

# The cenoby files

The Urth list — 12 messages, 5 voices, 23 Sep 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3460>

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Roy C. Lackey — 23 Sep 2002, 21:57

Having just completed a slow rereading of the LS series, there are some puzzles I can't seem to work out. Those bored with nitty-gritty plot details may want to skip it.

This puzzle is bound up, primarily, in two scenes and two associated objects. The scenes are Marble's two trips to the attic of the cenoby in CALDE. She went up there to get to the roof to get a better view of the Trivigaunti airship. One of the two objects is a painting on the wall of the second-floor hallway of the cenoby, the other is a trunk in the attic. It's hard, sometimes, to sort out the pronouns used by Marble after she assimilated some of Rose's personality, to know which of herself is meant; sometimes she switches viewpoints in the same sentence. But both trips to the attic came after Rose's death. In order to make as much sense of this as I can, I must first establish some background for both Marble and Rose.

Marble's earliest memory is of the first time she booted up in a huge room on Urth. She was naked and was given a maids' costume to wear. She was, in other words, literally created to be a maid. (This is in chapter seven of EXODUS, the one about the talus factory. There are some clear parallels regarding taluses and chems there with ideas Wolfe put forth in his Tolkien essay regarding individuals and their place in society, ideas that Adam Stephanides, iirc, commented on earlier this year, but I don't want to get into that here. But I will note that when Marble got "new clothes", as she puts it, after becoming a sibyl, she had to put aside the clothes she was created to wear. With her new clothes she assumed a new place in society her creators had not intended for her. Make of that what you will.) Marble had been the sibyls' maid when "the first bios moved into the city". (231) She was just a maid for two and a half centuries.

Marble told Silk that the oldest of the children she had first taught "must be sixty, or about that. I was--didn't teach until then." (LS1, 3) She was what? What she was going to say, I believe, was that she had been just the sibyls' maid up until then. This is confirmed in LS4, when she told Quetzal why she wanted to be released from her vow. (231-32) She then taught only the youngest of the children, teaching them "their sums and letters". So, Marble had been a sibyl for only fifty-odd years.

Now to Rose. She was 40 when she gave birth to Blood. Blood told Silk that he was 49, but Silk intuited that he was lying, that he was at least five years older--call it 54. That makes Rose about 94 when she died. Rose is a bitter, old bitch whom no one likes. She has nothing but contempt for Marble, as shown by her persistent refusal to use the customary honorific "Maytera" when speaking to others of her: "Marble's still fooling around in the kitchen. The littlest thing takes that girl forever." (LS1, 8) Note the "that girl", even though Marble is more than three times as old as Rose. To Rose, Marble is "that girl" because Rose remembers her when she still had her girlish face and synthetic-bio covering.

When Marble first went up to the attic, she searched her memory for how long it had been since she had last done that; 184 years before. (LS3, 5) She had been a "graceful girl" then; in fact, she had been a "graceful girl" for 120 years by then, because the \_Whorl\_ has been gone from

Urth for 300 years.

About that painting. On her second trip to the attic (LS3, 8) she was thinking about the painting on the wall of the second-floor hallway of the cenoby, the one of Molpe blessing an old woman and some doves. She says she had lied when she told a postulant once that she had posed as Molpe, "almost the only lie she had ever told". Yet she seems to have a memory of having posed for that painting. At any rate, she goes on to think she "could not have been a sibyl then, only the sibyls' maid". In other words, she was still just the maid at the time that picture was painted.

Marble did not pose for it; that was a lie, as she confessed. She told the lie because she wanted, as an old woman will who was once beautiful, the young postulant to understand that she had once been young, too; that somewhere inside she was still "that girl". Wolfe is particularly tricky about that painting, mingling memories and misdirecting the reader. The memory of having posed comes from Rose, evidently, despite the comments about chems making better models. Here is the relevant passage:

"She [Marble] could not have been a sibyl then, only the sibyls' maid; but the artist had been a relative of the Senior Sibyl's, who had agreed to let her [Rose] pose. Chems could hold a pose much longer than bios. All artists, he had said, used chems when they could, although he had used his mother for the old woman because chems never looked old. . . .

"She smiled at that, tilting her head far back and to the right. The hinges, then the other track. "He had given them the picture when it was done."

That picture, then, was painted more than fifty years ago, when Marble still had her girlish looks and Rose was a relatively young, attractive, slender sibyl. Marble's lie eventually became the truth. A single word in the following quote is all that gives me any reason to doubt this explication of that picture: "A chubby postulant whose name she could not recall had admired it; and she, thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble, flattered, had said that she had posed for Molpe." How and why should Marble have felt "flattered" if it was a lie? If it wasn't a lie, why would she repeatedly confess it to Betel at each shriving, such false confessions themselves constituting more lies? Remember, that lie was told many years before Marble acquired some of Rose's parts and personality.

Fifty-odd years ago, Rose was close to forty. Both Marble and Rose have independent memories of Maytera Betel when each was a sibyl; Marble of confessing over and over to her for the lie about posing for the painting, Rose of Betel's help with her pregnancy. When Marble told that lie she was, by her own account, "thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble". So, since Rose remembers Marble when she was "that girl", either Marble suffered a rather precipitous breakdown of her girlish facade, or she was made to give it up, possibly as a condition of teaching. It wouldn't do to have a teacher who looked like a girl herself.

Silk also saw that painting when he went into the cenoby to fetch Marble another habit. He noted that the Molpe painting was one of "three faded pictures" . (LS3, 4) Would a painting have faded noticeably in Rose's lifetime? Or is the fading more consistent with a period of 184 years?

Now that trunk. On that first trip to the attic Marble also noticed an old, rusted, tin trunk. She tried to recall who had owned it, "eventually running down the whole list--every sibyl who had ever lived in the cenoby--without finding a single tin trunk among the associated facts". When a sibyl died, what few personal possessions she had were either shared among the other sibyls or returned to her family. The fact that she knew the names--had a list in a memory file--of "every sibyl who had ever lived in the cenoby" is because Marble had spent her entire career aboard the \_Whorl\_ at the Sun Street Manteion. Remember, it has been 184 years since she last

opened that attic door, and the tool to hook the door with has been lost for "more than a century". She goes on to think: "She hadn't been up there, no one had--" There is no way, then, for that trunk to have belonged to Rose, but there is more misdirection, by Wolfe, about this trunk.

On her second trip to the attic Marble again noted the trunk, only this time matter-of-factly thinking "and here was her old trunk". Then she searches her files again for the word "trunk", only to come up with the same useless list of names. Then she changes the search word to "footlocker" and, bingo, "Here was a list of the dresses she had worn before they had voted to admit her. Her perfume. The commonplace book that she had kept for the mere pleasure of writing in it, of practicing her hand." The trunk had been Marble's, the perfume and dresses in it those she had worn before becoming a sibyl; sibyls have no use for such feminine things. Marble reinforces the idea that the trunk is hers when she mentions to Quetzal that, before she started teaching, she kept a sort of diary "to practice my hand". The problem is, \_that trunk had been in the attic for at least 184 years\_! Its contents had never been dispersed because Marble was still alive.

Now, either Wolfe screwed up here (and went out of his way to do it!), or that "fifty-odd years" figure mentioned earlier must be re-examined. Note the vote "to admit her" in the above quote. If it is true that Marble hadn't been in that attic for 184 years, and if the contents of the trunk were hers, then what was the vote intended to admit her to? Not to be a teacher or a sibyl; she was drafted to be the former and more or less forced to become the latter and, in any event, she didn't become a teacher until fifty-odd years ago.

What is going on here? Who posed for the painting, when? Whose trunk was it, and when was it put in the attic?

-Roy

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 24 Sep 2002, 01:09 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote about the painting and the trunk. I'll address the trunk part.

When Marble first went up to the attic, she searched her memory for how long it had been since she had last done that; 184 years before. (LS3, 5) She had been a "graceful girl" then; in fact, she had been a "graceful girl" for 120 years by then, because the \_Whorl\_ has been gone from Urth for 300 years.

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contents had never been dispersed because Marble was still alive.

Let's stop there.

Fact: Marble hasn't been there in 184 years.

Fact: Marble supposes that nobody had been up there for a century.

The crux of your point seems to be that Marble implies or believes that she saw the trunk there on her last visit, 184 years earlier (a paradox), but as I read over the text in the book it seems to me that Marble does =not= say that she saw the trunk there on her last visit (184 years earlier).

Thus, it resolves: the last time she went up into the attic she was a maid, then she put away her maid gear and became a sibyl, at which point =someone else= put her footlocker up in the attic, and now she enters the attic to see an unfamiliar trunk which is her forgotten old life. Her supposition about the amount of time since anybody else had been up there is simply wrong.

Or am I once again missing something?

=mantis=

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William Ansley — 24 Sep 2002, 03:17 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

At 4:57 PM -0500 9/23/02, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

She has nothing but contempt for

Marble, as shown by her persistent refusal to use the customary honorific "Maytera" when speaking to others of her: "Marble's still fooling around in the kitchen. The littlest thing takes that girl forever." (LS1, 8) Note the "that girl", even though Marble is more than three times as old as Rose. To Rose, Marble is "that girl" because Rose remembers her when she still had her girlish face and synthetic-bio covering.

Roy,

I'm glad to hear you say that "there are some puzzles I can't seem to work out" regarding BotLS. I couldn't work out practically all of them.

I haven't read the books in quite some time. I remember the puzzle of the picture, but had totally forgotten about the puzzle of the trunk, if I even realized it was a puzzle back then.

I'm not going to shed any light on your puzzles, but I did have a different interpretation of the passage you quote above. I took it to mean that Marble was still a maid when Rose first knew her and she still thought of her as one. While I admit that I am basing this on historical novels, movies and television, it seems to me that a female servant may have been called "girl" long after she too old to really be one, especially if she was a member of a class or especially a minority group that her "masters" felt was inferior to themselves. It seems to me that an aristocratic young English woman might have called an older female servant girl and certainly an aristocratic young woman of the antebellum American South would have done so with an older female colored (as she would have said) servant. To me, Rose's remark about Marble is exactly the kind of thing a woman might say about a kitchen maid that she didn't much care for.

This is not to say that Marble didn't also retain her girlish appearance when Rose first knew her, but I don't think it is necessarily the case that she did.

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Roy C. Lackey — 24 Sep 2002, 04:16 · follows William Ansley

mantis wrote:  
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No, no. Your reading of the text is correct; she did not see the trunk on a visit 184 years ago. As I said in the second paragraph: "But both trips to the attic came after Rose's death."

Thus, it resolves: the last time she went up into the attic she was a maid, then she put away her maid gear and became a sibyl, at which point =someone else= put her footlocker up in the attic, and now she enters the attic to see an unfamiliar trunk which is her forgotten old life. Her supposition about the amount of time since anybody else had been up there is simply wrong.

Or am I once again missing something?

She may have been wrong, on the first of those two trips to the attic, about it being 184 years ago when, still a graceful girl, she had last pulled down those attic steps--I have no way of knowing. She may be wrong, too, about no one else having been up there in over a century (the amount of time the door-hooking tool had been lost)--again, I have no way of knowing. But was she also wrong about having been a teacher and sibyl for only fifty-odd years? She said she started teaching when Pike was a young augur. If she was right about teaching only for the last fifty-odd years, then that trunk can't hold her old maid gear; not if no one has opened that attic door for more than a century. That's why I'm puzzled.

-Roy

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 24 Sep 2002, 14:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:  
No, no. Your reading of the text is correct; she did not see the trunk on a visit 184 years ago. As I said in the second paragraph: "But both trips to the attic came after Rose's death."

It might just be me, but I find myself confused to distraction by your use of number of trips in this case. (Not that it is your fault, just that it is all confusing.) I mean, we are really talking about three trips: the "last one" 184 years ago (year 148) and two trips on a day in year 332. If you are saying that the two trips in 332 happened after Rose's death, I agree with you, but I don't understand why you are bringing it up.

Thus, it resolves: the last time she went up into the attic she was a maid, then she put away her maid gear and became a sibyl, at which point =someone else= put her footlocker up in the attic, and now she enters the attic to see an unfamiliar trunk which is her forgotten old life. Her supposition about the amount of time since anybody else had been up there is simply wrong.

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If I understand it correctly, all Marble has to be wrong about is her guess that it has been a century or more since someone went up there. The trunk is there, ergo someone was up there fifty years ago to drop off a trunk (not to clean the attic, mind you, just drop off a trunk: so the trunk itself has only 50 years of dust upon it while the attic has nearly the amount of two centuries!).

=mantis=

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Charles Reed — 24 Sep 2002, 16:49 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

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Roy,

There's a very short quote in ON BLUE'S WATERS that mentions the painting, and I thought you might like to consider it. The scene is not too long after Krait has saved Horn from the pit. They have gone back to the sloop and Krait has offered to help Horn find Seawrack, and while they are sailing out of the little bay in which the sloop was moored, Horn begins addressing the extra powers of sight that he has acquired -- how he sees everything as if it (and he) were in a painting. This reminds him of the paintings in the cenoby, and he writes, "You [Nettle] told me about the beautiful pictures upstairs in the cenoby and I put them in our book because Maytera Marble had posed for Molpe." (Tor hardback page 228)

From this unambiguous statement, it is clear that Marble (not Rose) posed for the painting. The resolution of the puzzle is to realize that it wasn't

\*really\* Marble posing for the painting but Magnesia, her former and discarded personality. When maid-of-all-work Magnesia became Maytera Marble, she put away her old life entirely. Thus, when she said that she had posed for the painting, that was a slip-up. Magnesia, not Marble, had posed for that painting. Thus, to maintain the lie that she was Maytera Marble, she had to "confess" the lie she told about the painting. Marble felt "flattered" by the postulant's admiration because she was the one who actually posed.

I think this might also explain why Marble keeps repeatedly confessing this "lie" to Maytera Betel. I don't recall if this is directly addressed in the text, but if Magnesia's reason for becoming Maytera Marble is because she was in some kind of trouble and needed to hide, then I think you are correct in your guess that it was upon becoming a maytera that Magnesia got rid of her human-looking face. If that is the case -- that Magnesia was hiding from something and that Betel was instrumental in keeping her hid -- then Betel would have gone to great lengths to ensure that Magnesia stayed hidden, since Betel was an "accomplice" as it were. And if Betel found out that Marble had admitted to a postulant that she had posed as Molpe in the painting,

Betel might very well have been distraught at Marble's clumsiness, and to make sure Marble didn't suffer any more bouts of clumsiness, she kept reminding her of her slip-up, forcing Marble to confess again and again so that the point would be hammered home that she could not afford any more such mistakes.

If all of this is true, it's even more interesting to think of Betel's efforts to conceal Patera Pike's child from him, isn't it? It makes Betel a very interesting off-stage character, and not an entirely likeable one. It seems that both Rose and Marble were "hidden" in some sense by Betel, and that she went to great lengths -- even cruel lengths -- to make sure her secretes stayed secret. It also raises the question of whether Magnesia was hidden because she knew of Rose's pregnancy. I can't think of a reason why this would necessitate her going into hiding, though, so that might not be a very good guess.

## Charles

"Roy C. Lackey" wrote:

About that painting. On her second trip to the attic (LS3, 8) she was thinking about the painting on the wall of the second-floor hallway of the cenoby, the one of Molpe blessing an old woman and some doves. She says she had lied when she told a postulant once that she had posed as Molpe, "almost the only lie she had ever told". Yet she seems to have a memory of having posed for that painting. At any rate, she goes on to think she "could not have been a sibyl then, only the sibyls' maid". In other words, she was still just the maid at the time that picture was painted.

Marble did not pose for it; that was a lie, as she confessed. She told the lie because she wanted, as an old woman will who was once beautiful, the young postulant to understand that she had once been young, too; that somewhere inside she was still "that girl". Wolfe is particularly tricky about that painting, mingling memories and misdirecting the reader. The memory of having posed comes from Rose, evidently, despite the comments about chems making better models. Here is the relevant passage:

"She [Marble] could not have been a sibyl then, only the sibyls' maid; but the artist had been a relative of the Senior Sibyl's, who had agreed to let her [Rose] pose. Chems could hold a pose much longer than bios. All artists, he had said, used chems when they could, although he had used his mother for the old woman because chems never looked old. . . .

"She smiled at that, tilting her head far back and to the right. The hinges, then the other track.

"He had given them the picture when it was done."

That picture, then, was painted more than fifty years ago, when Marble still had her girlish looks and Rose was a relatively young, attractive, slender sibyl. Marble's lie eventually became the truth. A single word in the following quote is all that gives me any reason to doubt this explication of that picture: "A chubby postulant whose name she could not recall had admired it; and she, thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble, flattered, had said that she had posed for Molpe." How and why should Marble have felt "flattered" if it was a lie? If it wasn't a lie, why would she repeatedly confess it to Betel at each shriving, such false confessions themselves constituting more lies? Remember, that lie was told many years before Marble acquired some of Rose's parts and personality.

Fifty-odd years ago, Rose was close to forty. Both Marble and Rose have independent memories of Maytera Betel when each was a sibyl; Marble of confessing over and over to her for the lie about posing for the painting,

Rose of Betel's help with her pregnancy. When Marble told that lie she was, by her own account, "thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble". So, since Rose remembers Marble when she was "that girl", either Marble suffered a rather precipitous breakdown of her girlish facade, or she was made to give it up, possibly as a condition of teaching. It wouldn't do to have a teacher who looked like a girl herself.

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mantis writes:

It might just be me, but I find myself confused to distraction by your use of number of trips in this case. (Not that it is your fault, just that it is all confusing.) I mean, we are really talking about three trips: the "last one" 184 years ago (year 148) and two trips on a day in year 332. If you are saying that the two trips in 332 happened after Rose's death, I agree with you, but I don't understand why you are bringing it up.

Sorry to be confusing. I brought it up because that's the way the text has it. Marble made the second trip (on the same day as the first, iirc) for two reasons; to lubricate the attic entrance to facilitate any future entry, and to gain access to the roof to get a better look at the airship. The day Rose died, Marble's CPU was overheating badly and she was having trouble climbing stairs. She is thrilled with the new-found zest she acquired when she took Rose's used parts. After she got the sticking attic steps down she thought:

"I'll oil this, she resolved. I don't care if there isn't any oil. I'll cut up some fat from that bull and boil it, and skim off the grease and strain it, and use that. Because this isn't the last time. It is not.

"She trotted up the folding steps in an energetic flurry of black bombazine.

"Just look how good my leg is! Praise to you, Great Pas!"

She left the attic stairs down so she could lubricate them later. Later, after lubricating the mechanism, she made her second trip to the attic, and it was then that she changed the search word from trunk to footlocker. The 184 years ago bit is on the page prior to the above quote.

"Maytera Marble tried to decide how long it had been since she had done this, entering \_roof\_, and when that evoked only a flood of dripping ceilings and soaked carpets, \_attic\_.

"A hundred and eighty-four years ago.

"She could scarcely believe it--did not wish to believe it. A graceful girl with laughing eyes and industrious hands had climbed this same stair, as she still did a score of times every day, walked along this hall, and halted beneath this odd-looking door overhead, reaching up with a tool that had been lost now for more than a century."

She may have been wrong, on the first of those two trips to the attic, about it being 184 years ago when, still a graceful girl, she had last pulled down those attic steps--I have no way of knowing. She may be wrong, too, about no one else having been up there in over a century (the amount of time the door-hooking tool had been lost)--again, I have no way of knowing. But was she also wrong about having been a teacher and sibyl for only fifty-odd years? She said she started teaching when Pike was a young augur. If she was right about teaching only for the last fifty-odd years, then that trunk can't hold her old maid gear; not if no one has opened that attic door for more than a century. That's why I'm puzzled.

If I understand it correctly, all Marble has to be wrong about is her guess that it has been a century or more since someone went up there. The trunk is there, ergo someone was up there fifty years ago to drop off a trunk (not to clean the attic, mind you, just drop off a trunk: so the trunk itself has only 50 years of dust upon it while the attic has nearly the amount of two centuries!).

When Marble was pressed into teaching only two sibyls were then living, fat Betel and fortyish Rose. Bio sibyls don't perform manual labor; there's no way either of those women carried a trunk up to the attic for a chem maid, and Pike couldn't enter the cenoby. Marble put that trunk up there.

As for the 184 vs. 50 year spans, I can't explain it. But Marble is a machine; her memory consists of computer files. Those files might get overwritten or she might lose access to them, but the information in her files (like the list of sibyls and the list of dresses) either exists or it doesn't. If the file(s) containing her memory of 184 years ago contains erroneous data, \_how did it get there\_?

-Roy

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Charles Reed — 24 Sep 2002, 17:20 · follows Roy C. Lackey

"Roy C. Lackey" wrote:

When Marble was pressed into teaching only two sibyls were then living, fat Betel and fortyish Rose. Bio sibyls don't perform manual labor; there's no way either of those women carried a trunk up to the attic for a chem maid, and Pike couldn't enter the cenoby. Marble put that trunk up there.

Not necessarily. Based on the theory that I put forth in my last post, Betel was involved in "hiding" maid-of-all-work Magnesia as Maytera Marble. In such circumstances, I can easily see how Betel "took care of" Magnesia's old things. Either Betel climbed into the attic to hide the trunk or she had someone else do it -- presumably Rose.

To me, the only thing that's still unresolved about the whole issue is this: If Magnesia used to go up and down the attic steps several times a day during her cleaning duties, and she stopped doing that 184 years ago, and she didn't become Maytera Marble until some 50-odd years ago (call it 54 years ago), what was she doing during the intervening 130 years?

Charles

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James Wynn — 24 Sep 2002, 18:07 · follows Charles Reed

It's too complex to explain here, but for now I'll give the answer and toss out a few of the dots for you to connect.

Marble lied about posing for the picture. It was Molybdenum who posed for it. Marble lied about posing, ostensibly (the sheerest of facades) to protect Betel. She, of course told Betel during shriving that she did it to hide the fact that Molydenum had been dismantled and her parts given to Betel. If Marble was at the cenoby at the time, she was already too worn out for her parts to be appealing

The description of Marble becoming a teacher is pried with the story of Moly agreeing to sacrifice herself for Betel. It is told in the presence of Hammerstone and Marble pries the story to fool him and Silk simultaneously. Silk sees the story doesn't add up as he always does eventually. Notice how carefully she selects her words at the end of LS4, 11: "...and so Maytera called - called upon..." Hammerstone explained, 'She drafted Moly'. 'Upon me...I put my hand on the Writings and promised, and Maytera and Maytera Rose witnessed it and kissed me, and--and I got new clothes."

Extracted like this it is obvious that she finds it difficult to call Betel by name. Moly's identity is greatly merged with Betel's.

But Marble continued to vindictively bring up her lie during shriving before Betel - reminding Betel that there used to be a pretty maid at the cenoby. Later, Rose inherited the parts from Betel - and she treated Marble with contempt to "de-humanize" her, because otherwise it she would be a party to murder. Finally the parts came to Marble. Marble's reference to the ivory (animal) beads on a silver (metal) chain she inherited from Betel (LS4, 11) was a hint that she had inherited much more from her.

The chems had no need to enter the attic very often since it seems to have only been used to store the unwanted belongings of deceased sibyls. Perhaps chem maids weren't ordinarily admitted there for that reason. The attic also kept the belongings of poor Moly. The trunk belonged to Moly. She didn't recognize it because it had rusted in the attic after all those years. But Marble/Moly is certain that it NEVER belonged to any sibyl at the cenoby, because it had belonged to a maid there. Marble's opening of the trunk is not recorded but she certainly did. And she read the diary and re-familiarized herself with her "former" life.

Still a mystery to me is whether Betel had the parts only for a short while before dying and so the parts did not have time to absorb Betel's personality before she died, OR was the crotchety bitter crone that Rose became, her inheritance from Betel? Do Betel's memories surface in Marble as do Rose's and Moly's?

Whatever, Marble contained within herself Magnesia, Rose, and Molydenum and her memories after Rose's death are a mixture of those.

Crush

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Roy C. Lackey — 24 Sep 2002, 19:36 · follows James Wynn

Charles Reed writes:

[snip]

painting. This reminds him of the paintings in the cenoby, and he writes,

"You

[Nettle] told me about the beautiful pictures upstairs in the cenoby and I

put  
them in our book because Maytera Marble had posed for Molpe." (Tor  
hardback  
page 228)

From this unambiguous statement, it is clear that Marble (not Rose) posed  
for  
the painting. The resolution of the puzzle is to realize that it wasn't  
\*really\* Marble posing for the painting but Magnesia, her former and  
discarded  
personality. When maid-of-all-work Magnesia became Maytera Marble, she put  
away  
her old life entirely. Thus, when she said that she had posed for the  
painting,  
that was a slip-up. Magnesia, not Marble, had posed for that painting.

Thus,

to maintain the lie that she was Maytera Marble, she had to "confess" the  
lie  
she told about the painting. Marble felt "flattered" by the postulant's  
admiration because she was the one who actually posed.

I don't know that the statement in OBW can be construed as "unambiguous"--Horn and Nettle  
were the source for both sets of data, after all. That sort of technical hairsplitting--which name  
she was using at the time of the lie--might impress a lawyer, but are the gods from whom she  
seeks absolution really that easily fooled? Marble knew perfectly well that her original name  
had been Magnesia, as did Betel and Rose. If it was when she still called herself Magnesia that  
she posed for the painting, then she didn't lie to the postulant, regardless of what the postulant  
thought about it. At the worst it was a misapprehension, not a lie.

I think this might also explain why Marble keeps repeatedly confessing this  
"lie" to Maytera Betel. I don't recall if this is directly addressed in  
the  
text, but if Magnesia's reason for becoming Maytera Marble is because she  
was in  
some kind of trouble and needed to hide,

Magnesia wasn't trying to hide; she became a sibyl because parents were complaining that  
their children were now being taught by a laywoman. All women take a new name when they  
become sibyls.

then I think you are correct in your  
guess that it was upon becoming a maytera that Magnesia got rid of her  
human-looking face. If that is the case -- that Magnesia was hiding from  
something and that Betel was instrumental in keeping her hid -- then Betel  
would  
have gone to great lengths to ensure that Magnesia stayed hidden, since  
Betel  
was an "accomplice" as it were. And if Betel found out that Marble had  
admitted  
to a postulant that she had posed as Molpe in the painting, Betel might  
very  
well have been distraught at Marble's clumsiness, and to make sure Marble  
didn't  
suffer any more bouts of clumsiness, she kept reminding her of her slip-up,  
forcing Marble to confess again and again so that the point would be  
hammered  
home that she could not afford any more such mistakes.

If all of this is true, it's even more interesting to think of Betel's efforts to conceal Patera Pike's child from him, isn't it? It makes Betel a very interesting off-stage character, and not an entirely likeable one. It seems that both Rose and Marble were "hidden" in some sense by Betel, and that she went to great lengths -- even cruel lengths -- to make sure her secretes stayed secret. It also raises the question of whether Magnesia was hidden because she knew of Rose's pregnancy. I can't think of a reason why this would necessitate her going into hiding, though, so that might not be a very good guess.

I don't see how Magnesia could have failed to know of Rose's pregnancy; not even a chem could have been that ignorant of human physiology. Magnesia would have seen pregnant mothers all the time at the school. In any event, she was at the cenoby both before and after Rose's pregnancy.

-Roy

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Charles Reed — 25 Sep 2002, 19:52 · follows Roy C. Lackey

"Roy C. Lackey" wrote:  
Charles Reed writes:

[snip]

This reminds him of the paintings in the cenoby, and he writes, "You [Nettle] told me about the beautiful pictures upstairs in the cenoby and I put them in our book because Maytera Marble had posed for Molpe." (Tor hardback page 228)

From this unambiguous statement, it is clear that Marble (not Rose) posed for the painting.

I don't know that the statement in OBW can be construed as "unambiguous"--Horn and Nettle were the source for both sets of data, after all.

Personally, I think that's as unambiguous as Gene Wolfe gets. It seems like there are at least a few instances where some issue that has been confusing in a previous book gets a clear-cut statement of fact in a follow-up book, especially issues that GW didn't intend to be ambiguous. So, for my two cents, if Horn states flat-out that Marble posed for that painting, then I tend to accept such a statement at face value.

...Magnesia wasn't trying to hide; she became a sibyl because parents were complaining that their children were now being taught by a laywoman. \_All\_ women take a new name when they become sibyls.

I stand corrected. Sometimes I get a germ of an idea and then get carried away with it. I've looked through my books and can find no evidence that Magnesia became Maytera Marble in order to "hide" from something. And since that appears to be the case, then my previous explanation of Marble's reasons for confessing this lie makes no sense. Please pardon my over-enthusiastic theorizing. :-)

I don't see how Magnesia could have failed to know of Rose's pregnancy; not even a chem could have been that ignorant of human physiology. Magnesia

would have seen pregnant mothers all the time at the school. In any event, she was at the cenoby both before and after Rose's pregnancy.

Not that it's really relevant (since my "theory" was justifiably shot down), but Patera Pike was kept in the dark about Rose's pregnancy, so it's at least conceivable that Magnesia/Marble could also have been kept in the dark about it. I don't recall that bit about Magnesia being pressed into service because the parents were upset at having their kids taught by a laywoman, however. Do you recall where that is?

At the very least, however, Rose's pregnancy and Magnesia's transformation into Maytera Marble seem to be related, if only because they happened around the same time (50+ years ago). And it's not unreasonable to assume that they are directly related: Rose, being pregnant and needing to hide that fact from Patera Pike would not be able to do a whole lot of teaching, which would give rise to the need for a substitute. Magnesia knew how to write, how to calculate, and was already employed at the manteion, so she was a reasonable and cost-effective solution.

#### NOW TO THE GOOD STUFF:

I think I've finally worked out the solution of the painting, but it's rather convoluted. Maybe this theory will be shot down as well, but I actually think this one hangs together. Please read the whole sequence before you pronounce it horse-hockey:

1. While still the sibyls' maid, MAGNESIA posed for the painting.
2. Perhaps ROSE is alive at the time the picture is painted, but perhaps not -- it doesn't really matter. What does matter is that at some point MAGNESIA/MARBLE tells ROSE that she had posed for the painting.
3. One day a chubby postulant was standing with MAYTERA ROSE, admiring the painting, when Rose claims that she had been the one to pose as Molpe. There might be several reasons for this lie, one of which I'll put forward momentarily. Whatever the reason, she lied and claimed that she was the one who had posed. The postulant was absolutely incredulous -- even openly shocked at what she was hearing -- either because she couldn't see any resemblance between Rose and the beautiful girl in the picture, or because she already knew who the real model had been. My personal opinion about why ROSE lied is that when this lie was told, MARBLE was at least within earshot and might have been standing right next to ROSE and her postulant, and that ROSE told the lie knowing that MARBLE would overhear it. (Now that's pretty damn cold.)
4. Even if not very likeable as a person, Rose is a very devout woman. She feels terrible about the cruelty of this particular lie and confesses it to Maytera Betel at every shriving.
5. Rose dies and some of her parts get incorporated into MAYTERA MARBLE.
6. When going up to the attic one day to get a better look at the airship, MAYTERA MARBLE notices the painting and some very bizarre memories are evoked. She remembers (as MAGNESIA) posing for the painting while still a maid. She also remembers (as ROSE) having lied to a postulant about posing for the painting, as well as ROSE'S subsequent confessions. But her identity is so confused -- especially so soon after incorporating her new parts and new memories -- that she begins mixing things together. That's how we get a sentence like this: "A chubby postulant whose name she could not recall had admired it; and she, thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble, flattered, had said that she had posed for Molpe." She recalls ROSE'S memories of having lied and

\*also\* recalls MARBLE'S feelings at the time -- first the feeling of being flattered by the postulant's praise and then the feelings (created by the lie) of being thin, faceless, and old.

What do you think?

Charles

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Roy C. Lackey — 26 Sep 2002, 23:14 · follows Charles Reed

Charles Reed wrote:

I don't recall that bit about Magnesia being pressed into service because the parents were upset at having their kids taught by a laywoman, however.

Do

you recall where that is?

EXODUS, 232

At the very least, however, Rose's pregnancy and Magnesia's transformation into Maytera Marble seem to be related, if only because they happened around the same time (50+ years ago). And it's not unreasonable to assume that they are directly related: Rose, being pregnant and needing to hide that fact from Patera Pike would not be able to do a whole lot of teaching, which would give rise to the need for a substitute. Magnesia knew how to write, how to calculate, and was already employed at the manteion, so she was a reasonable and cost-effective solution.

The only clue I'm aware of that may pertain is a left-handed one, and may just be a minor mistake by Wolfe. It's in chapter 4 of CALDE, where Rose-in-Marble is telling Silk about her pregnancy.

"We [Betel and Rose] pretended I was becoming fat, too. She used to tease me about it, and our sibs believed her."

It's the word "sibs". When Marble became a teacher, the only living sibyls were Betel and Rose, neither of whom can be one of the sibs in the quote, obviously. Then Marble became a sibyl. That's still just one sib to fool. So, either at least two sibyls died in a relatively short time span--while Rose was demonstrably pregnant--or the cenoby acquired at least one new sibyl not too long after Marble became one. The latter choice is the more probable, and we know that the cenoby did in fact have at least one more sibyl after Marble--Mockorange, who was Mint's preceptress.

NOW TO THE GOOD STUFF:

[snip of theory]

What do you think?

Well, I can't tell you that you're wrong, but it requires a bit of supposing. It would be difficult to prove from the text--but then, so do a lot of other theories around here. If Wolfe hadn't included that part about "she, thin, faceless, old Maytera Marble" in that sentence, it would be a lot easier to believe that it was actually Rose who had lied to the postulant. That bothers me. We know that Marble lies occasionally, but I can't think of a specific incidence where Rose does so.

I don't pretend to have the answer to the painting puzzle, but it is a puzzle, and should be solvable from the text. I just don't know.

-Roy