

5HC: Shadow Children in the Lupiverse?

The Urth list — 24 messages, 10 voices, 19 Apr 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3180>

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 19 Apr 2002, 23:26

Okay, I'm dumb and I admit it; I hadn't remembered that the Shadow Children actually call themselves humans. Now I do. But are they really? And if they are, who are they?

You're going to think about halfway through this message that I am making another really dumb mistake. Maybe I am, but not the one you think I'm making, as you'll see.

The most-relevant quotes are as follows.

Ace pb p. 95; the Old Wise One talking:

"You would say that these sing. There is the Song of Many Mouths and All Full, The Bending Sky-Paths Song that none may come, The Hunting Song, The Song of Ancient Sorrows we sing when the Fighting Lizard is high in the summer sky and we see our old home as a little yellow gem in his tail...

"...when we sing, it is not the air that shakes.

We shake extension, and I am the song all the Shadow children sing, their thought when they sing as one. Hold your hands before you thus, not touching. Now think of your hands gone. That is what we shake."

Sandwalker said, "That is nothing."

"That which you call nothing is what holds all worlds apart. When it is gone, all the worlds will be born."

Well, now. That last sounds just a teeny weeny bit like the cyclical universe Wolfe talked about in Nutria's interview selection, doesn't it? H'mmm ...

Anyway, what I got when I was this far was that they were colonists who'd been there some time, and came from a world with a yellow sun, and so were, in all probability, humans or human- descended. Anyway, then on to pages 125ff; again the (or an) Old Wise One to Sandwalker:

"Now humans - my race - actually travelled in [starcrossers], cruising among the stars before the long dreaming days. We came here that way.

"... We either came recently or a long, long time ago. I'm not sure which.

"... We had no songs when we came here - that was one of the reasons we stayed, and why we lost the starcrosser."

"You couldn't have gone back in it anyway..."

"We know. We've changed too much ... we once looked as you do now."

It is in this passage also that the Old Wise One informs Sandwalker that "You come of a race of shapechangers -- like those we called werewolves in our old home." [127]

One more observation on why the Shadow children stayed: "For this we have given up everything, because this is more than everything, though it is only an herb of this world...Long ago in our home, before a fool struck fire, we were so -- roaming without whatever might be named save the sun, the night, and each other. Now we are so again, for we are gods, and things made by hands do not concern us." [129-31]

Okay, so what's going on here?

Possible explanations exfoliate: It's fairly clear, though, that the Shadow children are the first, French, colonists. They came to Ste-Anne, and found the godleaf, which

- a) gave them Amazing Psychic Powers[tm]
- b) are way cool hallucinogens that made them think they had Amazing Psychic Powers.

They also

- x) found the abos
- y) hallucinated the abos

Annoyingly, almost any combination of these is possible, as is the somewhat vaguer possibility that the Shadow children are not the French at all but a much earlier round of colonists -- among the names the great WOO remembers for their ancient home are "Atlantis or Mu -- or Gondwanaland, Africa, Poictesme, or the Country of Friends."

The one good thing to emerge so far is that Ste-Anne & Ste-Croix clearly can not be Urth and Lune, thank the Increate!, because people come and go between them and Earth fairly regularly without any apparent time travel.

Well, anyway. I'm jiggy with this so far, but then I remember: hey, this is all something Victor/"Marsch" wrote, and it's not at all clear that we have any reason to trust him. Another possibility occurs to me -- perhaps the abos are not shapeshifters at all, but humans, either the French or someone earlier, who -- under the influence of the godleaf -- have gone totally native, forgotten technology (and thus the ability to use tools is not physiological but simple unfamiliarity), and generally become different by Lamarckian evolution.

This is still more like a bunch of questions than it is like a model, but at least I think they're starting to be coherent questions...

PS: Are there any other Cabell references in Lupine texts...?)

Tony Ellis — 20 Apr 2002, 09:17 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

Okay, I'm dumb and I admit it; I hadn't remembered that the Shadow Children actually call themselves humans. Now I do. But are they

really? And if they are, _who_ are they?

This is a question I've come back to and come back to over the years. You can find a rather-too-condensed synopsis of what I understand to be the truth in a post I made called '5HC: a timeline without dates', back in 2000:
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0030/0152.shtml>

Possible explanations exfoliate: It's _fairly_ clear, though, that the Shadow children are the first, French, colonists.

They can't be. 'A Story' ends with the arrival of the French colonists.

That leaves us with two possibilities that I can see. Either the Shadow Children are indigenous or, as you say there is

the somewhat vaguer possibility that the Shadow children are not the French at all but a much earlier round of colonists -- among the names the great WOO remembers for their ancient home are "Atlantis or Mu -- or Gondwanaland, Africa, Poictesme, or the Country of Friends."

This is the explanation we are set up to believe for most of the story. But - and it's a very big but - toward the end the Old Wise One does a complete about-face, and admits that his race was already here when the first, prehistoric Earth colonists came: "Now I am half a man, and know that we were always here..."

Another possibility occurs to me -- perhaps the abos are not shapeshifters

Heh. I've been saying this for years: the abos are -not- shapeshifters. There's not a scrap of evidence to suggest that they are, and a big heap of evidence to suggest that they have simply been mythologised by the colonists. They are gifted mimics, certainly, but not supernaturally so.

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The French, no. Someone earlier, absolutely. The prehistoric humans the Old Wise One refers to.

If I sound a little cocksure, forgive me, but as I say I've been banging on about 5HC for years in this list, to the extent that I'm pretty confident about this stuff. If you want me to back any of it up with solid evidence, just ask.

Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 Apr 2002, 15:26 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis wrote:

This is a question I've come back to and come back to over the years. You can find a rather-too-condensed synopsis of what I understand to be the truth in a post I made called '5HC: a timeline without dates', back in 2000:
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0030/0152.shtml>

I gather that Tony Ellis has no interest in including the notion that Sainte Anne/Sainte Croix (or one or the other) constitute Eden, or the origin point for human beings, such that the waves of "discoverers" from Earth are in reality returning to a dimly remembered ancestral home.

(Which is fine! Nobody says you must--I certainly don't say you must.)

I brought it up most recently in Feb 2002:

<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0202/114.txt.shtml>

As far as I can tell it originated with prion, Sean Whalen, in 1998:
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0015/0057.shtml>

And I thought it was pretty neat at the time:
<http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0015/0068.shtml>

=mantis=

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Tony Ellis — 21 Apr 2002, 08:58 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

I gather that Tony Ellis has no interest in including the notion that Sainte Anne/Sainte Croix (or one or the other) constitute Eden, or the origin point for human beings, such that the waves of "discoverers" from Earth are in reality returning to a dimly remembered ancestral home.

...

As far as I can tell it originated with prion, Sean Whalen, in 1998:

And prion, very commendably, includes his own refutation of the idea. He says that there are too many holes and that it requires adding too much to the story, and I agree.

The dimly remembered ancestral home described in 5HC has a yellow sun and an Earth name. And appears, in any case, to have been telepathically lifted by the Shadow Children from the minds of passing starcrosser crews. And there's no dim memory at all of people ever leaving St Anne - only of them arriving.

If there's any actual evidence in 5HC to back up this theory I'm genuinely interested to hear it - but I can't think of any.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 22 Apr 2002, 16:21 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis responds to me:

Possible explanations exfoliate: It's fairly clear, though, that the Shadow children are the first, French, colonists.

They can't be. 'A Story' ends with the arrival of the French colonists.

Why, yes; so it does (or seems to -- certainly, it ends with the arrival of some colonists). But how much of 'A Story' should we take literally? Even the title is reversed: it isn't really "A Story" by John V. Marsch; it is a story by "John V. Marsch." All in Part 2 of 5HC is shadows and/or reflections, and all is told by Victor for some specific purpose. Find (in part 3) his purpose for telling the story, and learn what to believe.

And, no, I haven't found his purpose yet.

That leaves us with two possibilities that I can see. Either the Shadow Children are indigenous or, as you say there is

the somewhat vaguer possibility that the Shadow children are not the French at all but a much earlier round of colonists -- among

the names the great WOO remembers for their ancient home are
"Atlantis or Mu -- or Gondwanaland, Africa, Poictesme, or the
Country of Friends."

This is the explanation we are set up to believe for most of the
story. But - and it's a very big but - toward the end the Old Wise
One does a complete about-face,

... the reversal of the reflection of the Shadows ...

and admits that his race was already here when the first,
prehistoric Earth colonists came:
"Now I am half a man, and know that we were always here..."

So why does Victor tell us this? What is -his- reason? What does he hope to gain?

(We don't even know whether he wrote "A Story" before or after he was arrested!)

Another possibility occurs to me -- perhaps the abos are not
shapeshifters

Heh. I've been saying this for years: the abos are -not- shapeshifters.
There's not a scrap of evidence to suggest that they are,

Here I must disagree. The direct evidence is the ability of Victor's mother to become young or
old at will.

Actually, I suspect the truth of being more complex than that.

(Complexity? In a Wolfe text? Say it ain't so!)

Proposal:

Long ago, as in your timeline, Ste-Anne was inhabited by the ancestors of the Shadow children:
psionically gifted shapeshifters, less intelligent than humans as individuals but capable of
producing a group mind (the Wise Old Ones).

The early human colonists came. Their arrival was utterly traumatic for the Shadow children,
who chose to distort space so no _more_ colonists could come.

Thousands(?) of years pass after the arrival of the "Free People." Some genetic(?) exchange
takes place between them. The Shadow children become more intelligent and more human-like
in many ways. The "Free People" gain some limited ability to change, not their shape properly
speaking, but their appearance.

Does this work? I think it does.

Adam Stephanides — 22 Apr 2002, 14:14 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

on 4/22/02 11:21 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:
All in Part 2 of 5HC is shadows and/or
reflections, and all is told by Victor for some specific purpose. Find
(in part 3) his purpose for telling the story, and learn what to believe.

Or else Wolfe, in expanding the 5HC novella, wanted to write a story about the Shadow
Children, and decided to tie it in to parts 1 and 3 by having it be written by "John V. Marsch." (If I
sound a bit cynical, forgive me.)

--Adam

Tony Ellis — 23 Apr 2002, 17:21 · follows Adam Stephanides

Dan'I wrote:

Possible explanations exfoliate: It's fairly clear, though, that the Shadow children are the first, French, colonists.

They can't be. 'A Story' ends with the arrival of the French colonists.

Why, yes; so it does (or seems to -- certainly, it ends with the arrival of some colonists). But how much of 'A Story' should we take literally?

Personally I feel all of 'A Story' should be taken literally, but that's a whole debate in itself! I think there's enough material in 'V.R.T' to argue that the Shadow Children can't be the French Colonists.

For one thing, the timescale is just too short. St Anne has only been colonised for a couple of hundred years, and most sightings took place in the first of those. I don't think we're expected to believe that French colonists devolved into the gnarled, pygmy race we know as Shadow Children in such a short space of time.

Trenchard tells Marsch that when the boats of the first starcrosser came ashore, they found a man floating on his face, "beaten until dead with scourges of little shells tied together" - just the way 'A Story' tells it. We have no reason to think he's lying. Victor, who functions throughout the novella as a touchstone to the validity of his father's stories, doesn't demur. It could be argued that Victor has woven this detail into an otherwise entirely fictitious narrative, but that feels a little bloody-minded to me. Especially as this is not the only time that Wolfe goes out of his way to show that parts of 'A Story' are externally verifiable.

"Now I am half a man, and know that we were always here..."

So why does Victor tell us this? What is -his- reason? What does he hope to gain?

Personally, I have never felt that Victor had any sort of hidden agenda for writing 'A Story'. Making him the author always seemed to me to be simply a framing device, of which Wolfe is inordinately fond. Like Latro's scrolls, or Cutthroat's recording gadget, or making Horn the author of the Book of the Long Sun. But if you want a reason, how about this:

Victor is an anthropologist. Yes, he's a half-Annese impostor, but he's still an anthropologist by both nature and profession. He has inherited Marsch's great, unfinished work on the nature of the Annese, and with the lore and stories passed onto him by his Annese mother he is in a unique position to continue it. He also has an awful lot of spare time to fill. I think 'A Story' is meant to be his informed musing about what the Annese were like and where they came from, written to please himself. I also think we're supposed to believe he got it right.

Heh. I've been saying this for years: the abos are -not- shapeshifters. There's not a scrap of evidence to suggest that they are,

Here I must disagree. The direct evidence is the ability of Victor's mother to become young or old at will.

Looking more or less haggard is not, by my definition, shapeshifting. Trenchard, who has witnessed this ability firsthand, does not even believe it is in any way superhuman: "A matter of the voice, you understand, and the muscles of the face." There's a hint that there may be more to it than that in the way Victor interjects "Everything!" at this point, and I've suggested before now that it could be partially telepathic. But it's not the transformation of a human being into a "household utensil" as Dr Hagsmith puts it.

Jeff Wilson — 24 Apr 2002, 00:10 · follows Tony Ellis

From: "Tony Ellis" <LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk>

Another

possibility occurs to me -- perhaps the abos are not shapeshifters

Heh. I've been saying this for years: the abos are -not- shapeshifters.

There's not a scrap of evidence to suggest that they are, and a big heap of evidence to suggest that they have simply been mythologised by the colonists. They are gifted mimics, certainly, but not supernaturally so.

How do you explain the remarkable similarity of form and the ability to interbreed, then?

Jeff Wilson

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Alice K. Turner — 24 Apr 2002, 04:11 · follows Jeff Wilson

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

From: "Adam Stephanides" <adamsteph at earthlink.net>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Monday, April 22, 2002 10:14 AM

Subject: Re: (urth) 5HC: Shadow Children in the Lupiverse?

on 4/22/02 11:21 AM, Dan'I Danehy-Oakes at ddanehy at siebel.com wrote:

All in Part 2 of 5HC is shadows and/or reflections, and all is told by Victor for some specific purpose. Find (in part 3) his purpose for telling the story, and learn what to believe.

Or else Wolfe, in expanding the 5HC novella, wanted to write a story about the Shadow Children, and decided to tie it in to parts 1 and 3 by having it

be written by "John V. Marsch." (If I sound a bit cynical, forgive me.)

--Adam

--

Adam Stephanides — 04 May 2002, 14:21 · follows Alice K. Turner

on 4/23/02 12:21 PM, Tony Ellis at LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk wrote:

Trenchard tells Marsch that when the boats of the first starcrosser came ashore, they found a man floating on his face, "beaten until dead with scourges of little shells tied together" - just the way 'A Story' tells it.

We have no reason to think he's lying. Victor, who functions throughout the novella as a touchstone to the validity of his father's stories, doesn't demur. It could be argued that Victor has woven this detail into an otherwise entirely fictitious narrative, but that feels a little bloody-minded to me.

But that's what writers of fiction do. The Soldier series must contain dozens of "externally verifiable" details, but we don't conclude that Latro existed.

Even if we accept that "A Story" is based on Annese oral traditions, there's no reason to think that the events in it actually took place, let alone that the OWO's stories are true. The story is a myth: a myth of the coming of the French as a Fall, which also incorporates an origin myth (or several different origin myths). Or else it's Victor's imaginative reconstruction of how such a myth might have run. But in either case, there's no need to believe in prehistoric starcrossers, or in Shadow Children telepathically shooing away spaceships.

Especially as this is not the only time that Wolfe goes out of his way to show that parts of 'A Story' are externally verifiable.

Later, Tony wrote:

But there's nothing internal to 'A Story' to suggest that it is unreliable

Well, there's the title itself: a person writing what they believed to be a factual account of the arrival of the French colonists would be unlikely to title it just "A Story." And there are the implausibilities I mentioned above.

--Adam

Tony Ellis — 04 May 2002, 21:17 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:

But that's what writers of fiction do. The Soldier series must contain dozens of "externally verifiable" details, but we don't conclude that Latro existed.

That's not the same thing. When Wolfe weaves the siege of Sestos into Soldier of the Mist, he's using a real historical fact. When Victor weaves the pit seen in 'V.R.T.' into 'A Story', that's Wolfe using a 'fact' in one story that he has himself created in another story.

Instead of the Soldier series, consider the Long Sun books. We don't believe Silk exists any more than we do Latro, but we accept that, within the context of that fictional world, Horn is writing an account of a real person. I see 'A Story' in the same light.

But in either case, there's no need to believe in prehistoric starcrossers, or in Shadow Children telepathically shooing away spaceships.

Well, there's no need for Wolfe to have made the Croix\Anne system remain unknown "when planets more distant from Earth had been colonized for decades" either. Having the system so mysteriously overlooked doesn't contribute anything important to 'V.R.T.' (that I can think of). But it is another way of indicating that the events portrayed in 'A Story' really happened.

As for prehistoric starcrossers: if they don't exist we either have to either find another way for human beings to have got to St Anne and become the abos, or we have to say that abos are truly indigenous and therefore can't breed with the settlers. It is just about possible to say the latter, but to my mind it's a reading that greatly weakens the impact of the story. Plus, having Victor a half-breed also explains why he doesn't seem to be 100% as hamfisted as an abo should be. And why he isn't as good at mimicry as his mother.

The other thing about the prehistoric colonisation idea is that it gets raised in all three novellas. That makes me feel it's an idea we're supposed to consider seriously.

Andy Robertson — 04 May 2002, 21:24 · follows Tony Ellis

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

From: "Tony Ellis" <LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk>

The other thing about the prehistoric colonisation idea is that it gets raised in all three novellas. That makes me feel it's an idea we're supposed to consider seriously.

I suggest that T5HOC is a book with a lot to say about Colonialism and its aftermath. The Abos have to be there because they are Wolfe's major theme. They have to be near-identical with the colonists so that the minor theme of identity and subversion can be invoked. ((Their "white" phenotype and such minor consequences of that as the "pink" sun follow.))

I suggest that Wolfe was driven by this and threw in the stuff about prehistoric Starcrossers as persiflage and tergiversation. There is actually no solution, he wanted it left a mystery.

hartshorn

Phoebe Davis — 04 May 2002, 23:02 · follows Andy Robertson

I have just reread (since their publication mind you) 12 books by Wolfe - from Shadow of the Torturer through the final SS. It was overdue and entirely enjoyable, but I find that simple reality is no longer quite sufficient for me. Be that as it may, I am in awe that this gentleman, Tony Ellis, used a word that I had to look up. Thank you for tergiversation.

I will point out that in my years in book selling (let me seize this opportunity to remind the list that I not only had my own SF & Mystery bookstore for 6 years, but toiled as well for B. Dalton for 8 long years before that) the single most common complaint by the masses, the great unwashed, the un/non/anti-literati as it were, about Wolfe is that "he uses words I don't understand". It is Wolfe's very use and choice of words - obscure, obfuscatory, adumbrate they may be -- that attracts me to his work.

Bravo!

I am currently reading 5HoC - it seems I have not read this before despite having a signed first (typed in a gloating manner I'm ashamed to admit) in order to try to keep up with this list. Perhaps I will have a comment later, perhaps not, but the posts have been fascinating.

Phoebe

--- Andy Robertson <andywrobertson at clara.co.uk> wrote:

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hartshorn

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Adam Stephanides — 05 May 2002, 14:12 · follows Phoebe Davis

on 5/4/02 4:17 PM, Tony Ellis at LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk wrote:
Adam Stephanides wrote:

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But what Victor is doing within the world of 5HC is analogous to what Wolfe did in Soldier.

Instead of the Soldier series, consider the Long Sun books. We don't believe Silk exists any more than we do Latro, but we accept that, within the context of that fictional world, Horn is writing an account of a real person. I see 'A Story' in the same light.

There is nothing to suggest that Silk is a fictional character invented by Horn, and such a reading would contribute nothing to the interpretation of the Long Sun books: all we would be able to say is that a person about whom we know nothing wrote a novel for some reason. Neither of these is true for "A Story."

But in either case, there's no need to believe in prehistoric starcrossers, or in Shadow Children telepathically shooping away spaceships.

Well, there's no need for Wolfe to have made the Croix\Anne system remain unknown "when planets more distant from Earth had been colonized for decades" either. Having the system so mysteriously overlooked doesn't contribute anything important to 'V.R.T.' (that I can think of).

It's not so mysterious. Exploration need not have proceeded in neat concentric spheres. Croix/Anne might have been ignored because distant observation made it seem an undesirable spot for colonization. (Mantis, iirc, suggested that the pink sun and longer year could indicate that the twin planets were on the edge of the life-supporting zone.)

And the overlooking reinforces the picture of Croix/Anne as a backwater colony, which adds to the book's political dimension and helps to explain Number Five's father's frustration and Victor's interrogator's inferiority complex and over-compensatory bluster vis-a-vis Earth.

The other thing about the prehistoric colonisation idea is that it gets raised in all three novellas. That makes me feel it's an idea we're supposed to consider seriously.

Note, though, that the OWO's list begins with two "homelands" which are at least literarily plausible, and proceeds to three which aren't: either too old, too known, or fictional (and then we have the enigmatic Country of Friends). It seems to me that the list is in this order to undercut the idea of prehistoric colonization: "Yeah, the Annese came from Atlantis--or was it Never-Never Land?"

I'd suggest that the idea is repeatedly brought up, not because we're supposed to consider it seriously, but because it's one way the colonists/Annese are trying to fabricate a distinguished history for themselves and their system (like Rome's invented descent from the Trojans). It's another instance of the theme of self-delusion which runs through the books.

--Adam

Tony Ellis — 05 May 2002, 18:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

Phoebe Davis wrote:

.I am in awe

that this gentleman, Tony Ellis, used a word that I had to look up. Thank you for tergiversation.

That was Andy Roberston. And it's 'tergiversation', I believe. :-)

And Adam Stephanides wrote:

But what Victor is doing within the world of 5HC is analogous to what Wolfe did in Soldier.

Only if you assume Victor is writing fiction. And if Wolfe wants us to assume that, why go to the bother of making Victor write a piece of fiction that has so many externally verifiable details in it? Why not put some obvious internal inconsistencies in it, the way he does with Victor's genuinely fictitious writing in 'V.R.T.'?

There is nothing to suggest that Silk is a fictional character invented by Horn, and such a reading would contribute nothing to the interpretation of the Long Sun books: all we would be able to say is that a person about whom we know nothing wrote a novel for some reason. Neither of these is true for "A Story."

So what _does_ the reading that 'A Story' is pure fiction contribute to 5HC? I'm open to persuasion, but I have yet to hear anyone come up with a plausible explanation as to why Wolfe should want to waste one third of a novel with a section in which we are expected to understand that nothing we are told happens actually happens.

And the overlooking reinforces the picture of Croix/Anne as a backwater colony, which adds to the book's political dimension and helps to explain Number Five's father's frustration and Victor's interrogator's inferiority complex and over-compensatory bluster vis-a-vis Earth.

The picture of Croix\Anne as a backwater colony hardly needs reinforcing. And why reinforce it with a fact that by a million-to-one chance just happens to reinforce a key incident in 'A Story'?

I'd suggest that the idea is repeatedly brought up, not because we're supposed to consider it seriously, but because it's one way the colonists/Annese are trying to fabricate a distinguished history for themselves and their system (like Rome's invented descent from the Trojans).

Number Five brings it up because he is under pressure from Mr Million to answer, and to wind up David who is sneakily reading 'Tales from the Odyssey '. Dr Marsch, who brings it up in 'V.R.T.', is neither a colonist nor Annese.

Andy Robertson — 05 May 2002, 17:35 · follows Tony Ellis

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

From: "Tony Ellis" <LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk>

Phoebe Davis wrote:

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that this gentleman, Tony Ellis, used a word that I had to look up. Thank
you for
tergiversation.

That was Andy Roberston. And it's 'tergiversation', I believe. :-)

For what it's worth - if you want to find a writer who uses "tergiversation", you must read Patrick O'Brien . . . almost as good as Gene Wolfe, but very different.

hartshorn

Adam Stephanides — 06 May 2002, 03:33 · follows Andy Robertson

on 5/5/02 1:20 PM, Tony Ellis at LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk wrote:

And Adam Stephanides wrote:

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Because that is what Victor would naturally do if he were writing a fiction about the Annese.

Why not put some
obvious internal inconsistencies in it, the way he does with Victor's
genuinely fictitious writing in 'V.R.T.'?

Presumably because he wants to portray Victor as a good writer of fiction, though a bad liar.

There is nothing to suggest that Silk is a fictional character invented by Horn, and such a reading would contribute nothing to the interpretation of the Long Sun books: all we would be able to say is that a person about whom we know nothing wrote a novel for some reason. Neither of these is true for "A Story."

So what _does_ the reading that 'A Story' is pure fiction contribute to 5HC?
I'm open to persuasion, but I have yet to hear anyone come up with a plausible explanation as to why Wolfe should want to waste one third of a novel with a section in which we are expected to understand that nothing we are told happens actually happens.

Assuming "A Story" is fiction, it serves several purposes. It contributes to the picture of Victor trying to "know himself" and to the theme of mythmaking. It may, as others have suggested, be a disguised autobiography. It certainly reinforces a number of themes found in other parts of the book.

But I don't claim to fully understand 5HC or "A Story's" place in it. My point above was simply that reading the Long Sun books as fictions by Horn is obviously a sterile reading, while the same is not true for reading "A Story" as a fiction.

I can turn the question around, though: why, if Wolfe wants us to believe in prehistoric starcrossers and Shadow Children telepathically hiding the St. Anne, does he put this information in a document entitled simply "A Story" whose purpose is unknown, and which is mostly fictional in any case (unless you believe that the oral tradition preserved all Sandwalker's words and thoughts)?

The picture of Croix\Anne as a backwater colony hardly needs reinforcing.
And why reinforce it with a fact that by a million-to-one chance just
happens to reinforce a key incident in 'A Story'?

Why a million-to-one chance? It's one of the facts Victor has incorporated into his story.

--Adam

Tony Ellis — 06 May 2002, 16:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:
reading the Long Sun books as fictions by Horn
is obviously a sterile reading, while the same is not true for reading "A
Story" as a fiction.

No? :-) I find the idea of 'A Story' as fiction incredibly sterile. Saying that Victor was trying to "know himself" may tell us why Victor wrote it, but it doesn't tell us why Wolfe did. Why waste his time and ours encoding all that information about which was the indigenous race and which the alien, and keep coming back to it and coming back to it throughout the story, and make us work so hard to piece it all together, if we're not supposed to take it seriously? There are better and easier ways to pad out two novellas to paperback size.

The picture of Croix\Anne as a backwater colony hardly needs reinforcing.
And why reinforce it with a fact that by a million-to-one chance just
happens to reinforce a key incident in 'A Story'?

Why a million-to-one chance? It's one of the facts Victor has incorporated
into his story.

A million-to-one chance because if all Wolfe wanted to do was reinforce the idea of the colony as a backwater -- which, as I say, is redundant anyway -- there were any number of ways to do it. Yet he chose one which implies that a key moment in 'A Story' actually happened.

And it's not Victor incorporating these external facts into 'A Story', it's Wolfe. He's the one actually choosing what words go in and what words are left out. And I can't believe he would put in elements that suggest 'A Story' really happened if we weren't supposed to entertain that idea - not when it's such a large part of the book, with so much important stuff said in it.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 06 May 2002, 16:28 · follows Tony Ellis

Tony E. wrote:
I find the idea of 'A Story' as fiction incredibly sterile.

<Shrug>. Wolfe uses fiction in his fiction all the time, Tony -- all the stuff from the "brown book," the story of Doctor Death, etc., etc. The puzzle is only to figure out what it's doing in this place. It's pretty clear why the story of Dr. Death is present in "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories"; it's a little less clear why the "brown book" stories are present in tBotNS, but there's no doubt in anyone's mind that they're fiction and that they're there for a good and sufficient reason. A Story by "John V. Marsch" is hard, hard, but I think it reasonable to suppose it may be fiction and there for a purpose.

Note I'm not saying it is fiction, just that, if it is, that's not a basically or inherently sterile concept.

Josh Geller — 06 May 2002, 17:02 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

On Mon, 6 May 2002, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:
... It's
pretty clear why the story of Dr. Death is present in "The Island of

Doctor Death and Other Stories"; it's a little less clear why the "brown book" stories are present in tBotNS, but there's no doubt in anyone's mind that they're fiction and that they're there for a good and sufficient reason.

They are not just fiction: they are myth. They express patterns of history in easily understood and transmissible terms.

'The Story Of The Student And His Son' is (among many other things) the story of the Monitor and the Virginia (the Merrimac: from the US civil conflict of the 1860's) overlaid upon the story of Theseus.

The one about the wolves and 'Fish and Frog' is (again, among many other things) an interplanetary war overlaid on the founding myth of Rome.

And in what we are please to call 'our world' the story of Alexander gets overlaid upon the story of Gilgamesh.

Wolfe is one of the very few modern writers who really understands the process by which this happens. Jack Vance is another.

They are both very much aware of how ancient the human species is, how far back its memories go.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 06 May 2002, 17:25 · follows Josh Geller

Josh G. points out that the "brown book" stories...

... are not just fiction: they are myth. They express patterns of history in easily understood and transmissible terms.

Well, yeah. I guess my point is that they are not _factual_ within the universe-of-discourse. And, naturally, one of the running theories regarding "A Story by 'John V. Marsch'" is that it's a mythic account of the coming of the settlers, from an Annese point of view.

With an ambiguity fairly typical of the book, the story, seen as a myth, credits non-human (non-abo) local beings - the Shadow Children
- with having caused the settlers to find and arrive at Ste-Anne;
but such myths frequently provide some culturally meaningful explanations for events and objects otherwise incomprehensible from within the cultural context. We cannot know whether the Shadow Children ever actually existed on Ste-Anne; nor, if they did, whether they were responsible for the non-discovery of the two worlds until that time; nor whether this is a 'real' Annese myth of the invasion, or something "John V. Marsch"/VRT has made up from whole cloth, or some combination; nor, whatever it is, why he's done it. This list has by now offered any number of speculations as to why VRT might have written a mythologized autobiography, transcribed a real myth, or created a synthetic myth; each explanation creates further problems with other aspects of 5HC.

The Le Guin "uncertainty" analogy is good. I think an even better analogy might be to Godel ... any reasonably consistent set of postulates you come up with regarding 5HC will leave some "unprovable truths," i.e., aspects of the book that you can't explain without invoking further postulates, and ultimately you need to bring in postulates inconsistent with ones already in place.

'The Story Of The Student And His Son' is (among many other things) the story of the Monitor and the Virginia (the Merrimac:

from the US civil conflict of the 1860's) overlaid upon the story of Theseus.

Yes, we discussed this a few weeks ago. I observed that the loser ruled over a Land of Virgins, i.e., Virginia.

The one about the wolves and 'Fish and Frog' is (again, among many other things) an interplanetary war overlaid on the founding myth of Rome.

Not to mention the stories of Mowgli (whose name, Kipling tells us, means "naked frog") and Moses...

And in what we are please to call 'our world' the story of Alexander gets overlaid upon the story of Gilgamesh.

I'm afraid I'm blanking on this.

Michael Straight — 06 May 2002, 19:30 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

On Sun, 5 May 2002, Tony Ellis wrote:

So what _does_ the reading that 'A Story' is pure fiction contribute to 5HC? I'm open to persuasion, but I have yet to hear anyone come up with a plausible explanation as to why Wolfe should want to waste one third of a novel with a section in which we are expected to understand that nothing we are told happens actually happens.

I'm undecided about whether 'A Story' is "true," but I'd like to take issue with your idea that it would be a waste if it weren't.

1. It's an entertaining novella on its own. Maybe not the best Wolfe ever wrote, but it could have been published by itself, and then the question of how it fits with the rest of 5HC would be moot. It wouldn't be any more fictional than anything else Wolfe has written.

2. If it's meant to be a fabrication of one of the characters in 5HC, then that should tell us something about the character who wrote it and perhaps something about others in the novel. Wolfe is often much more interested in getting inside the heads and hearts of his characters than he is in satisfying our curiosity about events. To Wolfe, the question, "What sort of story would this character make up?" might be much more interesting than the question "What really happened in the past on these planets?" If you were an alien wanting to understand humanity, would you rather read all of our history books, or all of our works of fiction?

See also the storytelling contest in _Citadel_.

-Rostrum

Adam Stephanides — 07 May 2002, 02:02 · follows Michael Straight

on 5/6/02 11:20 AM, Tony Ellis at LittleSense at necronomicon.co.uk wrote:
No? :-) I find the idea of 'A Story' as fiction incredibly sterile. Saying that Victor was trying to "know himself" may tell us why Victor wrote it, but it doesn't tell us why Wolfe did.

To indicate something about Victor's character, perhaps?

If the only purpose of "A Story" is to tell us about the prehistoric colonizations and the Shadow Children's shield, then having it take up sixty pages is a waste of space, whether it's true or not.

Why waste his time and ours encoding all that information about which was the indigenous race and which the alien, and keep coming back to it and coming back to it throughout the story, and make us work so hard to piece it all together, if we're not supposed to take it seriously?

To say that we're not supposed to believe it is not to say that it doesn't play an important role in the novel, either as Victor's invention or as an Annese myth. Ambiguity over who is human and who isn't is a major theme of 5HC.

--Adam

Tony Ellis — 07 May 2002, 18:58 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam Stephanides wrote:

If the only purpose of "A Story" is to tell us about the prehistoric colonizations and the Shadow Children's shield, then having it take up sixty pages is a waste of space, whether it's true or not.

Why yes, it would be, but then I don't think that is the only purpose of 'A Story'. It also serves to tell us a lot about Annese culture, among other things, and on top of that it's a rattling good yarn in its own right. But too great a proportion of it is taken up with the mystery of where the Annese came from and how they got here for me not take that element seriously.

This is also my problem with the perfectly valid point made by both Dan'l and Michael Straight, that Wolfe uses stories within his bigger stories all the time. My immediate response is "yes, but why this story?" Why, out of all the stories he could have written, write one that worries and worries away so specifically at the idea of an ancient, star-faring race of humans? It's not as if 'A Story' needs this subplot to be good fiction: take out the Old Wise One's tales, or make him talk about something else, and you would still have a fine Wolfean story-within-a-story.

Another issue is that ordinarily, Wolfean stories-within-stories only take up a fraction of the larger narrative: the fact that they are not in the same sense 'real' doesn't dilute that larger narrative. Writing 'A Story' as fiction, however, leaves a proportionally far larger chunk of 5HC with only an indirect and tenuous contribution to make to the whole. That doesn't feel right to me.