willing letting himself be used and used by her again if only to be absolved within his replacement for his early-love mother, the Goddess Laura, and her finally, agreeing). It’s not always comfortable for Wolfe’s alter-egos when they themselves rollback. We as much earn cursed environments for our actions as know them before having initiated any at all. And not because “sin” is the only thing we know. Or because we are and ever shall be Freud’s driven. But because like as Disiri did upon Able when she prevented him from growing into a man, something beautiful and natural that could have been us, has strayed way off path owing to an early environment of ongoing, sustained terror.

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1 Here is how, a skewed interpretation, admittedly, Thecla baits Severian in to be used and then rejected: “‘Severian. It won’t help, Chatelaine. It won’t make any difference.’ She smiled. ‘What won’t?’ ‘Making friends with me. I couldn’t give you your freedom. And I wouldn’t—not if I had no friend but you in all the world.’ ‘I didn’t think you could, Severian.’ ‘Then why do you bother to talk to me?’ She sighed, and all the gladness went out of her face, as the sunlight leaves the stone where a beggar seeks to warm himself. ‘Who else have I to talk to, Severian? It may be that I will talk to you for a time, for a few days or a few weeks, and die. I know what you’re thinking—that if I were back in my suite I would never spare a glance for you. But you’re wrong. One can’t talk to everyone because there are so many everyones, but the day before I was taken I talked for some time with the man who held my mount. I spoke to him because I had to wait, you see, and then he said something that interested me.’” And here is how Silk describes his early-life experiences with his mother: “She would be unhappy now to see him in this quarter, walking its streets as poor as many of its people. She had never been a happy woman in any case, her large dark eyes so often bright with tears from sources more mysterious than the fisc, her tiny body shaken with sobs that he could do nothing to alleviate”

2 Horn’s interpretation: “So it is, I believe, with the Mother. She dwells in the sea, and Seawrack spoke of hiding at times within her body as one might speak of taking shelter in the Grand Manteion, the Palace, or some other big building.” Note, Wolfe gives us room to imagine that if Seawrack wasn’t atypical but rather typical of most of us, who after all ourselves first cradled within the our mothers’ bodies as homes when we were infants and children, we are all then imagining all large houses of Wolfe’s as still being infused by, not just natural materials but of the flesh and bones of our mothers, in a fashion akin to how Severian can’t but experience women with great heights and
large oval breasts as his mother; the early affects associated with our long and influential early experiences with her body are there in many architectural expanses as well.

3 Thecla doesn’t refer to her mother in the text as abusive, only her teachers, but she is this text’s Diane from Wolfe’s “Death of Dr. Island,” and Diane is someone plagued by parents inside her who are the source of emotional troubles, those who are the source of the “death wish” the computer doctor intends to use as one of his therapeutic tools to fix another patient. Like Thecla, she is inserted into a sequestered world—for her, a therapy planet, and for Severian, a sequestered citadel that no one approaches—to try and help fix someone who is essential to a world’s survival but who can’t participate in the world owing to being paralyzed by some fear. Diane helps Ignacius in that her desire to seek out death means Ignacius can readily use her, via killing her, to get over his fear of women—they are not all-powerful as he had presumed, but weak, brittle things—the thing that had been stopping him from participating in the world at large. Thecla, via accepting Severian’s inducement to kill herself, helps Severian get past what was blocking him from exiting the citadel and entering the world at large—his fear that that world will prove a void for him, because to get there he will have to have chosen against the desires’ of his masters who in serving as mother-representatives, will have made him feel like his choice means being thereafter absent their love—because it makes that the only option now open for him, and because it allows him to get there without overtly choosing against his masters but only through falling into the love for the beautiful exultant client that the masters presumed would be inevitable for all their charges if they were long in her company, unless they were simultaneously repeatedly dispatched to other beautiful women for sex. Thecla, too, in her as a child being one of those who snuck up on prisoners and applied electric torture to them, is doing what all children do when their mothers were predatory, identifying with the perpetrator. The depiction in the text of the “monstrous face that glared […] with saucer eyes, then quickly faded to mere dark,” a behaviour that Thecla partook in when she was a child when she preyed on the prisoners, is a replication of a scare parents in the past habitually inflicted on their children, as DeMause explains:

This need to personify punitive figures was so powerful that, following the principle of "concretization," adults actually dressed up Katchina- like dummies to use in frightening children. One English writer, in 1748, while explaining how terror originated with nurses who frightened infants with stories of “raw-head and bloody-bones,” said: The nurse takes a fancy to quiet the peevish child, and with this intent, dresses up an uncouth figure, makes it come in, and roar and scream at the child in ugly disagreeable notes, which grate upon the tender organs of the ear, and at the same time, by its gesture and near approach, makes as if it would swallow the infant up. These fearful figures were also the favorites of nurses who wanted to keep children in bed while they went off at night. Susan Sibald remembered ghosts as a real part of her eighteenth-century childhood: Ghosts making their appearance were a very common occurrence. . . . I remember perfectly when both the nursery maids at Fowey wished to leave the nursery one evening . . . we were silenced by hearing the most dismal groanings and scratchings outside the partition next the stairs. The door was thrown open, and oh! horrors, there came in a figure, tall and dressed in white, with fire coming out of its eyes, nose and mouth it seemed. We were almost thrown into convulsions, and were not well for days, but dared not tell. The terrorized children were not always as old as Susan and Betsey. One American mother in 1882 told of a friend's two-year-old girl whose nurse, wanting to enjoy herself for the evening with the other servants while the parents were out, assured herself she wouldn't be disturbed by telling the little girl that a horrible Black Man […] was hidden in the room to catch her the moment she left her bed or made the slightest noise […] to make double sure that she should not be interrupted during the evening's enjoyment. She made a huge figure of a black man with frightful staring eyes and an enormous mouth, and placed it at the foot of the bed where the little innocent child was fast asleep. As soon as the evening was over in the servant’s hall, the nurse went back to her charge. Opening the door quietly, she beheld the little girl sitting up in her bed, staring in an agony of terror at the fearful monster before her, and both hands convulsively grasping her fair hair. She was stone dead! (Foundations of Psychohistory, 12-13).

I think at some level Wolfe is aware of this as an explanation for this cruelty in children, a suspicion I’d substantiate in Wolfe’s stipulating that the giants in the Wizard Knight, the Angrborn, are angry and cruel owing to having a mother who was abandoning and cruel to them, and to some extent in the inhumu only being capable of replicating the manner of the people they were first ingested with or that they end up themselves ingesting.

4 “As this one to me. I live by defending others from a law that is grown monstrous, devoid not only of justice but of the very thought and ideal of justice. I defend others, yet no one is more alone than I. In centuries long past, the
need to do so as a knight is unconsciously also portraying the environment he remains in as mostly one where is perennially situated traumas originating in abuse afflicted by mothers, where the “knights” defend mothers they’ve forced themselves to think of as innocent of the charges they themselves originally leveled at them, while partaking in clothing their mothers originally garbed them in and in hostile behaviour their mothers originally directed at them. As DeMause says:

“These medieval duels often restaged the maternal traumas of childhood. For instance, mothers in medieval times often squeezed the penis of their boys to toilet train them, so knights traditionally considered a squeeze of their noses to indicate a challenge to a duel. The knight’s costume repeated the brilliant colors, feathers and swishing cloth of their mothers, and, as one scholar put it, ‘For centuries European war was an odd spectacle of men dressed in fancy clothes trying to kill one another.’ Some knights actually wore a helmet in tournaments that had his Lady sculptured on them, like the ‘Lady Venus’ helmet of the famous 13th-century knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein portrayed above. The question ‘Why fight?’ which haunts the senseless battles of knights is again answered by ‘For the Killer Mother,’ who in Icelandic sagas and Germanic epics viciously berates the men for not plunging into battles or feuds more quickly and avidly.’

In full, this is what Chelle says about what the army meant for her: “Is the Army a kind of death? Or is death a kind of enlistment? If it is, we all enlist, even if we don’t want to. We’re sick of this life. Was I sick of winning the fencing tournament, sick of being the star pitcher on the softball team? No, sick of being out of college and in a world where I couldn’t do any of that.”

DeMause, building off James Masterson’s articulation of growth panic, argues that the sense that life is meaningless after college owes primarily to a sense that in now no longer playing at adulthood but being truly “there,” you have a sense that you your parents will abandon you for your leaving them to focus on your own life, and it results in various “horsemen of the apocalypse” visiting you, one of these being depression and another, void. It leads to your devaluing this life as without promise and in engaging in manic flights of action:

“When Socarides’ patients make moves to individuate- like moving into their own apartment or getting a new job-they have dreams of being swallowed by whirlpools or devoured by monsters. The only salvation from these maternal engulfment wishes/fears is a ‘flight to external reality from internal reality,’ a flight in which social institutions play a central role, as we shall shortly discover. Many people who have been in psychotherapy become conscious of this individuation panic and flight to external reality when they begin to grow, break free of old emotional patterns and start to feel their freedom. These fears can be characterized as an all-pervasion growth panic that traumatized individuals (nearly everyone) constantly carry around during their daily lives. Masterson quotes one of his patients: ‘I was walking down the street and suddenly I was engulfed in a feeling of absolute freedom. I could taste it. I knew I was capable of doing whatever I wanted. When I looked at other people, I really saw them without being concerned about how they were looking at me…I was just being myself and thought that I had uncovered the secret of life: being in touch with your own feelings and expressing them openly with others, not worrying so much about how others felt about you. Then just as suddenly as it came, it disappeared. I panicked and started thinking about the million things I had to do at the studio, of errands I needed to run after work. I began to feel nauseous and started sweating. I headed for my apartment, running most of the way. When I got in, I felt that I had been pursued. By what? Freedom, I guess.’ It is this manic flight to action a flight that is a defense against growth panic that is the emotional source of much of social behavior. Manic acting-out in social activity is a universal addiction, similar in its effects to the dopamine agonistic effects of cocaine. That’s why leaders so often take manic drugs, like John F. Kennedy during the Gulf Crisis (amphetamine) and George Bush during the Gulf War (Halcion). Like drugs, grandiose manic social activities such as war and political domination produce a temporary elation and a dopamine surge, but not the lasting joy of self-discovery and love.”

Later, to restore some sense of equality, he feels not only the need to head off into military battles in space but the need to do so as colonel: that is, to gain balance, he has to trump her own credentialing; he has to outdo her.
7 Chelle comes to realize her husband is quite a warrior himself, but it occurs to her that as a lawyer he must have been a fighter apparently only after she attempts to figure out how he performed so ably in military battles. She realizes, retroactively. She has mostly known him as a wimp.

8 “You would get married, and I would be in the way all the time until I was old enough to live on my own.”

9 Or as Able treats Svon’s sword when he throws it to the side.

10 Fortunately, though Chelle believes that Skip’s resurrecting her mother not only consciously but unconsciously was his effort to please her, she does end up leaving him for sanely realizing that “because he thought that horrible thing he did would make [her] […] happy and after that [she] […] knew [she] […] could never trust him anymore, that when he gave [her] […] something there might be dead kids behind it, might be anything behind it, any kind of murder.” This same conclusion, where a wife is shocked that some basic trust she had applied to her husband ends up resulting in her being invited to gross terrors, appears frequently in Wolfe. For example it surfaces not only with Nettle but also with Hyacinth, who in trusting her husband finds herself brought to a place reminiscent of a world she was very evidently trying to differentiate herself from, the disgusting underworld, which for her clearly represents the fate her father, in sending her Baron Beel-like to be a sex-slave so he could increase his social rank, dispatched for her when she had just come of age. Not for her a happy marriage, but to exist in a world where strange men spread filth on her every evening she was alive.

11 “I once had a toy, a little wooden man in a blue coat who was moved by strings. When I played with him, I made him walk and bow, and spoke for him. I practiced until I thought myself very clever. One day I saw my mother holding the two sticks that held his strings, and my little wooden man saluting my youngest sister much more cleverly than I could have made him do it, and laughing with his head thrown back, then mourning with his face in his hands. I never spoke of it to my mother, but I was angry and ashamed.”

12 “Hide asked, “Do you, Father? Are you sure?” The simple words fail to convey his expression and voice; it was one of the few times I have felt absolutely certain that he loves me.”

13 “He had loved Nettle—Nettle, whose mother had hated her from the moment of conception, as the name she had given her had made only too plain—and had envied Patera Silk Hyacinth (lovely, savage Hyacinth) with all his heart.”

14 That is she is both mother and daughter might be suggested in the reversal of positions. She begins as predator, the predatory mother, in lurking over her, and ends in perhaps more daughter-mode, in that Nettle nestsles her.

15 Severian is of course pursued by two sets of enemies, Hethor’s beasts and the Archon’s soldiers, and it might be that Casdoe, in being assaulted by two sets of enemies—one, a beast, and the other soldiers of a kind—marries Severian’s two different pursuers, making him feel safe from for a while from both. Hethor’s beasts are dispatched via the person he is really mostly serving a slave to rather than as a puppet-master over, Agia, a dark mother-figure who “tak[es] all that lives most fully in humanity as her opponent,” and Wolfe felt the need to conjure them as pursuers to chase after his alter-ego Severian because Severian temporarily works as rebuke to her gorging needs and desires. When Horn does the same when he visits Maytera Marble-Rose in On Blue’s Waters and won’t let them have what they want, what they have been cueing him to do by instituting a classroom-akin teacher’s relationship to them, a director’s relationship to him, the very moment they meet back with another, namely, his bringing to them his water bottles, he remedies this rebuke by at the end of his journeys bringing “them” an eye so she can finally see again. Severian manages the same when in the end of his own journeys he concedes to letting Agia serve as commander of the myrmidons. As we see in Wizard Knight, where Able’s one rebuke of the dark mother Parka results in his being forced into a life-long marriage to an incestuous mother, Disiri, one brave rebuke is no small matter in Wolfe’s fiction. In Wolfe, you stand tall to a dark mother, even once, if you don’t find a stand-in for yourself immediately you either die (Vodalus), go blind (the abbé), or disappear at the end of each day (Latro).

16 Cyriaca: “And he stopped and looked at me, I think in some surprise. You cannot know how it feels to be a little armigette from the north, in a gown sewn by your own maids, and provincial jewels, and be looked at so by someone who has spent all his life among the exultants of the House Absolute. Then he smiled.” Agia: “That’s why
I thought so myself when I first saw you. And you see, if you were, then I was someone that somebody like that, an
armiger and probably the bastard of an exultant, might care for. Even if it was only a kind of joke. I had no way of
knowing what would happen.”

17 Severian remarks on how dangerous it was for her husband to try and set up a home in the mountains, but the
husband is never an entity within the household as we know it but rather only the mother is, someone whom we are
made to note as a formidable house-manager, and so the danger would affix to her, the only head of household as we
know it, for, Horn-like, setting off for any place that would allow them to know the distance between herself and her
mother won’t readily be closed. This was for them the mountains, but if on Blue, like Horn and Nettle they would
perhaps have chosen an island instead.

18 Severian’s serving as a lamp in dark places, that is, when he brings forth the bright claw to the men-beasts surging
on him, and when he brings the warm new sun to a darkened Urth, is partaking in a mother’s power to give love to
love-starved people, the mother’s love that is given so long as the receivers perform masochistically before “her,”
which the men-beasts end up doing by immediately losing all fight and being submissive to Severian and which the
autarch, in freezing all progress, has ensured true as well overall for the public he masters, the Commonwealth.

19 “While all young children sometimes need to split the image of their parent into its benevolent and threatening
aspects to feel fully sheltered by the first, most cannot do it as cleverly and consciously as this girl did. Most
children cannot find their own solution to the impasse of Mother suddenly changing into “a look-alike impostor”
(Bettleheim, Uses of Enchantment).