

"Shadow of the Torturer"

The SF-Lovers list — 1 messages, 1 voices, undated

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ICL.REDFORD — undated

It's hard to know what to say about this book, except that it's definitely worth your time. It's the life story of an executioner, starting with his apprenticeship in the torturer's guild, and ending in his early manhood. Later books apparently chronicle his rise to the Autarchy, the emperorship. The second, "The Claw of the Conciliator" is already out in hardback. It is not a violent or sadistic story, nor is the protagonist particularly evil; he is just a cold, dark man doing the job for which he was trained. He tells the story in such an even philosophic tone that you have to shake yourself to get out of it. Example:

The knife had somehow fallen from the dead man's neck. Perhaps he had pulled it out in his agony. When I bent to pick it up, I discovered that the coin was still in my hand and thrust it into my pocket.

We believe that we invent symbols. The truth is that they invent us; we are their creatures, shaped by their hard, defining edges. When soldiers take their oath they are given a coin, an asimi stamped with the profile of the Autarch. Their acceptance of that coin is their acceptance of the special duties and burdens of military life - they are soldiers from that moment, though they may know nothing of the management of arms. I did not know that then, but it is a profound mistake to believe that we must know of such things to be influenced by them, and in fact to believe so is to believe in the most debased and superstitious kind of magic. The would-be sorcerer alone has faith in the efficacy of pure knowledge; rational people know that things act of themselves or not at all.

Gene Wolfe is the author.