

Fifth Head of Cerberus Part 2 of 2

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Mar 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6352>

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Marc Aramini — 24 Mar 2013, 05:22

PETER WRIGHT AND COLONIAL THEORY:

Wright stresses the inability to differentiate between colonizer and colonized in his essay

“Confounding the Skin and the Mask:

?Disappointingly, it took twelve years for another critic to capitalise on Sargent’s reading and readdress the political dimensions of the text. Albert Wendland’s *Science, Myth, and the Fictional Creation of Alien Worlds* (1985) treats *The Fifth Head of Cerberus* as a narrative raising ?questions over identity” and “personal morality” and, more significantly perhaps, concerning “methods of government” which are “complex and impressive.” Wendland’s argument not only focuses on “the reversed outlook of object [aborigine] onto subject [coloniser].but also the complicated interaction of object and subject, and the inability to untangle the two” that Wolfe effects through his carefully balanced deployment of ambiguity. Importantly, Wendland recognises that “such ambiguity not only questions the certainty of most SF conclusions (the defining of the universe by the SF human explorers, the determination of the object by the subject),

but also the whole concept of certainty itself, especially the assumed, self-contained and separate integrity of individual subjects.” Although Wendland does not undertake a consistent postcolonial reading, he is aware that Wolfe’s examination of these admittedly “abstract matters” is contextualised by setting — Sainte Croix and Sainte Anne are both Earth colonies — and by Wolfe’s treatment of the complex interaction between human colonist and aborigine. “The new regime’s domination is so strong that the old race, in order to survive must imitate the ways of the new rulers, become like them”, Wendland remarks, associating implicitly the physical mimicry of the Annese with the cultural mimicry found amongst many colonised peoples. Despite the pertinence of this observation, Wendland remains unwilling to apply a postcolonial critique to a text so clearly amenable to such discourse. Hence, there is a need to reconsider the narrative in

the light of postcolonial theories in order to illuminate the possible purposes and consequences of Wolfe’s elaborate and mesmerising textual puzzle. However, even at this stage it is important to understand that the existence of the puzzle is more significant than its solution, since the puzzle is where the political arguments of the novel can be found.

MY RESPONSE To which I say, if we look at the interplay of all those interviewed in the text, the reason that this “impossibility” to distinguish is actually a farce. The difference between Sandwalker and Eastwind is empirically EASY TO SPOT — it does seem that a brief bit of dialogue indicates Eastwind has NO TESTICLES, when a girl points and laughs at him and then he claims that it is bound by woman’s hair until it putrefies, though the reference is not 100% clear and he might just be plucking his facial hair every day. The difference between Marsch and the boy who takes is place is also easy — those green eyes and a complete inability to use the rifle properly. The ambiguity comes in identifying who is the conqueror. The French come down to conquer and are soon repressed by some unknown force (is it English? Not sure). In the discourse of the Wise Old One who cannot distinguish between men as Shadowchildren, the Free People, or those

colonists, it is pretty clear that the reason for this is ALL THE LIFE STEMS FROM A COMMON ORIGIN, save perhaps that of the pink seeds in the leaves. [I wonder if the mite that spins its

weave and, if it winds up inside workers of the mat, is related to St. Anne life, as those aborigines are great with ropes and suck with tools — could the small mite be important? Dollo's law is brought up (once a species loses the use of something it doesn't come back, he has to adapt a new way to do the same thing) is almost certainly because the offhand colonization from ancient terrestrial stock and differentiation/regression/hybridity back to an animalistic place has happened. Both the stagnation of cloning in St. Croix and the interbreeding and hybridization of St. Anne has gone a long way to dehumanizing the worlds — St. Croix is a place that doesn't change, nor does it move, St. Anne a place that is too changeable and fluctuates with no base into the animal kingdom, so adaptable that it lacks identity.

I really like Wright's point here: "Through the interaction of Mr Million, Number Five's father, and Number Five who are, after all, one and the same person, Wolfe appears to be advocating hybridity, diversity, and cultural exchange by showing the stifled and stifling stasis that opposes it. In many ways Maison du Chien, 666 Saltimbanque, is a rambling metaphor for cultural isolationism, on the one hand, and imperialism on the other since the act of cloning and the process of hypnopaedia are symbolic representations of colonial occupation and re-education."

I also like his points on hybridity: "Hence, the biological chameleon becomes a cultural chameleon; the shapeshifter an ideal anthropologist, an individual possessing the intelligence and insight to understand cultures alien to himself. Accordingly, the menace embodied by Marsch-Trenchard takes the form of his ability to outperform the colonial figure — Marsch — at every level. His "development" as a character is a consequence, then, not of his mimicry, but of an increasing hybridity, a furthering of his own racial heterogeneity.

In addition, he makes excellent points about "counting" the abos as human:

WRIGHT: "This is not to say that various characters do not try to construct a colonial discourse. David, Number Five's son-come-brother, remarks how it is imperative to see the aborigines as human because, "If they were alive it would be dangerous to let them be human because they would ask for things, but with them dead it makes it more interesting if they were, and the settlers killed them all." 17 In other words, if the aborigines are believed to be extinct, it is safe to consider them as human. However, if they are deemed to be still extant, to advocate their humanity would be to admit they would "ask for things", that is be humanly materialistic, and demand a basic level of human rights. We see this attitude repeated by East Wind in his treatment of the Shadow Children, by Mrs. Blount and Dr. Hagsmith, who see the Annese as animals.

And finally, his conclusion:

"This is the final tragedy of the collection: the solitary hybrid, untrammelled by contact with other individuals during his sojourn on Sainte Anne, understanding more than any other character about society, governance and individual and interracial interaction, is denied. His incarceration is the imprisonment of a free spirit enchained physically, spiritually and emotionally by those who suspect and fear difference. The captive John V. Marsch/Victor Trenchard, alone in his benighted cell, is the final, emotive image Wolfe provides of the actions of a species whose poisonous character holds them, like the successive clones of Mr Million's personality, on a becalmed ship, fearing to embrace the possibilities of an empowering personal and cultural transformation.

Yet Wright's excellent article is still ignoring something important — that both of these places, the mutable hybrid and the stagnant clone, still seem to be leading to a place of moral bankruptcy and murder.

And this is where Borski strikes a very true note, in his article which responds to it, which I am quoting at length because it is just RIGHT:

BORSKI'S RESPONSE: "[the original Marsch] does seem intrigued by the trophy-like nature of the carabao he kills, and takes a shot or two at a following farmcat, but in the latter case he desists when he sees how much this upsets Victor and tells the boy that if he can get the animal

into camp he can keep it as a pet. Contrast this compassion and sensibility with the far more murderous tendencies of Victor, who kills not only human John Marsch, but the abo girl he has rendezvoused with in the back of beyond? who respectively represent each of the two worlds which he should be trying to understand and assimilate as tyro anthropologist, not reduce through violence. Victor, in addition, seems unusually hostile to women, at one point seeking in his prison diary to justify why men find well-endowed women more desirable than their scrawnier sisters, at another imagining Celeste Etienne masturbating with a candle. He also believes he was abandoned by his

mother after she witnessed him having intercourse, and expresses no regret at having left his destitute father behind to fend for himself. Surely, with biases like this no compulsions about murder, issues with female sexuality, toxic familial relationships? Victor Trenchard falls far short of the idealized observer Wright posits*, and actually deserves punishment for his more serious crimes, even if the authorities on Sainte Croix are imprisoning him for all the wrong reasons. At least unlike another fictional intellectualized monster, Hannibal Lector? Victor is where he belongs.

Then there's also the signally high level of mimesis between Number Five and Victor Trenchard. Wright, of course, fails to mention this, and perhaps rightly so, given the operative paradigms and central thrust of his arguments. But the plain truth of the matter is that there are so many correspondences between the two men that it's hard to believe Wolfe wants us to see them as different, being in fact, if not each other's shadow, then nearly the same character. The following list is probably not exhaustive, but I think it clearly delineates this critical point that Victor Trenchard and Number Five are symbolic twins, with life circumstances and ultimate fates irrevocably linked:

- 1) Victor is born to Three Faces, a sometimes prostitute, who later abandons him; Number Five, according to Aunt Jeannine, has probably been carried in utero by one of the house girls at 666 Saltimbanque, and also grows up motherless.
- 2) Both Number Five and V.R.T. have the number five connected with them. (V = 5 in Roman Numerals).
- 3) Both bear names that must be decrypted. Number Five's real name is Gene Wolfe, and V.R.T. is Victor R. Trenchard. If the "R" of his middle name is Rodman, as some people have suggested, this is an additional correspondence, being author Gene Wolfe's middle name, furthering the autobiographical conjunction between the two.
- 4) Number Five is the physical clone of his father; Victor is the nominal clone of his, both p?re and fils bearing the aforesaid "R".
- 5) Both Number Five and Victor declaim about the importance of fishing nets to the Free People.
- 6) Atop the pleasure garden of Cave Canem, Number Five spies on a patron** frolicking with a "nymph du bois" in a private grotto; in the back of beyond John Marsch imagines Victor frolicking in secret with his own nymph du bois.
- 7) Both men have scholarly, scientific minds.
- 8) Both men kill alternate versions of themselves? Number Five, his father, with whom, as a clonal son, he's isogenetic; Victor, his mentor John Marsch.
- 9) Number Five plans on impersonating Maitre after he kills him (although we do not hear if he carries this out); Victor successfully assumes the identity of murdered John Marsch.
- 10) Number Five has a dream about confining Corinthian pillars in a paved court, the Annese equivalent of which ("woodhenge") Victor sees in the back of beyond.
- 11) Number Five, in a detention camp, sees robot guards go berserk, firing upon prisoners; Victor dreams about the same incident, with berserk robots firing upon him in "a vast deserted courtyard surrounded by colonnades."
- 12) Both Number Five and Victor Trenchard are initially arrested as suspects in the same foul deed the murder of Maitre.
- 13) Victor Trenchard is being held by the authorities on the possibility that he may be a spy for Sainte Anne; Maitre (Number Five's alter ego) is a spy.
- 14) Both men are served barley soup while imprisoned.

15) Number Five and Victor Trenchard's lives are linked by the recurring image of the trumpet vine, mentioned at the beginning of the titular novella which recounts Number Five's story, and referenced again at the conclusion of "V.R.T.?", which tells Victor Trenchard's, in essence making of them a single tale.

Now, given how Number Five's life turns out?tragically, he repeats his father's excesses, from patricide to imminent abuse of his own son (if this were a Greek tragedy, surely his name would be Teutamides (Greek: "Son of he who repeats himself"))?and how sympathetically resonant it has been with that of his shadow twin, Victor Trenchard it seems very hard to find anything triumphal in V.R.T.'s demise.

What Borski has said in this super long quote is perfect — the two characters are mirrors of each other, even dreaming realistically in their "otherness". I don't? see VRT at all as a positive character as Wright does. Both extremes, the capricious assimilation of all that they aborigines symbolize, and the frigid stagnation of St. Croix, both lead to the pit of hell.

CONNECTION WITH SHORT SUN:

We have a world of corruption and stagnation. Lots of similarities.

Sentient trees. Hybridization. Confused Identities. Blue and Green binary planets. Different alien species that seem to rely on imitating or stealing identity from others (inhumi, abos). I think there is evidence that both Vanished People and Inhumi are the vestiges of humanity, as these Shadow Children and abos are as well. Man with Four arms.

Differences: these abos don't seem to ingest their "victims" as the inhumi and the trees do in Short Sun.

Why am I so certain they are different? The resonance between Urth and the Blue/Green system is too strong for me. St Croix and St. Anne just don't seem galactically important enough — their struggle is more individual than the theme in Short Sun of returning home only to find that it no longer suits you. The theme of Fifth Head of Cerberus is very different. The man with four arms is surgically created here.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS:

In general, these are my conclusions — the main character in every section dies in one way or another — Number Five kills himself in his father, but that ending, "someday they will want us" is ominous; there is every indication the cycle of fraudulence will continue in the maggots sewers of the city of mimicry behind the doors to hell guarded by Cerberus. Sandwalker, with his feet on the ground, is the aborigine who is killed. The aborigines were actually once human and are trying to be that again, but Dollo's law has made them adapt back in a different way to using tools. The shadow children are different — they are mental constructs to some degree, and the trees or projections of those leaves, I think, which are still somehow transubstantially hybridizing, perhaps mentally through the chewed leaves with their pink eggs. (The story of Cinderwalker shows him making a woman who loses her arm into two women, one with a human arm and an abo

body, the other with a human body and an abo arm — this is some funky hybridization right here, and I think thematically similar to what Number Five is doing in creating viable frog generations from an unfertilized sex cell — those chewed leaves with their pink eggs MUST be something with that creative "godlike" force, because it was said, when they were being chewed, no more need for women and the chewer was "like God". Demiurgic?

Eastwind is the one who survives, as the later tale corroborates. There is a scene where the first Frenchmen at the landing site are supposedly greeted by Trenchard's ancestor Eastwind (though Trenchard is obviously deluded about his origin and is merely imitating an aborigine and supplementing his income by making fake tools.)

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: WHO HAS COLONIZED AND SUBJUGATED THE FRENCH? Almost certainly not the aborigines. Given the confusion of the Wise Old One about who was a man and who wasn't, and his confusion of past and present, this does seem as if there was an ancient colonization of terrestrial stock to the planet. How?

[Eastwind is the twin who survives, I am sure)

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE PLASTIC TOOLS OF THE ABOS M.MILLION ASKS THE CHILDREN TO DISCUSS? Trenchard tries to sell his forgeries, David and Number Five talk about how they weren't important and nets and stuff were, but geez, can they even use tools? The boy VRT can use complicated ropes, the captors in the second novella use liana vines as ropes to lower their victims, and Number Five does imply that the nets and poisons would have been more important than tools, but why are there even tools on St. Anne if the abos couldn't use them unless it implies earlier colonization from Gondwanaland?

DOES VRT REALLY KILL HIS CATWOMAN OR IS IT MARSCH WHO DOES SO?

In the final analysis, objective identification seems pretty easy, it is the individual who cannot know himself. The overwhelming negative imagery of Port Mimizon and the street names certainly indicates that something truly horrific and hellish has transpired, and is still transpiring. There are no happy endings in Fifth Head of Cerberus, both stagnation and imitation lead to an unsavory fate.

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"" +
"",templates: {"N":"" +
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{nblfr.style.display = "none";}if (northBanner) { northBanner.style.display = "none";}}());

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iframeHandle.style.display='none';\n }\n })();", "\nif(window.yzq_d=null)window.yzq_d=new Object();\nwindow.yzq_d['VNzd1mKL5R8-']='&U□clf30hc%2fN%3dVNzd1mKL5R8-%2fC%3d-1%2fD%3dMIP6%2fB%3d-1%2fV%3d0';\n", "true");}
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injectHtml("REC", "\n.can_ad_slug {font-family:arial;font-size:11px;color:#999;text-decoration:none;background-image:url('http://ads.yimg.com/hl/a/optimized/adchoice_1.png');background-re
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}\n\n\n\nAdChoices\n\n\n", "\nif(window.xzq_d=null)window.xzq_d=new Object();\nwwindow.xzq_
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var targetWindow = window;
if (targetWindow) {
var e;
try {
var fn;
if (targetWindow.YAHOO && targetWindow.YAHOO['a'+ 'd'+ 's'] &&
targetWindow.YAHOO['a'+ 'd'+ 's'].darla)
fn = targetWindow.YAHOO['a'+ 'd'+ 's'].darla._loaded;
if (fn && (typeof fn = 'function'))
fn (emitted);
} catch (e) { document.write ("") }
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Y=S.xzq_d;if(Y=null){return }if(J=null){return }var T=J+M;if(T.length>P){C();return }var
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engthP){}}else{U++;N(T,X,U,W);X=Y[R]}} }if(U){U++}N(T,X,U,W);C());function
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RegExp("\\\\\\\\([ ^\\\\\\\\])*\\\\\\\\"));Y=(Y[1].length>0?Y[1]:"e");T=T.replace(new
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