

5HoC: The Top Floor of the Library

The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 01 Sep 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6652>

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Richard Simon — 01 Sep 2014, 14:49

Thank you, Gerry, Lee and Mark, for motivating me to re-read The Fifth Head of Cerberus. I had hesitated to do so for many years because I found it repellent in many of its details and depressing in its entirety. The details are still repellent, but I found it a little less depressing on this reading, largely because the emotional tone of the second story ('A Story') had altered for me.

Save for one, the books Number Five finds at the top of the spiral in the public library were easy enough to identify and confirm that Five's surname begins with a W. But who is the author of the book about 'the assassination of Leon Trotsky'? And what is the book? Is it a book at all, or something to do with the film of that title?

By the way, I didn't find any specific evidence in the book for Five's first name. There are Wolfe clues aplenty, but though 'Gene' is obviously an appropriate name for a clone, I couldn't find anything to confirm that it really was his name. The author has confirmed that it is, but he did so to someone who had arrived at name by guessing. Anyone have any light to shed?

Also by the way, Maitre's cloning experiments almost certainly eliminate the possibility that the population of Ste. Croix are anything other than Earth-human (well, most of them). Maitre must have gained his knowledge of genetic engineering from Terrestrial textbooks, and unless the mimicry of the shadow-children extends all the way down to the microbiological level (which is surely absurd) it wouldn't have worked if everybody was a shapeshifted nonhuman.

jbarach at aol.com — 01 Sep 2014, 20:43 · in reply to Richard Simon

Richard --

The book about the assassination of Leon Trotsky is Bernard Wolfe's The Great Prince Died (alternatively titled Trotsky Dead). Wolfe was, for a while, Trotsky's secretary. He was also a science fiction writer.

The library shelf would, of course, contain all kinds of literature, but by including three science fiction writers (Bernard Wolfe, Wilhelm, and Vernor Vinge [misplaced]), Gene Wolfe is strongly hinting that we should think of Number Five's (progenitor's) name in connection with science fiction. By describing Bernard Wolfe's novel the way he does, Gene Wolfe also avoids explicitly saying the name "Wolfe," though by including Virginia Woolf, he does get the sound of his last name in. Kate Wilhelm's inclusion is probably a tip of the hat to her husband, Damon Knight, who grew Gene Wolfe from a bean (as the dedication of the book says).

As for "Gene," that's derived from Aunt Jeannine's name. Her brother, Number Five's father, would be Jean, and so that would also be Number Five's name ... but if you Anglicize the pronunciation, you get "Gene."

Robert Borski worked all of this out in his Cave Canem essay, "Je m'appelle Jean Loup" (<http://www.wolfewiki.com/pmwiki/pmwiki.php?n=CaveCanem.Number5>).

John

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

From: Richard Simon <gallebuck at yahoo.co.uk>

To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Sent: Mon, Sep 1, 2014 9:49 am

Subject: (urth) 5HoC: The Top Floor of the Library

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Marc Aramini — 01 Sep 2014, 21:19 · in reply to Richard Simon

Thanks Richard. It is a bleak book for sure, but one of my favorites.

Ultan's library finally put up my essay on it, but you are already familiar with the thesis from here - it is just way more thorough. All the best!

<http://ultan.org.uk/variance-reduction-techniques/>

On Monday, September 1, 2014, Richard Simon <gallebuck at yahoo.co.uk> wrote:

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Andrew Bollen — 02 Sep 2014, 00:02 · in reply to jbarach at aol.com

jbatach wrote:

As for "Gene," that's derived from Aunt Jeannine's name. Her brother, Number Five's father, would be Jean, and so that would also be Number Five's name ... but if you Anglicize the pronunciation, you get "Gene."

This makes sense, but I've always wondered, why then does Number 5's name come before David's in Mr Million's little roll-call?

On Tue, Sep 2, 2014 at 6:13 AM, <jbarach at aol.com> wrote:
Richard --

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John

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

From: Richard Simon <gallebuck at yahoo.co.uk>

Barry Ragin — 02 Sep 2014, 00:22 · follows Andrew Bollen

I too want to delurk for a few minutes to say thanks for inspiring yet another re-read of 5HoC. I'm not quite confident enough in my own interpretations to share them, but here's a couple of passages i found rather more interesting on this re-read.

Regarding Number Five's unspoken name, there's this in " 'A Story', By John V. Marsch."

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"Chew harder," Sandwalker told him, "and you won't believe that." And then, because he was sorry to have hurt a friend at such a time he added more kindly, "which one are you — aren't you the one who showed me what it is you chew?"

"Wolf."

Lastvoice had begun his chant. Sandwalker said "Your Old Wise One told me last night your names were Foxfire, Whistler, and something else I forget — but there was none of that name."

"We have names for seven," the Shadow child said, "and names for five. The names for three you have heard. My name now is the name for one. Only his name, the Old Wise One's name, never changes." (p. 140)

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It's been postulated that the Number Five clone line may be the only actual humans left in the St. Anne/St. Croix system. Might Wolf being the name for a single Shadow child be a significant textual support for this, or some other interpretation?

Also, this, in "V. R. T."

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My problem, then, is to learn all that there is to be learned about some very primitive people who have left almost no physical traces at all (as far as anyone knows) and some highly embroidered legends. I would be disheartened if it were not that the parallel with those paleolithic, Caucasoid Pygmies who came to be called the Good People (and who survived, as was eventually shown, in Scandinavia and Erie* until the last years of the eighteenth century) were not almost exact. (p.157)

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Page numbers from the 1981 printing of the Ace edition. I believe

*Erie to be a typo. Not as significant as the he/they editing difference that's been discussed on the list, but i assume that the correct word is actually Eire. I searched the archives for the phrase "Caucasoid Pygmies" and found two hits, neither of which was more recent than 2003, so i'm not sure if i'm the only one who wonders about this paragraph.

Googling the phrase "Caucasoid Pygmy" returns exactly 3 hits, none of which i feel comfortable linking to. So, what exactly does Gene Wolfe, who never wastes a word, mean by the phrase "as was eventually shown"? When i first read 5HoC in my twenties, i thought it was a fantasy, and assumed he was making a leprechaun analogy. That's pretty clearly not the case. I think he may be saying that the person who wrote this journal entry may not be the scholar he presents himself to be, but i'm definitely open to other thoughts.

Also, and i don't know why, but i never made the connection between the Bernard Wolfe who wrote the Trotsky book and the Bernard Wolfe who wrote Limbo, which sits next to my Gene Wolfe 3 foot bookshelf. I may need to re-read that one this winter.

Once again, thanks for the stimulating conversation.

Barry

On Sep 1, 2014, at 5:19 PM, urth-request at lists.urth.net wrote:
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