

(no subject)

The Urth list — 6 messages, 4 voices, 27 Jan 2005

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Broceliande27533 at aol.com — 27 Jan 2005, 12:33

I am a lurker who has so far been too shy to contribute, and nervous about initiating a debate about 5HC. I have read the many postings in the archives and wasn't sure that anyone was ready for another bout. Also, I have much to say, and was afraid, rightly, of starting and not being able to stop. And the connections in 5HC lead you on inexorably. I wrote to Jim because of his website and because I thought I had too much to say for a posting. But, Jim having (qu)o(u)ted me, and because I can for once put off what I am supposed to be doing today, here goes. And one thing has led to another. Inevitably many of the connections I see have personal meaning and may be accidental and I am aware that I have to be careful not to knit myself my own Gene Wolfe story rather than looking at the text. I agree that 5 HC is about genetic predation, (a great phrase which I gladly adopt): about the "Victory" of technologically advanced peoples and thus their genes at the expense of others less technologically advanced, as a result of human migration (assisted in Earth's case by disease, which is not an issue that GW deals with in 5HC: perhaps because if he had described lots of the Annese expiring as a result of the common cold this might have indicated earth origin). And the question of whether the Annese or the colonists are the Victors is a central unanswered and probably unanswerable question in 5HC. Per Aunt Jeannine, is genetic predation "the explanation for the cruelty and irrationality (he) sees all around him?" 5HC, is of course, also about evolution, and I suppose genetic predation as an aspect of evolution. It has already been commented that the spiral staircase in the library is a reference to the double helix, (early 50's I think: and Watson's book came out in the 60's). I have never been able to make sense of the key to the library. Is it the key to the genetic code?

I know nothing about General Wolfe and Quebec, but I have travelled in the Pacific North West and the Caribbean, where I have been very conscious of the presence and absence of the autochthonous population, and I am very aware of the French particularly Napoleonic presence in the Caribbean. Also very aware of the Irish presence in the New World: indeed in Alaska where autochthonous people survived better than anywhere else (because, I was told, it was impossible for Europeans to survive without Native expertise, and because there was little or no competition for farming land), many of the Native Americans that I met also had Irish ancestry, just as it is suggested that Trenchard has Irish ancestry. (I think it is very interesting by the way that Borski's suggestion that Trenchard Sr's name is "Roy" has been so readily taken up: it feels right, doesn't it? And of course Roy also means King. Borski suggests that he is the Annese shaman "Twelvewalker" and RT says he is the descendant of Eastwind (or Sandwalker become Eastwind: Eastwind being castrated) To me "long house" suggested Native American architecture even though the description does not fit. But GW intended I think to leave all kinds of resonant echoes of what happened in all sorts of places on our world.. The persistence of Native American/First Nations place names has also struck me (that's another theme in 5HC). Also, in England, Celtic place names e.g. — Afon?, "Derwent". The Celts are another people subject to genetic predation from migrating groups, but as I argue below, they can be regarded as once having been genetic predators themselves. Wolfe as a Midwesterner

must also be acutely aware of vanished peoples and surviving place names. I agree that pagan themes and the myths of Europe and the Mediterranean are extremely important in GW. I am not surprised that he has read Graves. I guessed that: certainly from? Soldier?, but perhaps from 5HC too. The sacred trees and waters of the Annese are an important theme, as is the ring of trees. Sacred trees and waters appear to have been a key element of Celtic or perhaps preCeltic religion (see Darrah, below) and circular structures were constructed, probably as observatories, by Neolithic and Bronze age peoples in significant quantities. If I am right about my theory that the Celtic reference is also a reference to human migration and conquest, then, Graves, who theorises at length in *The White Goddess* about population movements into Britain and Ireland and religious change, is perhaps relevant in 5HC. The BBC website suggests that the word "Celtic" has no cultural, racial or even linguistic meaning at all in the history of the Iron Age. But at the time when 5HC was written the view was that the Celts came from Central Europe, and spread East and West and that "Gal" names are Celtic (e.g. Wales (Gwalia), Gael, Galicia, Galatia, Gaul). Graves wrote that there were three waves of Celts, Brythons, Goidels and Belgii, starting in about 1000 BC, each of whom conquered, pushed Westwards and subsumed existing pre-Celtic cultures. It was also thought that before then there had been many previous conquests by waves of Neolithic and then Bronze age invaders which had each obliterated or replaced the earlier culture with or without great population change. That view was I think current and may still be current. There is a legend that the Brythons (Britons) were refugees from the Trojan war under Aeneas' grandson Brut. But people often invent interesting foreign origins for themselves, just as, maybe, the Annese did. Graves suggests that Tuatha de Danaan may have had links with the Danaeans of pre-classical Greece before they ended up in Ireland from Spain. David is reading *Tales from the Odyssey*: I read that as a joke about ?2001- A Space Odyssey?, which came out in 1968 I think, and therefore a double reference to the Homeric Greeks as space travellers. The Homeric Greeks are also supposed to have invaded Greece during the Bronze Age and conquered and suppressed the pre Indo European inhabitants and imposed their patriarchal religious beliefs on a matriarchal religious system. So at the time when 5HC was written, in 1972, Wolfe would have been entitled to assume that the Celts had effectively replaced the earlier inhabitants of Britain and Ireland and obliterated and replaced their culture. Indeed so successful is the Celtic tradition that it is usually assumed that Stonehenge was built by and worshipped in by the Druids (certainly a late iron age "Celtic" priesthood) and the Neolithic and Bronze age builders thus entirely forgotten. Welsh Scottish and Irish languages traditions and culture have in fact survived remarkably over 2,000 years considering the pressure on them. That Westwards pressure precipitated the successful Scottish/Irish/Welsh Diaspora into the New World.. So GW is in my view presenting the Celts of Wales, Ireland and Scotland as — Gene Wolves?. The connection between pre-Roman religious themes and the Arthur and Grail legends has been explored by many writers. In particular it has long been suggested that the battle between the brothers (5HC again) Balin (Beli) and Balan (Bran) at the ford is a combat theme which is part of the "Nemetón" cult- see Frazer's *The Golden Bough*: which I assume GW has read, and I bet Jessie L Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, et al. If any subscriber on this list has an interest in this area I recommend John Darrah's "The Real Camelot" and — Paganism in Arthurian Romance? for a rigorously researched and presented argument that the Grail Romances and the Matter of Britain contain many references to Bronze age religious practices and cult figures in the Matter of Britain, transmitted orally as "a bronze age oral literature" akin to Homer (5HC again), and including identifiable references to the moving of the Bluestone circle from Prescelli to Stonehenge. Graves is also very interesting on the links between the "Celtic" and Norse Gods (Gwydion/Odin/Woden). I think in 1972 toolmaking was considered to be the defining characteristic of Hom Sap. It was thought that tools came first, brains later. Not sure that that is still the case. For instance, the following have been suggested

- Big brains developed because of language, and maybe singing too,
- not tool making. Quite little monkeys and money-like beings use and even make primitive tools, as do birds (who are incidentally quite like us in some ways, particularly in

courtship and pair bonding and selective promiscuity)

- Language, music art and culture are all to do with reproductive advantages and courtship: they developed early and before tool making
- Baskets and woven containers and other things which have perished are just as important and perhaps more so than edged tools and weapons. With a basket you can carry the food and with a sling you can carry the baby.
- Human migration took place along coastlines by the beachcomber routes: nets and baskets etc absolutely essential, big stone hatchets not so useful: and you don't need fire to eat shellfish. Fish is crucial to brain development. Some human groups may still not use fire (e.g. the Andaman islanders)
- The development of more sophisticated tools came after our brains got big
- You don't need tools to produce art including painting: hands are quite sufficient: indeed hands prints are an important part of Palaeolithic art
- Language and grammar and the speech centre of the brain developed first of all through communication through use of hands and only afterwards did oral speech develop
- We are hardwired to acquire language
- We evolved as walkers, not runners
- Human males may be hardwired to respond to the female "waist hip ratio": thus Marsch/Victor, reviled for sexism in the passage "all the things we consider beautiful in a woman are merely criteria for her own survival, and thus the survival of the children we shall father in her" (and then a reference to Darwin), is actually making an important evolutionary point
- It is big brains that make human childbirth so hazardous: "The first birth kills or none," says Cedar Branches Waving's grandmother. I would add: big brains permit knowledge of good and evil: thus Eve and "In sorrow thou shall bring forth children".

So GW seems to present very sound anthropological views, whether he intended to or not.

I would also add that hands have many essential functions that must predate tool using and construction. You can't care for a human baby, even a naked one, without hands with fingers and an opposable thumb. It can't cling. At first it can't suckle without help from human hands. Hands also have an important role in courtship and sexual activity, and a symbolic role too: think of the wedding ceremonies: rings and so on.

You could say that tool making is really irrelevant to what it means to be human. It is however the first step to technology, and technologically created humans, which is also what 5HC is about.

The cat (another Marquis of Carabas reference) is a talking animal. As in Narnia, animals that speak have souls: animals that don't speak don't have souls also apropos the prisoner "I see an animal's mask: but I have always known that I do not speak like the others, but only make certain sound in my mouth-sounds enough like human speech to pass the Running Blood ears that hear me, sometimes I do not even know what I have said, only that I have dug my hole and passed to run singing into the hills". (And then a reference to hearing the shovels scraping and the dead being buried in the cathedral above him).

I do not know what evidence, if any, Wolfe relies on to support the existence of or survival into the 18th C in Scandinavia and Ireland of Palaeolithic

Caucasoid pygmies who came to be called the Good People. (Rosemary Sutcliffe, children's historical writer, (has Wolfe read her?) suggests this in ?Knights Fee, and I think I have seen it suggested elsewhere : she herself was much influenced by Kipling. Scandinavia and Ireland are prime territories for myth. But now there is Homo Florensis, who made me think of the Shadow

Children. There was an article in the British magazine The Spectator on 6th November 04 entitled 'Do little people go to heaven?'. It asks about whether, if H.F. were rational animals, they would have had immortal souls, or whether this is restricted to Hom. Sap. It concludes 'But would the Floresians be fallen creatures, like the children of Adam, or still walking in unsevered friendship with god. CS Lewis wrote about the unfallen Martians in Out of the Silent Planet? If the Floresians were fallen creatures, how would they be redeemed? Wolfe's point entirely. Did someone say that 5 HC was like a play in 3 Acts? There was some discussion a way back about a film of The New Sun books and who would play what. I thought about a film of 5HC, and decided that it would not work: too obvious a medium, too little room for ambiguity, or the ambiguity would make it incomprehensible. But, if certain technical difficulties were overcome, it would make a remarkably good opera. And nowadays there is any number of young, (and indeed old) skinny athletic singers around to appear in Act 2. Its difficult to see a production at ENO (English National Opera) where the cast keep their clothes on nowadays so I'm sure it could be played au naturel without embarrassment. And you could have the same cast singing different roles in each of the three acts.

"How long was human prehistory on mother earth. One million years" Some would say 10 million. (Bones of my fathers). (I see and hear this as Victor's final aria, with the ENO chorus as shadow children). And talking of opera: I haven't read The Wizard Knight, but is Wolfe by any chance a Wagnerian? Was struck by several references in the postings to similar themes. And there is Marquis of Carabas reference in Rheingold which is others based firmly on Norse and German myth. Whatever you think of his politics, or opera in general, Wagner's reworking of the Norse myths in the Ring is extremely interesting for a folklorist, (see Deryck Cooke's (mailto:Cooke@s) "I saw the World End" which is worth reading quite apart from the Wagnerian element if you are interested in Teutonic myth generally). That is all for now, and I thank you for your patience if you have got this far, but one thing led to another, and I shall go back to less pleasant tasks, and, when I have time, privately, to annotating 5HC, and my evidential analysis of the questions:-

1. What is the evidence for and against the existence of the Annese,
 2. Is Veil's hypothesis correct?
 2. Did Victor become Marsch, or did Marsch become Victor, or is the prisoner a syncretisation of the two?
- Anyone up for writing a libretto?

Judith P

maru — 27 Jan 2005, 13:13 · in reply to Broceliande27533 at aol.com

I am kind of curious- what does the Marquis de Carabas have to with Teutonic derived myth? I coulda sworn that that particular fairy tale was French, derived possibly from the Mideast, but most famously making appearances in various 18 & 19 c. anthologies.

~Maru

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James Wynn — 27 Jan 2005, 13:21 · in reply to Broceliande27533 at aol.com

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Hmmmm...I hadn't thought of the possible point Wolfe may be making about humanity and the ability to use tools. Is he asking whether the Annese's inability to use tools prevents them from being human regardless of how closely they mimic us?

Is Wolfe taking on the Turing requirements for Artificial Intelligence [if a machine is convincingly human enough, then it is self-aware] and applying them to Biology?

maru — 27 Jan 2005, 13:32 · in reply to James Wynn

This doesn't actually have anything to do with the issue, but I've always thought the true subtlety of the Turing test usually goes unappreciated: What the Turing Test asserts is that there is no way to perform all the operations of intelligence, in any way simpler and more mechanical than actual intelligence. Intelligence is incompressible, if you will. Or, intelligence is defined extensionally, not intentionally. Oh wait, I've thought of a point: Tool-using is a skill. Not intelligence in and of itself. So, when you test AI, do you ask it to use an inclined plane, pulley and other bric-a-brac to prove its intelligence, or do you test its imaginativeness and other logical potential?

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Chris — 27 Jan 2005, 14:24 · in reply to maru

Well, with regard to 5HC note that if the idea that abos can't use tools, then Veil's hypothesis seems hopelessly naive. Does Veil know something (ie, that popular wisdom is wrong and abos can use tools) that others do not? She did spend some time studying her subject. Perhaps the second and third novellas are naive, based on a folktale conception of the abos. If *that* were the case, then in all likelihood V.R.T. is not an abo, but would like to imply that he is.

With regard to Turing, what you just described is basically a semantic struggle. Defining

intelligence, as you say, "extensionally" (although this really isn't quite right, I see what you're trying to say). "If it looks like a duck, and quacks like a duck..." To which Searle can be seen volleying (again, mostly semantically): no, it doesn't matter what it looks like, intelligence is the product of a specific biological process and machines can't have it, by definition, no matter what they do or "say". The part that any empirical test or evidence plays in this debate is much smaller than it might appear. The empirical test, of course, appears as a product of having already accepted Turing's position.

I think that ultimately the tool-using test you're talking about, if implemented in a way that actually worked, would be more or less the same as a standard test. Here you would have to be concerned with what constitutes a "use" of a tool, and be able to quantify between more and less intelligent uses for the tool, which involves "imaginativeness" and "logical potential". Not to mention that sometimes it is more intelligent not to use a tool than to use it. (And language is as good a tool as any...)

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maru — 27 Jan 2005, 15:04 · in reply to Chris

To which the hoary old Oriental Sun-Tzu replies: 'To win without winning; that could be called a win.' Not needing to use a tool is the highest use tools. Or, Not-use is not the same as not using. And as far as Searle goes, I think he falls into the trap of the No-true-Scotsman fallacy: But he talks like a Scot, eats like a Scot, looks like one what with the kilt and hair, his parents and grand-parents were Scots...' 'Bah! He's no true Scotsman.' Which is to say, he practically says that intelligence is something that biologicals do, and obviously no Turing machine can be biological, QED AI is a delirious fantasy. Or, historically, intelligence is a unique product of a unique world-history and evolutionary sequence, therefore no machine.... etc. One last thing: tools aren't really a good test: they too are extensional: remember, intelligent beings can use

tools, but so can mere mammals like anteaters and monkeys, and certain birds can even evolve their technology/tools. So a better test would be to try to test the capacity that allows tool use.

~Maru

It's been entirely too long since I read 5HC; take my words with a grain of salt- preferably sea salt, better flavour.

Chris wrote:

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