

Fifth Head's Last Line

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 14 Nov 2000

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Robert Borski — 14 Nov 2000, 12:47

Blattid having wondered:

Meanwhile, I've just finished reading FIFTH HEAD for, rather surprisingly, only the second time, and find that there are some pretty basic things I don't understand. I know that many people find the last line of the first part very disturbing: I truly do not understand `_why_`.

I'm one of the people who believe this and say so both on my website and in my 5H review in Ultan's Library.

I have three reasons for so doing.

1) The last line ("Someday they'll want us") recapitulates George Santayana's most famous dictum. Specifically, Number Five has not learned from his father's mistakes, therefore he can only repeat them. Hence he will not be able to move on to the next evolutionary step, where he and his clan will be wanted by the high and the mighty of Sainte Croix as something other than flesh peddlers. Think of Number Five as Sisyphus here, who must forever toil but ultimately fail at the same task (cf. Number Five's two nightmares about stasis, one where he's trapped by graveyard pillars, the other where he's on a ship steered by his dead father, who seeks to find out "why the ship doesn't move").

2) There is also in the last line the implication that the ends justifies the means. It's therefore all right if Number Five and his father/brothers conduct unorthodox experiments on their own cell-line and sell the monstrous results in the slave market. Think of Number Five as Josef Mengele here, conducting his own little personal Holocaust--no big deal really, since someday he'll be lauded for the sacrifices he's made in the name of science, medicine and personal growth.

3) Lastly, there's a good measure of ironical inversion in the line. Of course, someday Number Five will be wanted--but by Number Six (the baby carried in by Phaedria at the end), who will eventually exact his own blood toll for the atrocities perpetuated against him--thus starting the entire murderous cycle all over again.

Robert Borski