

Silly Bus 4

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 27 Apr 1998

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Alice Turner — 27 Apr 1998, 09:47

Thinking about "In the Penal Colony" sent me back to my old Modern Library "Selected Stories" yesterday, a fine project for a rainy Sunday, and now I'm thinking that "The Great Wall of China" ought to be included in the syllabus too; it is quite wonderful about time in a static civilization and seems to me relevant not only to the Autarchy but to the Ascians. Here's just one among many striking paragraphs:

"Just so, as hopelessly and as hopefully, do our people regard the Emperor. they do not know what emperor is reigning, and there exist doubts regarding even the name of the dynasty. In school a great deal is taught about the dynasties with the dates of succession, but the universal uncertainty in this matter is so great that even the best scholars are drawn into it. Long-dead emperors are set on the throne in our villages, and one that only lives in song recently had a proclamation of his read out by the priest before the altar. Battles that are old history are new to us, and one's neighbor rushes in with a jubilant face to tell the news. the wives of the emperors, pampered and overweening, seduced from noble custom by wily courtiers, swelling with ambition, vehement in their greed, uncontrollable in their lust, practice their abominations ever anew. the more deeply they are buried in time the more glaring are the colors in which their deeds are painted, and with a loud cry of woe our village eventually hears how an Empress drank her husband's blood in long draughts thousands of years ago."

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