

The lady in pink

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 25 May 1998

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Robert Borski — 25 May 1998, 16:14

It's time I finished my long-running genealogical investigation of Sainte Croix's House of Wolfe, as depicted in GW's masterwork THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS.

Having in previous posts attempted to link Phaedria to the House of Wolfe as Number Five's long lost sister (a contention I now have much additional evidence for), I'd like to expand now on David, Number Five's known half-brother. Specifically, I hope to determine who his mother might be.

As Aunt Jeannine surmises to Number Five in regards to David's maternity, Maitre "must have used one of my girls." She must then be or have been a prostitute.

We also have David's eye color: blue. Because Maitre's eyes are brown, his mother must therefore have blue eyes. I've written on this at length in an earlier post (v.9), but again would like to emphasize this point: in FIFTH HEAD eye color is of signal importance. In fact, if you look at only the characters whose eye color is listed in the entire novel, you will glean that except for two women each listee is explicitly related to another major character. Other characters are given other identifying characteristics, but never eye color, and several of these play substantial roles in the narrative. The maid Nerissa is chief among these, appearing in a number of scenes, but I also include Urania, Marydol and Mme. Duclose.

Another potent clue, I believe, is relayed to us by Number Five, who discusses a mysterious "lady in pink," who is mentioned not once, but thrice, if always in the same context. She is the pretty woman he meets in his father's library at a very young age, and who tells him Maitre has written many of the books present. Later, we learn the presence of any woman in his father's library is extremely unusual. As Number Five notes on re-encountering Dr. Marsch in the library, "I was surprised to see him, and even more surprised to see one of the girl's in my father's library." Clearly, this indicates the lady in pink is someone special.

There is also another telling clue, I believe, when in a single earlier paragraph, Number Five not only brings up the lady in pink again, but also himself, David, Mr. Million and a spiraling walkway he denotes as a "helix." Barry Scheck notwithstanding, I warrant this links all four figures genetically.

These then provided me with the clues I hoped to use in determining David's maternity. His mother would have to be a blue-eyed prostitute dressed in pink.

I found her in VRT, the third novella in FHofC.

She lives in the same boarding house as Marsch/VRT and she is the woman identified as Celestine Etienne.

How do we know she is or was a prostitute? Wolfe describes her exactly as he describes the

demimondaines of the Maison du Chien. I.e., she is "exceedingly tall, her legs stiltlike in their elongation." Compare this with Number Five's description of the whores who come to see his play, with "their elongate shadows" or the prostitute he sees leaving the library, whose legs are "grotesquely long."

We also have an image of vulgarity associated with her. Marsch/VRT, coming home late from an evening at the Maison du Chien, imagines her masturbating with a candle (Marsch, of course, being the son of a prostitute, and having killed at least one girlfriend, is anything but a simple misogynist).

It's also later revealed by the junior officer assigned to decide Marsch's fate that CE is spying for the government and that Maitre himself is a "GSPB Class AA Correspondent Espion." (Shades of Crane-Hyacinth!) Surely, it would not be unusual for a spymaster to recruit fellow spys from among the whores he employs, and maybe it is even a step up from simple prostitution, something he might have wanted to do for Celestine, especially if he had any affection, latent or otherwise, for her.

As for Celestine Etienne's eye color, it is blue-purple.

Not only is this consistent with her being the mother of David, but also the mother of Phaedria, whose eyes are violet. (Remember my stating only two characters with listed eye colors did not seem to be explicitly related to major figures? They are Celestine and Phaedria). Moreover, I believe it would be entirely consonant with the novel's themes for us to suppose that David and Phaedria may even have been twins. (Lest one think this is an example of *geminus-ex-machina*, keep in mind that FHofC is replete with twins/doubles, from real {Sandwalker/Eastwind} to clonal {Maitre/#5} to virtual {Marsch/VRT} to nomenclatural {2 Robert Culots} to planetary {Ste.Croix/Ste.Anne} to animal {2 crippled monkeys}). Perhaps having an outcrossed son to work with, Maitre was perfectly comfortable selling Phaedria, or feared she may become like the earlier outcrossed daughter, his "sister" Jeannine (both Phaedria and Jeannine share the same avarice).

Other possible links are etymological. If Etienne=Stephen='a crown,' and Aubrey (Jeannine's alter-ego)='elf +ruler,' this might be one indication. Celestine, I believe, refers to her eye color, but for all I know there may be a passage in Samuel where David is called "the anointed son of Heaven" or something similar.

The final, if not conclusive, clue?

When Celestine Etienne first comes to visit Marsch/VRT in prison, she's wearing a pink dress.

Robert Borski (who has now begun to distill all of his thoughts and theories about FHofC--and I have plenty--into a monograph tentatively entitled *Cave Canum*--watch for future announcements)

m.driussi — 26 May 1998, 05:13 · follows Robert Borski

Robert Borski,

You =better= write something!

To help you in that direction, I'd like to be the first to remind you that the mysterious, maybe-prostitute "lady in pink" is a =very= Proustian detail that I didn't notice before (guess I should re-read 5HC soon).

In Proust's work (REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST, aka IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME), the "lady in pink" is connected with Marcel's Uncle Adolphe. On a surprise visit to his uncle, young Marcel blunders into their still-decorous meeting and is invited to stay and chat a while--they move into uncle's study (SWANN'S WAY, ch. "Combray," starting from p. 81 in my edition).

Marcel later figures out that she is none other than Odette (a very major character--she tortures Swan with jealousy and then he marries her; their daughter Gilberte is "the little red-haired girl" much beloved by Marcel [pre-Albertine] before she [Gilberte] was wooed by Charlie Brown of "Peanuts"--er, Robert Saint-Loup [Marcel's best friend]).

=mantis=