

Dorcas' death in childbirth

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 04 Oct 1999

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Jonathan Laidlow — 04 Oct 1999, 11:36

Hello folks,

I'm only barely keeping up with Urth at the moment - welcome to all the new posters. I'm very pleased to see that all discussion of Short Sun is being kept on the Whorl list - copies have yet to filter into the UK as far as I can tell. I'm currently rereading Long Sun in preparation.

On the Dorcas post - what a fascinating essay Roy! It deserves more study before I respond in full, but perhaps I could answer the point about Dorcas' death in childbirth.

You say that death in childbirth is a fictional device, and may just be Caron's way of avoiding the issue. Now as recently as the eighteenth century (and the nineteenth) death in childbirth was very very common. To give an eighteenth century example which I've picked up from my studies of Laurence Sterne, if a cesaerian was required then the mother would die. There was no recorded example of a mother surviving such an operation. Many more children would die during childhood, hence the need for large families to help in the family employment, whatever that might be.

Now Urth does have hi-tech resources, but they are not available to everyone, and I doubt very much that they were available to Dorcas and Caron. I presume that medical knowledge for the masses was at best at a pre-20th century level, and thus if Dorcas did indeed have a difficult pregnancy, then she would likely not have survived.

A similar point about her age - before the twentieth century daughters would often be married away straight after adolescence. This was obviously much more common for poor families than for rich. Even in fiction (and I'm thinking of that whole genre of novels where a poor girl marries 'upwards' in society - Samuel Richardson's 'Pamela' is perhaps the best C18 example) the girls are usually very young. They would have been indentured as servants as soon as possible, so that their poor family did not have to support them any longer.

Jonathan

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