

Someday They'll Want Us : Who are "they"? Who are "us"?

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Talarican — 20 Nov 2000, 06:19

<quote Tony Ellis>

..."disturbing"...Number 5 has become his own father... he has become the thing he hates. Loss of the Self is, perhaps, the ultimate horror. <unquote>

That certainly fits nicely with the theme of Identity, and its discovery and loss, which underlies all of 5HC. Clearly, this is correct. When exactly did Number Five become Maitre, though? I am again crippled by not having a copy of the book with me to consult. I know Number Five plotted to kill and supplant Maitre, but was it motivated from the start by a conscious desire to supplant his 'father', or by self-preservation, kill-him-before-he-kills-me, followed by masquerading as Maitre out of necessity?

<quote Robert Borski>

... the ends justifies the means. ...Think of Number Five as Josef Mengele here...someday he'll be lauded for the sacrifices he's made in the name of science, medicine and personal growth. <unquote>

the Mengesque mad scientist certainly seems to be a favorite character for Wolfe! As much as the "mad scientist" turns up in science fiction and horror, Wolfe is one of the few who undertake to examine the scientist and the madness, rather than only the products.

Speaking of "personal growth", let's go intertextual with Maitre's New Sun counterpart, Baldanders. (in fact, now that I bring it up, could Baldanders be Wolfe's walking pun-parody of that somewhat cliched phrase?) Dr. Talos, in his audience with Autarch Severian (Citadel XXXVI), expounds quite frankly on his then-lost master's means and motives: "...Baldanders was more monster ... he had built himself. It's a law of nature, and what is higher than nature, that each creature must have a creator. But Baldanders was his own creation; he stood behind himself, and cut himself off from the line linking the rest of us with the Increate." This maxim certainly seems to aptly characterize the Cave Canem clan, as well. They have separated themselves from their creator, and thereby have damned themselves.

<quote Nutria>

The tyrants, oppressive slavers, of No. 5's planet are intent on conquering and wiping out the abos, instead of joining with them in a new community. ...Meanwhile, to survive, the abos have to give up their own ways and try to pass as human. All of this is culturally stifling and destructive. <unquote>

Nutria's point is well taken. And were the precolonial abos, real or not, as perceived by the interested humans, truly free? They had no slave drivers, no secret police, no armies, no attorneys or courts. Yet they were at the mercy of Nature, feast or famine, and were obliged to take ruthless advantage of any opportunity merely to eat which came their way, including abos of other nations and tribes. The impersonal forces of nature become the harshest tyranny of all,

and people who never invented the spear nonetheless established theocracies and ecclesiastical law in the service of those powers which deign to allow them to barely survive. Recall David's statement about their hypothetical attachment to their culture and religion. The folklore holds that abos, in spite of genocidal persecution, found life "passing" in the human cities and villages much easier than hunting and gathering in back of beyond, especially in winter. The issue of "cultural genocide" is a bit more complex than it appears at first blush.

My pedestrian alter ego, a year and a half ago, as well as myself, have always held that Wolfe never intended to objectively answer whether the Annese abos in fact actually "exist" within their story context/subcreation (as opposed to the inhumi or the Beautiful Ones, which unquestionably do), ever, or as of the time in which "Fifth Head" and "V.R.T." are set. (attn those urthlings who have been in touch with Mr. Wolfe or keep close track of his published interviews: has he ever commented upon this issue?) My impression has always been that the governments and the influential, on both worlds, do not officially believe in the reality of Annese "abos", not that that is conclusive, of course! And, if we accept Victor Trenchard as an authority, the abos, real or not, even had their own elusive dubious faery neighbors, the Shadow Children. 5HC turns the Area 51 / UFO conspiracy legends on their head: WE are the invaders, but were aliens already there, and if so, what happened to them? And is the government covering it up? Wolfe may tease us with sly clues and red herrings, but I don't believe there actually is an answer there to find.

In my view, given my theory, the most valid interpretations of 5HC are those which stand independent of any one or another particular answer to the "abo question". Accordingly, we need to look at the cases where the abos are extinct, or, better yet, never existed. In that case, we may well ask what was in the culture and collective psychology of the human colonists that such folklore would become so widely told and believed, to the point some individuals not only impersonate "abos" with some degree of perceived authenticity, but some, such as Victor Trenchard, actually believe themselves to be such? What does it say about people to believe in such scenarios as that of Veil's Hypothesis?

One obvious answer presents itself immediately: the bulk of the human population of both planets are descendants of the conquerors and/or the conquered in a terrible war fought by previous generations. The social/legal structures and classes of both worlds were determined, albeit in divergent ways, by that war and its outcome. The Trenchards may or may not be abo, but they certainly identify themselves as being of the defeated French underclass. An oppressed underclass will generally cling to and seek comfort in its folklore and religion, just as do the primitives.

The questions of Self and Identity certainly are at least partly functions of culture and class, and of the status of being victor or conquered, slave, master, or free. (Or, ultimately, real or legendary!) That, I believe, is why all these ingredients appear somewhere in 5HC for due consideration.

Talarican