

The Katharine maid

The Urth list — 39 messages, 11 voices, 25 Oct 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4753>

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Roy C. Lackey — 25 Oct 2006, 20:02

Most attempts to account for the unchanged appearance of the maid who played the role of Holy Katharine for as long as Severian could remember do so by supposing the use of time travel. That is certainly a possibility, but the text also affords another mechanism whereby the same effect might be accomplished -- aquastors/eidolons. We have the example of Malrubius, who died when Severian was a young boy, yet pops up several times in the story, and Severian himself, who was resurrected at least twice by the same plot device. The machinery that supports eidolons have a range of "a few thousand years".

Setting aside for the moment the question of who exactly the maid might have been, what person in their right mind who had a choice in the matter would consent to participating in such a rite for such a sorry group as the torturers? When did she begin playing the role? When Severian was a small boy? Was it the same maid when Gurloes was a boy? Did her participation end when Severian left the guild? Was she still there for the two feasts Eata must have attended before he ran away? Alas, the text doesn't say, yet it's important.

If the same maid played the role for the entire period of the autarchy, it colors the perception of her as Severian's mother. The bogus Catholic Saint Catherine was obviously the inspiration for Holy Katharine, but of what help is that? That Catherine was supposedly condemned for professing her faith in an officially despised religion.

Severian the Conciliator came to Urth when Ymar was a teen, at the very end of Typhon's rule. Ymar was present when Severian gave his little sermon about the coming of the New Sun, and eventually became the first autarch. It seems reasonable to suppose that Ymar's reign marked the beginning of the Conciliator cult as the state religion. The ruined chapel in the autarch's Citadel where the guild held its annual ceremony is evidence that the cult was once officially sanctioned. It was ruined for the same reason that everything else on Urth was in ruins; time took its toll and the New Sun had not come.

So at what point did Ymar's guild start acting out the ritual, and why? The mother of the Conciliator doesn't seem like a likely candidate for execution by the same authority that initiated the worship of the Conciliator. If you want to argue that the ritual was a holdover by the torturers from ancient days long before Typhon, why was it held in a chapel devoted to the Conciliator? If the ritual was a holdover, then what does it have to do with Severian's mother? The torturers would have, in effect, supplanted their patron saint with the mother of a god; traded a Catherine for a Mary, if you will. That doesn't make sense.

It seems incredible that the maid should have begun acting her role early in the autarchy, but if she didn't, when did she start? Who orchestrated it and why? The Yesodians were messing with Urth at least as far back as Ymar's time. Inire was their agent, the power behind the throne. The Hierodules traveled backward and forward in time. They knew who Severian's parents were.

The guild masters knew damn well who the maid was and where she came from; the ritual

could not take place without their cooperation. They knew who Severian's mother was. What was Ouen's Catherine's real crime? She gave birth to the Conciliator? That is exactly what the Hierogrammates wanted -- a New Sun to usher in Ushas. That is the reward a woman gets for giving birth to a god, getting her head cut off once a year, whether it was fake or real? Being tortured to death, sooner or later?

An eidolon maid would simplify the whole affair; just turn the sustaining machinery on and off as needed. At the conclusion of the feast the maid could dissolve into nothingness, like Malrubius on the beach. Since eidolons are always of the dead, from her point of view she has nothing to lose, and little or no time would pass between appearances. Her final payoff would be eventual release and the promise of new life at the conclusion of her service.

The external technology for the eidolons is alien, but the animating spirit comes from a living person. The eidolon of Severian created on the Ship differed from the original in that his bum leg was repaired. None but Severian knew about Triskele, so the dog's eidolon came from his mind. The dog's missing leg might as easily have been restored, but Severian remembered him as having three legs, just as the maid remained fixed in his famous memory.

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 25 Oct 2006, 20:26 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy,

An eidolon is an interesting idea, but where does the eidolon technology come from? Are you suggesting that some group of Hiero-Foos have been projecting the Katherine-maid into the Cathedral all these years? For what reason?

I offered another suggestion a few days back that meets the criteria you lay out. An artificial person, a la Jonas -- I guess we'd have to call her a chem? -- might easily enough be built with an optionally-detachable head. (Recall that Severian is sure he feels the neck sever under his blow.) Since chem-building technology was clearly around in Typhon's (and therefore Ymar's) day, this removes any necessity for alien intervention.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks

Jeff Wilson — 26 Oct 2006, 04:12 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

The external technology for the eidolons is alien, but the animating spirit comes from a living person. The eidolon of Severian created on the Ship differed from the original in that his bum leg was repaired. None but Severian knew about Triskele, so the dog's eidolon came from his mind. The dog's missing leg might as easily have been restored, but Severian remembered him as having three legs, just as the maid remained fixed in his famous memory.

Whose memory does the maid come from?

Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise eidolons?

Jeff Wilson - [jwilson at io.com](mailto:jwilson@io.com)

< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2006, 04:28 · follows Jeff Wilson

Dan'I wrote:

An eidolon is an interesting idea, but where does the eidolon technology come from?

From the Hierogrammates. It was on the Ship and it was on the smaller "craft" B F & O used to reach Apu's time and resurrect Severian in that tomb. It was on the craft used by Malrubius when he transported Severian to the ocean, so we know the machinery was around on Urth in Severian's time.

Are you suggesting that some group of Hiero-Foos have been projecting the Katherine-maid into the Cathedral all these years?

Eidolons were not mere projections. They were flesh and blood so long as the machinery used to sustain them was in operation (witness the motley bunch who fought for Severian against the sailors in the fight after the Trial). If allowed enough time, they could take on existence independent of the machinery, as was the case with Severian, twice.

For what reason?

For the same reason that *someone*, somehow, caused the maid to appear year after year, in Severian's experience unchanged.

I offered another suggestion a few days back that meets the criteria you lay out. An artificial person, a la Jonas -- I guess we'd have to call her a chem? -- might easily enough be built with an optionally-detachable head. (Recall that Severian is sure he feels the neck sever under his blow.) Since chem-building technology was clearly around in Typhon's (and therefore Ymar's) day, this removes any necessity for alien intervention.

The fact is, the Hierodules were interfering at least as far back as Ymar; after all, he went to Yesod. There is not the least hint in the Urth Cycle that chems were in existence on Urth in Typhon's time. I honestly don't think that Wolfe had thought of chems when he wrote NEW SUN. More retrofitting problems. But my main objection is thematic. There is a strong suggestion in the text that Catherine is somehow Katharine, and more than a hint that Severian's mother is somehow connected to the maid. I think that requires that she be human. When Severian was young he thought that the maid might be from the witches, but soon realized that "such disrespect would not be tolerated". Based on that, I don't think the torturers would have allowed their guild to be mocked by any sort of robot patroness that couldn't even feel pain.

As a side bonus of this eidolon business, it might also explain how Inire could be "alive so long beyond the span of his short-lived kind". A series of eidolons created as needed over the centuries would do it. His mission was over when Severian went to Yesod, and by all appearances he soon faded too, so far as I can tell, without a whimper or whisper of his passing.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2006, 04:43 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

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The dog's missing leg might as easily have been restored, but Severian remembered him as having three legs, just as the maid remained fixed in his famous memory.

Whose memory does the maid come from?

It may have come from his memory of her annual feast appearance. It may have come from one of his extra-textual time trips to the past. It may have come from some other person.

Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise eidolons?

Huh? They weren't eidolons. I don't understand.

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 26 Oct 2006, 05:13 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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The dog's missing leg might as easily have been restored, but Severian remembered him as having three legs, just as the maid remained fixed in his famous memory.

Whose memory does the maid come from?

It may have come from his memory of her annual feast appearance. It may have come from one of his extra-textual time trips to the past. It may have come from some other person.

I don't think it would be Severian's memory. Presumably, it would be someone available whenever the jailers guild was reformed into the all-male Brotherhood, long after the Conciliator had departed and Ymar had ascended.

Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise eidolons?

Huh? They weren't eidolons. I don't understand.

They seem to be menial functionaries, and they don't have saints' names, suggesting they are not like other residents of the Commonwealth.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Dan Rabin — 26 Oct 2006, 05:46 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson: Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise eidolons?

Roy Lackey: Huh? They weren't eidolons. I don't understand.

Jeff Wilson: They seem to be menial functionaries, and they don't have saints' names, suggesting they are not like other residents of the Commonwealth.

Hmm. I always assumed that these two were perfectly ordinary guild members whose names happened not to be used in these references because Severian was talking about their roles, not their identities. This would be something like referring (in contemporary America) to "Dean of Sciences" or "Attending Physician".

I also assume, though I can't put my finger on any evidence, that guild brothers in such roles are not on track to becoming masters.

It's just barely possible that there is a status of non-guild-member in service of the guild (something like a lay brother at a monastery?), but this doesn't seem likely considering that members of the Order are clearly pariahs and that the Order turns away adult applicants.

-- Dan Rabin

b sharp — 26 Oct 2006, 15:41 · follows Dan Rabin

I don't know if Roy subscribes to the theory that Urth is not Earth (though I think the spelling, the text clues and Wolfe interviews make it clear they are different). I think Urth is an earlier, darker version of Earth as Briah is an earlier, darker version of Yesod.

Earth has Jesus, a boy born in our past, raised as a carpenter, rising to become a religious leader, tortured and killed, resurrected, ascended and fated to reappear in our future as Saviour. His mother is Mary.

Urth has Severian, a boy born in our (initial reader of BotNS) present, raised as a torturer, rising to become a political leader, killed, resurrected, ascending to become the New Sun in our future but fated to reappear as Conciliator in our past. I think once the idea of using Saint Catherine, the torture victim, as a darker version of Mary, first occurred to Wolfe, the idea would be too cool to for him to dismiss. To have her played by a maid (virgin as Roy describes) is also appropriate.

Having recently learned from an interview that Wolfe relied solely on mental notes to keep his stories straight, I am prepared to accept that he has retained various minor logistic (timeline issues etc.) inconsistencies to sustain his own most personally pleasing literary ideas.

Roy writes:

The bogus Catholic Saint Catherine was obviously the inspiration for Holy Katharine.

I don't understand the use of the "bogus" adjective but I think it is more than just inspiration. I think Holy Katharine's story IS Saint Catherine's story aside from the two letter difference. Saint Catherine's execution is re-enacted faithfully by the Torturers. The wheel meant to torture her flew apart at her touch after which she was beheaded (and her body whisked away by angels, hm....). The Roman emperor who ordered her torture and execution was Maximus during the 6th Christian Persecution. <http://www.catholic-forum.com/Saints/saintc01.htm>

Since the name Maximus is actually used in the text of BotNS in regard to Holy Katharine's torture it is strong and direct evidence that this story originates from Earth rather than Urth. Other similar examples of this I can think of are Mount Nebo mentioned in the Jungle Hut, Squanto mentioned in the Wonders of Urth and Sky book and Kim Lee Soong and the quote from Alice in Wonderland from Jonas. For me the Frankenstein, Jungle Book and Theseus allusions are less compelling because there is no direct quote or name borrowing. I think using an Earth name means Wolfe is pointing to an important clue.

So, perhaps the person who initiated the Torturer's ritual only read a book inspired by an Earth Saint legend but I think the use of the Maximus name is a clue that there was direct contact. I agree with Roy (though for different reasons) that Father Inire (with Ymar) is the likely candidate for getting the torturers guild in its modern organization because there are other clues suggesting Inire has had direct contact with Earth.

In the past I viewed Father Inire (and the Cumaean) as possibly antagonistic toward the coming of the New Sun. On a recent re-reading of Urth, I noted Severian describing an embrace from Father Inire just before he left for Tzadkiel's ship, so I've softened that stance. But I still see them both as fallen angels who were failing at their task, being distracted by their vices (young women and absorbing the lives of dead); Barbatus, Famulimus and Ossipago being sent to set things right.

I rebel against the eidolon theory regarding the maid's unchanging appearance. Mainly, I think, because the eidolon concept in the first four books is used mainly for Aquastors...who are like guardian angels appearing and visible only to the person from whose mind they were created. Only in UotNS do we start seeing eidolons capable of taking on real substance and being visible to everyone.

The concept of kaibits and youth retention are introduced in the first four books so I find those explanations more appealing for the maid. She is of armiger height and it is currently under debate whether armigers were able to take advantage of the kaibit youth retention system. I'm still chewing on Jeff Wilson's theory that the maid is actually a series of kaibits from an original exultant. That might work.

Some minor quibbles with Roy who says:

The Hierodules traveled backward and forward in time. They knew who Severian's parents

were.

I think, without exception, B, F and O travel backward in time. Their memory is always only of the future. So if they knew who his parents were it was only from talking with Severian as Autarch. Of course Severian won't openly tell US who his parents are...so if they know they had to figure it out, as we did.

and

The eidolon of Severian created on the Ship differed from the original in that his bum leg was repaired.

I believe the eidolon which was created after Severian was killed by Sidero still had a bum leg. The leg wasn't made whole until Severian had been to Yesod, passed his test, got attached to his Star and was back on the Ship heading home.

-bsharp

Mark Millman — 26 Oct 2006, 16:31 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Dear Mr. Rabin,

Your suggestions are eminently plausible. I wish I could remember whether Severian tells us what happens to apprentices who aren't elevated to

journeyman; that might also be a source of people to fill the cook's and porter's roles.

Dear Mr. Wilson:

I don't think that the eidolon technology is as widespread as the deliberate creation of servants, which it seems to me you're implicitly proposing, would suggest. If I've misunderstood, and you're saying that Severian's interactions with Brother Cook and Brother Porter are so important that the men are recreated from his memory for his benefit, then I'd be very interested in your reasoning.

Or are you perhaps making a connection with the khaibits' creation, in which they'd begin as eidolons of their (living) models, achieve permanent existence by living in the world, and subsequently be exploited by the exultant women? I think we'd all assumed that khaibits are the product of a more conventional cloning technology--perhaps one related to the medical experimentation in which Baldanders is engaged at Lake Diuturna--but this would be a very interesting take on the issue.

Best,

Mark Millman

[previously in this thread:]

Jeff Wilson: Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise eidolons?

Roy Lackey: Huh? They weren't eidolons. I don't understand.

Jeff Wilson: They seem to be menial functionaries, and they don't have saints' names, suggesting they are not like other residents of the Commonwealth.

Dan Rabin: Hmm. I always assumed that these two were perfectly ordinary guild members whose names happened not to be used in these references because Severian was talking about their roles, not their identi-

ties. This would be something like referring (in contemporary America) to "Dean of Sciences" or "Attending Physician".

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It's just barely possible that there is a status of non-guild-member in service of the guild (something like a lay brother at a monastery?), but this doesn't seem likely considering that members of the Order are clearly pariahs and that the Order turns away adult applicants.

Dan Rabin — 26 Oct 2006, 17:25 · follows Mark Millman

Roy Lackey: >The bogus Catholic Saint Catherine was obviously the inspiration for Holy
>Katharine.

b sharp: I don't understand the use of the "bogus" adjective but I think it is more than just inspiration.

Roy's use of "bogus" may simply have been referring to doubts about the historical existence of Catherine of Alexandria.

-- Dan Rabin

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 26 Oct 2006, 17:44 · in reply to b sharp

On Thu, 26 Oct 2006 11:41:41 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> said:

Of course Severian won't openly tell US who his parents are...so if they know they had to figure it out, as we did.

Actually, Severian names Catherine as his mother in Chapter XLIV of URTH:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin. (As Autarch, not only could he disband the torturers' guild, but also confiscate their records, thereby confirming the above.)

As for the woman portraying St. Katharine being a khaibit, a chem, or an eidolon, while interesting to speculate about, can't say I favor any of these approaches. One of novel's central conceits seems to be that Severian meets *all* of his family at some time or another, with us as readers to determine who is actually kin and how each potential family member is related to

Severian. (I'm hoping if the wiki-project is launched it will include drawn renditions of the various proposed family trees.) To therefore accept that Severian meets the literal embodiments of, say, his father, his paternal grandparents, and his sister (whoever she may be), but only the spurious equivalent of his mother strikes me as cheating and untidy, and not true to Wolfe's overall gameplan.

My 2 chrisos worth, if perhaps counterfit.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - The way an email service should be

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 26 Oct 2006, 18:00 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 10/25/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:
There is not the least hint in the Urth Cycle
that chems were in existence on Urth in Typhon's time.

Jonas. The word "chem" is not used, but an artificial person of electromechanical nature.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>

<http://www.danehyoakes.com>

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2006, 19:24 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Roy Lackey: >The bogus Catholic Saint Catherine was obviously the
inspiration for Holy
>Katharine.

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than just inspiration.

Roy's use of "bogus" may simply have been referring to doubts about
the historical existence of Catherine of Alexandria.

-- Dan Rabin

Correct. The saint never existed and was removed from the canon in 1969.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2006, 19:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted and wrote:

On Thu, 26 Oct 2006 11:41:41 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com>
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This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin.

Ah, yes, so it does. It also contradicts the passage I quoted earlier:

"[. . .] a breast running with warm milk. It was my mother's breast then, and I could hardly contain my elation (which might have wiped the memory away) at having reached back at last to her, after so many fruitless attempts. My arms sought to clasp her, and I would, if only I could, have lifted my eyes to look into her face. My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts. The grayness at the edge of my field of vision, then, was the metal of her cell wall. Soon she would be led away to scream in the Apparatus or gasp in Allowin's Necklace." (CLAW, chapter XXVII)

Both quotes cannot be true. The sentence, "My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts." is either a pointless lie or another example of Wolfe being forced to change his mind about some things when he came to write the sequel. I can't think of any way to reconcile the two passages.

-Roy

Nathan Spears — 26 Oct 2006, 19:50 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy, I'm confused about the contradiction you are trying to point out. The passage from Urth names his mother and says that she bore him in her prison cell, and the passage from Claw says that he fed from her breast in her prison cell. I think the sentence you highlight is pointing out that children will not breast feed after they are taken by the torturers. Severian is still with his mother in her cell, he has not yet been "taken."

----- Original Message -----

From: Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2006 2:25:17 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Katharine maid

Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted and wrote:

On Thu, 26 Oct 2006 11:41:41 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> said:

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-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2006, 19:59 · follows Nathan Spears

Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin.

Ah, yes, so it does.

Damn. I may have done Wolfe and myself an injustice by conceding too quickly. <g>

Wasn't there a similar discussion not too long ago about "forebears" or some such? "Borne" is the past participle of "bear" ("to carry; transport"). When followed by the word "by", it doesn't refer to having given birth.

-Roy

Nathan Spears — 26 Oct 2006, 21:17 · follows Roy C. Lackey

<http://www.allwords.com/word-born.html>

If the "borne by" means "to bear a burden" then the sentence seems clunky. It takes a right turn and makes Catherine the focus rather than Severian. I think he's referring to Catherine as the mother.

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh who was a burden to Catherine in a cell of the . . ."

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh who carried by Catherine in a cell of the . . ." makes even less sense.

----- Original Message -----

From: Roy C. Lackey <rlackey at stic.net>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Thursday, October 26, 2006 2:59:35 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Katharine maid
Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted:

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-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 27 Oct 2006, 03:21 · in reply to Mark Millman

Mark Millman wrote:

I don't think that the eidolon technology is as widespread as the deliberate creation of servants, which it seems to me you're implicitly proposing, would suggest. If I've misunderstood, and you're saying that Severian's interactions with Brother Cook and Brother Porter are so important that the men are recreated from his memory for his benefit, then I'd be very interested in your reasoning.

If the Masters use a machine to make an eidolon to serve as Holy Katharine, they could plausibly use a machine to make an eidolon to serve as a cook or a menial laborer. However, unlike Holy Katharine's one-day-a-year existence, Brother Porter and especially Brother Cook may be post-eidolons, having consumed enough independent substance.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Jeff Wilson — 27 Oct 2006, 03:36 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Both quotes cannot be true. The sentence, "My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts." is either a pointless lie or another example of Wolfe being forced to change his mind about some things when he came to write the sequel. I can't think of any way to reconcile the two passages.

I don't think it is necessarily a contradiction. Since we are reading a translation, "take" may variously mean surgical removal as well as induction into the guild, either both at once or separately on different occasions. His mother may have been merely confined for a time, as Thecla was, and so nursed him in her cell. Later, she was executed and the apparent orphan kept as an apprentice-to-be. She may even have given birth during the time of confinement, and the Brothers did not open her to take the baby because there was the technical possibility she would be reprieved. Likely the c-section only takes place proximal to death while in custody.

Roy C. Lackey — 27 Oct 2006, 04:17 · follows Jeff Wilson

Nathan Spears wrote:
<http://www.allwords.com/word-born.html>

That on-line dictionary isn't worth the paper it's printed on. <g>

If the "borne by" means "to bear a burden" then the sentence seems clunky.

It takes a right turn and makes Catherine the focus rather than Severian. I think he's referring to Catherine as the mother.<<

I was hoping someone else would do this. Yes, he is referring to her as his mother. But, as I said, borne is the past participle of bear (to carry). Born (no "e") is the past participle of bear (to give birth). Borne and born are not interchangeable, which is why they have separate entries in my old

Webster's. You can simply substitute "carried" for "borne" in the disputed quote without doing violence to the sentence, and the usage becomes clear. I don't think that can be done with any one-word substitute referring to a past incidence of giving birth to a child -- at least not without mangling the English language.

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh who was a burden to Catherine in a cell of the . . ."

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh who carried by Catherine in a cell of the . . ." makes even less sense.<<

Just drop the "who" you added and it makes perfect sense. But cheer up; it can still be argued whether or not Severian meant she carried him in her womb or the brown basket previously noted. <g> See my "Baby Severian" post of the 18th for the larger context and why I initially thought the URTH quote contradicted the CLAW quote and proved my theory wrong.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin.

Ah, yes, so it does.

Damn. I may have done Wolfe and myself an injustice by conceding too quickly. <g>

Wasn't there a similar discussion not too long ago about "forebears" or some such? "Borne" is the past participle of "bear" ("to carry; transport").

When

followed by the word "by", it doesn't refer to having given birth.

-Roy

Tim Walters — 27 Oct 2006, 04:33 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Oct 26, 2006, at 9:17 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I was hoping someone else would do this. Yes, he is referring to her as his mother. But, as I said, borne is the past participle of bear (to carry).
Born (no "e") is the past participle of bear (to give birth). Borne and born are not interchangeable, which is why they have separate entries in my old _Webster's_.

My old _Webster's_ says:

born, a. [pp. of bear (to give birth): now used only in passive constructions not followed by _by_.]

You can simply substitute "carried" for "borne" in the disputed quote without doing violence to the sentence,

I disagree. Who would say "carried in a cell"? You carry _from_ a cell, or in a _basket_, not "in a cell".

Jeff Wilson — 27 Oct 2006, 04:47 · in reply to Dan Rabin

Dan Rabin wrote:

Jeff Wilson: Does this imply Brother Cook and Brother Porter are likewise idolons?

Roy Lackey: Huh? They weren't idolons. I don't understand.

Jeff Wilson: They seem to be menial functionaries, and they don't have saints' names, suggesting they are not like other residents of the Commonwealth.

Hmm. I always assumed that these two were perfectly ordinary guild members whose names happened not to be used in these references because Severian was talking about their roles, not their identities. This would be something like referring (in contemporary America) to "Dean of Sciences" or "Attending Physician".

I also assume, though I can't put my finger on any evidence, that guild brothers in such roles are not on track to becoming masters.

but there are no other "Brothers" mentioned in the guild, and no way to become one mentioned in the discussion of the guild ranks. This would imply that not only has no-one become a Brother during Severian's tenure with them, but no one has even mentioned it either. It's like the typical childhood image of school teachers who live inside the school house, never seen in any other context.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

Roy C. Lackey — 27 Oct 2006, 07:27 · follows Jeff Wilson

Tim Walters quoted and wrote:

On Oct 26, 2006, at 9:17 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I was hoping someone else would do this. Yes, he is referring to her as his mother. But, as I said, borne is the past participle of bear (to

carry).

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My old _Webster's_ says:

born, a. [pp. of bear (to give birth): now used only in passive constructions not followed by _by_.]

Precisely. My _Webster's_ says the same thing. That's why Wolfe didn't write "born by"; he wrote "borne by". "Born" has nothing to do with the sentence in question. The word isn't in the sentence.

["Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."]

-Roy

Tim Walters — 27 Oct 2006, 08:51 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Oct 27, 2006, at 12:27 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

born, a. [pp. of bear (to give birth): now used only in passive constructions not followed by _by_.]

Precisely. My _Webster's_ says the same thing. That's why Wolfe didn't write "born by"; he wrote "borne by". "Born" has nothing to do with the sentence in question. The word isn't in the sentence.

The point is that "borne by" is what Wolfe would write if he meant that Catherine gave birth to Severian in the cell, because "born by" is wrong. "Borne" is, in fact, a valid past participle of "bear (to give birth)," as specified in the "bear" entry:

"_Bear_, signifying _to bring forth_, has the past participle, when used passively, spelled born, but when used after the verb _to have_, it is spelled _borne_. Thus, a child was _born_, but she has _borne_ a child."

Although "have" is not in the sentence, the "born" entry makes it clear that in this particular passive use, "borne" is to be preferred, which is why I cited said entry.

In any case:

--"borne by" to mean "given birth by" is a common usage, whether sanctioned by Webster or not;

--mentioning one's birth is a common way to emphasize one's mere humanity, as in "man, born of woman." Mentioning being carried seems random (although I don't have the "brown basket" reference to hand; maybe there's enough context there to make it less so).

Nathan Spears — 27 Oct 2006, 14:34 · follows Tim Walters

From dictionary.com

"Usage note Since the latter part of the 18th century, a distinction has been made between born and borne as past participles of the verb bear¹. Borne is the past participle in all senses that do not refer to physical birth: The wheatfields have borne abundantly this year. Judges have always borne a burden of responsibility. Borne is also the participle when the sense is 'to bring forth (young)' and the focus is on the mother rather than on the child. In such cases, borne is preceded by a form of have or followed by by: Anna had borne a son the previous year. Two children borne by her earlier were already grown."

In looking around the web for this, I have noticed a lot of uses of the phrase "borne by Mary" in reference to Jesus. I was wondering if the Catholic members of the list, or those familiar with Catholicism, might comment as to whether this phrase is familiar to them - that is, if the phrase comes up a lot in doctrine or teaching or gossip around the cathedral. Perhaps Wolfe chose this phrase with those connotations in mind - this list has already (heh) borne discussion of the possibility of Catherine as a Mary substitute, and that would fit perfectly with the sentence in question.

----- Original Message -----

From: Tim Walters <walters at doubtfulpalace.com>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Friday, October 27, 2006 3:51:34 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Katharine maid

On Oct 27, 2006, at 12:27 AM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

born, a. [pp. of bear (to give birth): now used only in passive constructions not followed by _by_.]

Precisely. My _Webster's_ says the same thing. That's why Wolfe didn't write

"born by"; he wrote "borne by". "Born" has nothing to do with the sentence

in question. The word isn't in the sentence.

The point is that "borne by" is what Wolfe would write if he meant that Catherine gave birth to Severian in the cell, because "born by" is wrong. "Borne" is, in fact, a valid past participle of "bear (to give birth)," as specified in the "bear" entry:

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Although "have" is not in the sentence, the "born" entry makes it clear that in this particular passive use, "borne" is to be preferred, which is why I cited said entry.

In any case:

--"borne by" to mean "given birth by" is a common usage, whether sanctioned by Webster or not;

--mentioning one's birth is a common way to emphasize one's mere humanity, as in "man, born of woman." Mentioning being carried seems random (although I don't have the "brown basket" reference to hand; maybe there's enough context there to make it less so).

Mark Millman — 27 Oct 2006, 16:30 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

Dear Mr. Wilson:

Thanks for playing devil's advocate. It still seems pretty unlikely, either as a practical matter within the story or thematically from a critical viewpoint.

Best,

Mark Millman

On Thu, 26 Oct 2006, Jeff Wilson wrote:
If the Masters use a machine to make an eidolon to serve as Holy Katharine, they could plausibly use a machine to make an eidolon to serve as a cook or a menial laborer. However, unlike Holy Katharine's one-day-a-year existence, Brother Porter and especially Brother Cook may be post-eidolons, having consumed enough independent substance.

--

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >

[previously,] Mark Millman wrote:

I don't think that the eidolon technology is as widespread as the deliberate creation of servants, which it seems to me you're implicitly proposing, would suggest. If I've misunderstood, and you're saying that Severian's interactions with Brother Cook and Brother Porter are so important that the men are recreated from his memory for his benefit, then I'd be very interested in your reasoning.

Daniel D Jones — 27 Oct 2006, 19:30 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Thursday 26 October 2006 15:25, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Rex Lycanthrosaurus quoted and wrote:

On Thu, 26 Oct 2006 11:41:41 -0400, "b sharp" <bsharporflat at hotmail.com>

said:

Of course Severian won't openly tell US who his parents are...so if they know they had to figure it out, as we did.

Actually, Severian names Catherine as his mother in Chapter XLIV of URTH:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin.

Ah, yes, so it does. It also contradicts the passage I quoted earlier:

"[. . .] a breast running with warm milk. It was my mother's breast then, and I could hardly contain my elation (which might have wiped the memory away) at having reached back at last to her, after so many fruitless attempts. My arms sought to clasp her, and I would, if only I could, have lifted my eyes to look into her face. My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts. The grayness at the edge of my field of vision, then, was the metal of her cell wall. Soon she would be led away to scream in the Apparatus or gasp in Allowin's Necklace." (CLAW, chapter XXVII)

Both quotes cannot be true. The sentence, "My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts." is either a pointless lie or another example of Wolfe being forced to change his mind about some things when he came to write the sequel. I can't think of any way to reconcile the two passages.

I think you're misinterpreting the sentence you quote. You've addressed the second half of the sentence but you haven't explained what the first half means. Why does the fact that "...the children the torturers take know no breasts..." prove that the memory of his suckling is his mother? What does the entire sentence mean? I think Severian is saying that it must be his mother because if he's suckling at a breast, he hasn't yet been taken by the torturers. Once he IS taken, he'll be fed by bottle or equivalent. Thus the memory must be of a time before he is taken and the woman suckling him must be his mother. That means there's no contradiction in the two passages. Catherine bore him (and suckled him) while imprisoned in a cell in the tower. At some point after his birth (exactly how long after is unclear, but certainly while he was still an infant) she was tortured and killed, and Severian was taken by the torturers to be raised as a member of the Guild.

Chris Mulder — 28 Oct 2006, 01:10 · in reply to Daniel D Jones

Exactly my interpretation, as well.

cm

Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org> wrote:

I think you're misinterpreting the sentence you quote. You've addressed the second half of the sentence but you haven't explained what the first half means. Why does the fact that "...the children the torturers take know no breasts..." prove that the memory of his suckling is his mother? What does the entire sentence mean? I think Severian is saying that it must be his mother because if he's suckling at a breast, he hasn't yet been taken by the torturers. Once he IS taken, he'll be fed by bottle or equivalent. Thus the memory must be of a time before he is taken and the woman suckling him must be his mother. That means there's no contradiction in the two passages. Catherine bore him (and suckled him) while imprisoned in a cell in the tower. At some point after his birth (exactly how long after is unclear, but certainly while he was still an infant) she was tortured and killed, and Severian was taken by the torturers to be raised as a member of the Guild.

Roy C. Lackey — 28 Oct 2006, 02:53 · follows Chris Mulder

Gentlemen:

The dictionary citations both of you have given support my reading. This is the sentence:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

The part before the comma can be ignored here, leaving the subordinate clause "from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower." There is only **one** verb in the clause, "borne". There is no form of the verb "to have" before borne (or another verb after it) to qualify it, as would be required for borne to refer to the mere fact that Catherine gave birth in a cell.

The subject in the clause is "Severian", the predicate is "borne". The rest of the clause, beginning with the word "by", is a prepositional phrase serving as an adverb modifying the verb "borne".

Either the sentence is grammatically incorrect or "borne by" means something other than "to bring forth". As written, "borne by" means "carried by". The more usual meaning in this context would be that Catherine carried a child in her womb.

But Severian also had a memory of being in a brown basket when he was still too young to crawl, and one most often uses a basket to carry something. It is possible that he was carried **to** the cell in the basket. It is also possible that he was kept in the basket while she was in a cell, but I doubt that she would have had much occasion to carry it around there. (Unless maybe he had the colic and she was trying to get him to stop crying. <g>) The prepositional phrase, however, weighs against that.

So, in the end, the URTH quote still seems to undermine my theory that Severian was not born in the Matachin Tower. At least I think it does. The quote still doesn't quite square with all the criteria laid out in the tetralogy, particularly the criterion that none of the apprentices were born among the torturers. I could probably come up with some theory that allows for both, but that would lead to more speculation than either the text or I can support.

-Roy

-

-----Original Message-----

From: Nathan Spears <spearofsolomon at yahoo.com>
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Date: Friday, October 27, 2006 9:34 AM
Subject: Re: (urth) The Katharine maid
From dictionary.com

"?Usage note Since the latter part of the 18th century, a distinction has been made between born and borne as past participles of the verb bear¹. Borne is the past participle in all senses that do not refer to physical birth: The wheatfields have borne abundantly this year. Judges have always borne a burden of responsibility. Borne is also the participle when the sense is ?to bring forth (young)? and the focus is on the mother rather than on the child. In such cases, borne is preceded by a form of have or followed by by: Anna had borne a son the previous year. Two children borne by her earlier were already grown."

In looking around the web for this, I have noticed a lot of uses of the phrase "borne by Mary" in reference to Jesus. I was wondering if the Catholic members of the list, or those familiar with Catholicism, might comment as to whether this phrase is familiar to them - that is, if the phrase comes up a lot in doctrine or teaching or gossip around the cathedral. Perhaps Wolfe chose this phrase with those connotations in mind - this list has already (heh) borne discussion of the possibility of Catherine as a Mary substitute, and that would fit perfectly with the sentence in question.

----- Original Message -----

From: Tim Walters <walters at doubtfulpalace.com>

Roy C. Lackey — 28 Oct 2006, 04:57 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Daniel D Jones quoted and wrote:

"Perhaps I was too distant from myself, from the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell of the oubliette under the Matachin Tower."

This also seems to contradict Roy Lackey's supposition that Severian was borne outside the Matachin.

Ah, yes, so it does. It also contradicts the passage I quoted earlier:

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memory must be of a time before he is taken and the woman suckling him must be his mother. That means there's no contradiction in the two passages. Catherine bore him (and suckled him) while imprisoned in a cell in the tower.

At some point after his birth (exactly how long after is unclear, but certainly while he was still an infant) she was tortured and killed, and Severian was taken by the torturers to be raised as a member of the Guild.

I guess that what I get for being economical and not repeating myself. <g> My "Baby Severian" post of the 18th dealt with much of your argument. Most of the criteria for acceptance into the guild are also addressed on the second page of the second chapter of SHADOW. Among them is, "None of us were born among the torturers, for none are."

-Roy

Tim Walters — 28 Oct 2006, 06:15 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Oct 27, 2006, at 7:53 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

The dictionary citations both of you have given support my reading.

No, they don't. Nathan Spears' citation ("Two children borne by her earlier") is exactly analogous to Wolfe's clause ("the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell..."), leaving no room for doubt that Wolfe's sentence can sensibly be read as being about Severian's birth.

In my opinion, that's the only unstrained reading, but that's less certain.

Daniel D Jones — 28 Oct 2006, 12:54 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Saturday 28 October 2006 00:57, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Daniel D Jones quoted and wrote:

At some point after his birth (exactly how long after is unclear, but certainly while he was still an infant) she was tortured and killed, and Severian was taken by the torturers to be raised as a member of the Guild.

I guess that what I get for being economical and not repeating myself. <g> My "Baby Severian" post of the 18th dealt with much of your argument. Most of the criteria for acceptance into the guild are also addressed on the second page of the second chapter of SHADOW. Among them is, "None of us were born among the torturers, for none are."

I've gone back and reread your 18th post. Your arguments against Severian being born in the tower rests on the sentence "None of us were born among the torturers, for none are." I'd argue that you're misinterpreting that sentence as well. What does it mean to be "born among the torturers?" I'd say it's referring to the torturers taking wives or lovers and raising their own children into the guild. The torturers do not replenish their guild from within. I don't think the sentence means that no children are born among the torturers _clients_.

I don't see any resolution for the apparently contradictory sentences about wet nurses and knowing no breasts. I suspect this was an error on Wolf's part.

Nathan Spears — 28 Oct 2006, 20:47 · follows Daniel D Jones

I don't see any resolution for the apparently contradictory sentences about wet nurses and knowing no breasts. I suspect this was an error on Wolf's part.

What statement about wet nurses? Looking at the Baby Sev post I found this line:

The key part of this quote is "the children the torturers take know no breasts", which seems to contradict his earlier statement about wet-nurses.

but I'm not clear on what the earlier statement is.

Daniel D Jones — 28 Oct 2006, 21:22 · in reply to Nathan Spears

On Saturday 28 October 2006 16:47, Nathan Spears wrote:

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What statement about wet nurses? Looking at the Baby Sev post I found this line:

The key part of this quote is "the children the torturers take know no breasts", which seems to contradict his earlier statement about wet-nurses.

but I'm not clear on what the earlier statement is.

Chapter 2 of Shadow:

"...when a woman big with child is sent to us we open her and if the babe draws breath engage a wet-nurse if it be a boy. The females are rendered to the witches..."

It seems to me the line saying that the children the torturers take know no breast is a direct contradiction to the above which says they engage a wet nurse. At least, the only definition I'm familiar with for "wet nurse" is a woman who suckles another woman's child. If it is a contradiction, then the question is whether it's an error of Severian's or Wolfe's. I suspect it's Wolfe's. I can see any point or significance to Severian misleading the reader in so subtle and trivial a manner. Outside of that apparent error, I don't see any contradictions or issues with Severian being born in the tower.

As I see it, the torturers, if they have children, do not bring them into the guild. The guild is replenished by the children of their clients. A woman who is remanded into their care for torture is given a Caesarian. Male children who survive are raised as torturers. We know, however, that some clients are merely imprisoned for extended periods until their sentence is handed down. The text doesn't specifically say but it seems unlikely that a pregnant woman would be given a Caesarian while her ultimate disposition has yet to be decided. After all, it's possible she'll be released. Thus it seems not only possible but likely that some women do give birth while imprisoned in the tower, if only those who are awaiting final judgement and disposition. I don't see any issue or contradiction with Severian being born to Catherine while she was a prisoner but before her sentence had been handed down. Once her sentence was given, it was executed and Severian was "taken" into the guild.

Nathan Spears — 29 Oct 2006, 04:13 · follows Daniel D Jones

Aha! I missed that. It does seem like a contradiction. But in a world without baby formula, perhaps the wet-nurse puts her milk in a bottle. The torturers might refuse to let the children breastfeed for psychological reasons.

I was also going to suggest that perhaps the "stand under the bar" rules applies literally to children that the torturers "take." That is, perhaps they don't accept a child into the ranks until they can stand on their feet, but at that point they wouldn't be breastfeeding anyway.

I second the opinion that it's just an oversight by Wolfe.

----- Original Message -----

From: Daniel D Jones <ddjones at riddlemaster.org>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Saturday, October 28, 2006 4:22:30 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) The Katharine maid

On Saturday 28 October 2006 16:47, Nathan Spears wrote:

I don't see any resolution for the apparently contradictory sentences about wet nurses and knowing no breasts. I suspect this was an error on Wolfe's part.

What statement about wet nurses? Looking at the Baby Sev post I found this line:

The key part of this quote is "the children the torturers take know no breasts", which seems to contradict his earlier statement about wet-nurses.

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Roy C. Lackey — 29 Oct 2006, 04:30 · follows Nathan Spears

Tim Walters quoted and wrote:

The dictionary citations both of you have given support my reading.

No, they don't. Nathan Spears' citation ("Two children borne by her earlier") is exactly analogous to Wolfe's clause ("the Severian of bone and flesh borne by Catherine in a cell..."),

The complete cited sentence was: "Two children borne by her earlier were already grown." The presence of the verb "were", following "borne", changes the sentence structure, making the

analogy flawed. But it doesn't really matter. If Wolfe intended "borne by" to mean "given birth by", then it violates sanctioned usage. If he intended it to mean "carried by" (referring to a pregnant woman), it doesn't. Either way, as I have previously indicated, the implication is that Catherine seems to have been pregnant and in a cell. It follows that Severian was most likely born in a cell, which means that my theory that he wasn't is probably wrong.

-Roy

Roy C. Lackey — 29 Oct 2006, 21:04 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Daniel D Jones wrote:
Chapter 2 of Shadow:

"...when a woman big with child is sent to us we open her and if the babe draws breath engage a wet-nurse if it be a boy. The females are rendered to the witches..."

It seems to me the line saying that the children the torturers take know no breast is a direct contradiction to the above which says they engage a wet nurse. At least, the only definition I'm familiar with for "wet nurse" is a woman who suckles another woman's child. If it is a contradiction, then the question is whether it's an error of Severian's or Wolfe's. I suspect it's Wolfe's. I can see any point or significance to Severian misleading the reader in so subtle and trivial a manner. Outside of that apparent error, I don't see any contradictions or issues with Severian being born in the tower.

The apparent contradiction about who suckles whom and when played a large role in why I theorized that Severian might not have been born in the tower. I'll set aside for the moment the issue of torturer recruitment.

[snip]

The text doesn't specifically say but it seems unlikely that a pregnant woman would be given a Caesarian while her ultimate disposition has yet to be decided. After all, it's possible she'll be released. Thus it seems not only possible but likely that some women do give birth while imprisoned in the tower, if only those who are awaiting final judgement and disposition. I don't see any issue or contradiction with Severian being born to Catherine while she was a prisoner but before her sentence had been handed down. Once her sentence was given, it was executed and Severian was "taken" into the guild.

Let's dismiss Severian, too, for now. Now suppose this scenario:

Some woman, pregnant but not yet "big with child", is sent to the torturers. Unlike most people sent to them, she is not tortured relatively soon after arrival. The pregnancy progresses and eventually a boy baby draws breath, whether born naturally or otherwise. A week, or a month, or three months later the order comes for her to be tortured. She dies as a result of it. What happens to the baby?

According to the logic of your above supposition, this hypothetical baby would at this point be "taken" into the guild. Who feeds and otherwise cares for it -- and *where*? Severian said, "the children the torturers take know no breasts". Not only are there no female members of the guild, I can't recall *any* female in NEW SUN even being inside the Matachin Tower who was not a "client". It would be logical to assume that a newborn would be treated the same way as a child cut from the womb. But if so, why did Severian specify "...when a woman big with child is sent to us we open her and if the babe draws breath engage a wet-nurse if it be a boy."? It seems that he is making some sort of distinction between babies born naturally and those the torturers cut out. I was trying to account for that in my theory.

Again: "My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts. The grayness at the edge of my field of vision, then, was the metal of her cell wall." That "then" bothers me. In his thoughts, as the vague memory comes to him, he concludes that the woman he can't see and probably couldn't recognize if he could see her, *must* be his mother *because* he is nursing in a cell. In other words, those particular aspects of the memory distinguish him from "the children the torturers take" in some way.

If there was nothing unusual about infants nursing from their respective mothers in cells, how could he have arrived at the conclusion he reached? Why couldn't the woman nursing him have been just some wet-nurse? *Because it happened in a cell.* A wet-nurse would not have been in a cell.

It therefore seems to me that your above interpretation of what Severian meant by "taken" into the guild can't be correct. His "the children the torturers take know no breasts" statement is unqualified, making no exception for himself or the hypothetical baby. Even if each and every apprentice in the guild came to be there as a result of his mother having given birth to him naturally in a cell or by C-section, then who are the children the torturers take who know no breasts?

-Roy

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Oct 2006, 19:09 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On 10/29/06, Roy C. Lackey <rclackey at stic.net> wrote:

It therefore seems to me that your above interpretation of what Severian meant by "taken" into the guild can't be correct. His "the children the torturers take know no breasts" statement is unqualified, making no exception for himself or the hypothetical baby. Even if each and every apprentice in the guild came to be there as a result of his mother having given birth to him naturally in a cell or by C-section, then who are the children the torturers take who know no breasts?

Roy,

Though the statement is unqualified, I think there is an _implicit_ qualification that cuts through this dilemma like Alexander's sword through a certain knot.

The children the torturers take know no breasts ... _after_ they are taken. The torturers, obviously, have no control over what happens _before_ the child is taken.

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Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you walk into an open sewer and die.

- Mel Brooks

Daniel D Jones — 30 Oct 2006, 19:38 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Sunday 29 October 2006 16:04, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Daniel D Jones wrote:

Some woman, pregnant but not yet "big with child", is sent to the torturers. Unlike most people sent to them, she is not tortured relatively soon after arrival. The pregnancy progresses and eventually a boy baby draws breath, whether born naturally or otherwise. A week, or a month, or three months later the order comes for her to be tortured. She dies as a result of it. What happens to the baby?

According to the logic of your above supposition, this hypothetical baby would at this point be "taken" into the guild. Who feeds and otherwise cares for it -- and *where*?

The apprentices are raised in the tower and cared for by older apprentices and Guildmembers. I see no reason that this couldn't include infants as well, and no reason the children couldn't be bottle-fed on milk taken from a cow, goat, etc. This would explain why they "know no breast."

Severian said, "the children the torturers take know no breasts". Not only are there no female members of the guild, I can't recall *any* female in NEW SUN even being inside the Matachin Tower who was not a "client". It would be logical to assume that a newborn would be treated the same way as a child cut from the womb. But if so, why did Severian specify "...when a woman big with child is sent to us we open her and if the babe draws breath engage a wet-nurse if it be a boy."? It seems that he is making some sort of distinction between babies born naturally and those the torturers cut out. I was trying to account for that in my theory.

As great a writer as he is, even Wolfe is only human. I don't think he analyzes every sentence for every possible interpretation and nuance of meaning. Only his readers do that.

I think the statement about "knowing no breast" was simply a plausible way for Severian to know that this was his mother and not a wet nurse. Once they are taken into the guild, they know no breast. So a memory of a breast must be his mother. The contradiction with the elsewhere statement about wet nurses is simply an error on Wolfe's part.

Again: "My mother certainly, for the children the torturers take know no breasts. The grayness at the edge of my field of vision, then, was the metal of her cell wall." That "then" bothers me. In his thoughts, as the vague memory comes to him, he concludes that the woman he can't see and probably couldn't recognize if he could see her, *must* be his mother *because* he is nursing in a cell. In other words, those particular aspects of the memory distinguish him from "the children the torturers take" in some way.

No, he concludes the woman nursing him must be his mother because she is, in fact, nursing him. Once he was taken from her and placed into the care of the guild, he was never suckled again. He then concludes that the grayness is a cell wall because he knows that his mother was imprisoned. The "then" means that this sentence follows logically from the former one, not that it logically implies the previous sentence. He doesn't conclude that it's his mother because of the cell - he concludes it's a cell because it's his mother.

If there was nothing unusual about infants nursing from their respective mothers in cells, how could he have arrived at the conclusion he reached?

As I just explained.

Why couldn't the woman nursing him have been just some wet-nurse? *Because it happened in a cell.* A wet-nurse would not have been in a cell.

No, the passage assumes there were no wet-nurses. The children taken know no breast. They are bottle fed.

It therefore seems to me that your above interpretation of what Severian meant by "taken" into the guild can't be correct. His "the children the torturers take know no breasts" statement is unqualified, making no exception for himself or the hypothetical baby. Even if each and every apprentice in the guild came to be there as a result of his mother having given birth to him naturally in a cell or by C-section, then who are the children the torturers take who know no breasts?

Every child that's taken by the torturers. You're taking the sentence as an absolute - if a child was taken by the torturers, then he _at no time_ knew a breast. I think the sentence means that, _once taken_, the infant _never again_ knows a breast. Since the children taken know no breast after they're taken, the fact that he's in the process of knowing a breast is proof that he has not yet been taken and is in the arms of his mother.