

Palgrave History of Science Fiction (Eric Bourland)

The Urth list — 12 messages, 5 voices, 16 Mar 2018

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6781>

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Robert Pirkola — 16 Mar 2018, 20:20

On March 7, 2018 Eric Bourland wrote:

I respect how she managed herself in every jackpot she got thrown into.

It struck me that you used the word "jackpot" here. There is a bit in the book that has always given me the fuddles: "That girl wouldn't have unlocked the door for Jacob, Jack Pot, and Joan of Arc". AEG, pg. 29. Who is "Jack Pot" as used here?

Chase is Wolfe . . . it took me a while to understand this. I think after I did understand, Chase made more sense to me. He's slightly sinister and we never really know about him. But also a magic man, and omniscient, but with those gifts comes uncertainty of intent.

I think that identifying GC as GW is interesting to think about but leaves me cold in the final analysis. What can this do for the book? Does it make it an exercise in elaborate meta-fiction? That GC is the "author" of the book and thus capable of writing in any changes he wants without explanation? If true, he can, with a stab of the keyboard, make ho-hum CC into a star! He can turn Alexis from the star of The Red Spot into a waitress within a few pages! He can deus ex any machina he wants (and perhaps every inexplicable part of the book is made explicable by this omnipotent ability of the character as author). It can explain why GC is the only character other than CC who the third-person narrator reports on without CC being present (the opening chapter at the White House and the scene where GC is shot). But if the explanation behind AEG's most inscrutable head pounders is simply GC is magic because an author is magic and he's Gene Wolfe, you see? so PRESTO!, then count me out. I'm not suggesting that this is necessarily your thesis, but I would be interested in hearing your take on why it is important to identify GC and GW outside of a "hey isn't that clever, Gene Wolfe put some of himself into Gideon Chase!" It is such a confounding book, any toe-hold can be a fun way to re-read the book, and maybe if you did so with this in mind, some interesting stuff would pop out.

Wolfe adores Cassie, just as Gideon Chase adores Cassie. And I think he respects her. Both fellows respect her.

"Like eat?"

"Much too much," Cassie told her darkly.

That statement arrived at just the right time, later in the story. Given earlier, it's gratuitous.

Yeah, it's a neat little statement. But why? Just because it's funny? What would have been gratuitous about its use earlier? Why does a person with a supposedly killer body and magically enhanced sex-appeal admit that she likes to eat much too much? In fact, she does eat much too much throughout the book. Why?

She loved her king (Reis, whose name is king, and whose meaning in the story is king) with a love much more profound than her love for Chase. Yet she flies to meet Chase in the end, on Woldercan. I think she expended her beauty in order to obtain a craft that will convey her to

Chase . . . and out of the story. She fought her way out, with great sacrifice and peril, but fair and square.

I like to think about the things that Cassie wished for; what she actually got; what she got free of or escaped from; and what she was traveling to meet in the end.

Her fighting her way out of the story, out of the time loop that is a closed novel, to be with GC/GW on Woldercan is also appealing. Is this book really that "meta"? See my comments above on the ultra-meta approach and ditto them here.

William Reis is the name of a character in another Wolfe story, I forget which one.

Why, that would be 1987's "The Other Dead Man".

Marc Aramini — 16 Mar 2018, 23:07 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

James Wynn noted that wolfe pronounced it Will Rise. Did you finish all of Latro Robert? I have been tinkering with my 80 page Wizard Knight writeup this week trying to decide how to order the sections. Two headed, like orgalmir and borrgalmir and the two headed turtle that crawls out of the lake.

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Marc Aramini — 17 Mar 2018, 15:44 · in reply to Marc Aramini

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He states that to try to solve the puzzles and fill the spaces in Wolfe risks missing the major stakes, and that as Long and Short Sun develop, the ambiguity of New Sun is overturned by the enlightenment of The Outsider and the undeniable existence of Ah Lah (Silk's enlightenment is artificial and has a physical cause - though the will of God is done regardless - in many ways higher powers are far more prevalent in Severian's abilities and autonomous resurrections, given the red herring of the claw, powerful only for its association with him, though the soul is of course a real thing in all of the series).

These are my absolute statements about Wolfe, which don't tend to agree very well with what Roberts is saying, though I am glad he says them in a public resource that will be read:

There is nothing of the postmodernist about Wolfe save a mask. He mocks and undercuts postmodern subjectivity by creating objectively solvable puzzles at every turn - we do not have to be caught up in the character's false impressions because we are external to the system. These objective details include history and creed. Sometimes the only way to understand certain events involves symbolism, however.

Those who do not solve the puzzles as the text directs cannot often fully understand what Wolfe is getting at and risk following their own agenda. (See Peter Wright's championing of Marsch and the abos in "Confounding the Skin and the Mask" on Ultan's Library as one example where a colonial agenda is pushed at the expense of the text's connotations, blaming humans for the violence between abo tribes before they ever arrive on Ste. Anne.)

If we all knew everything, then we would see how profoundly connected to tradition and objective reality Wolfe's works actually are. When all information is available to us, the strangeness is no longer strange at all, just an extension of patterns existing in our reality. (The caveat here is who knows everything? Well, when you want a job done right ... who can straighten what Wolfe has writ crooked?)

Marc Aramini — 17 Mar 2018, 16:26 · in reply to Marc Aramini

He also says that attempting to explore the symbols creates more textual insecurity (something I wholeheartedly disagree with - sometimes the only closure is symbolic, and Wolfe's use of symbols is surprisingly precise even in late work -see Julius smart, his orange association (Naranjo) and the Marid naranj, for example - 1 to 1 symbolic representation) and that comparisons to Proust are erroneous - Wolfe rips off so many lines from Proust in New Sun it isn't even funny. Is an intentional science fictional treatment of involuntary memory triggered through scrumptious chatelaine flesh rather than a madeline not enough?

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Ab de Vos — 18 Mar 2018, 01:59 · in reply to Marc Aramini

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Marc Aramini — 18 Mar 2018, 02:09 · in reply to Ab de Vos

I agree. But that's okay because lord knows I have snickered at academics quite a bit. (Present company excepted; redeemed by interest in Wolfe)

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Eric Bourland — 18 Mar 2018, 09:34 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

Hi, Robert,

Interesting points! And probably my own reply is not too interesting. I was not thinking at all the Gideon was the author of the book. But I do think a writer pours into each character a little of herself or himself. A bit of the author goes into a character, esp a beloved character. And sometimes it might please the author to set up a little signal for the thoughtful reader. I think Gene Wolfe does this sometimes, but in a subtle, rather than an artless way. And I think it's mostly just for the slight humor of the thing, rather than anything oracular or grand.

It struck me that you used the word "jackpot" here. There is a bit in the book that has always given me the fuddles: "That girl wouldn't have unlocked the door for Jacob, Jack Pot, and Joan of Arc". AEG, pg.

29. Who is "Jack Pot" as used here?

Hmmm. I bet if we go looking we can find a fairy tale that involves a chap named Jack Pot. I have various editions of Lang, Andersen, Grimm, and a few others around here, but in paper book format, and if I dive into that today, rather than doing my work, I'll have a great time but probably regret it later. =) I know that Wolfe likes fairy tales. I used to love them, myself. I still do and wish I had more time to read them. Heck . . . I wish I had more time to read. ;-)

In any case, of course, I was just using "jackpot" as a . . . hamhanded colloquialism. A scrape, a jam, a bad situation, like grad school.

Yeah, it's a neat little statement. But why? Just because it's funny? What would have been gratuitous about its use earlier?

Well, this reader thought it was funny and endearing. It made me like Cassie more. Why gratuitous, if used earlier? Pacing, I think. But, this is only my take on it.

Why does a person with a supposedly killer body and magically enhanced sex-appeal admit that she likes to eat much too much? In fact, she does eat much too much throughout the book. Why?

Hmm. Maybe, like many women, she has been taught by a patriarchal society that she should, indeed, be concerned about what she eats. Personally, I like a woman who eats with gusto. One of the pleasures of my life is cooking good meals for my wife (and my kid).

Why, that would be 1987's "The Other Dead Man".

Thank you! that's right. I'm gonna go find that one sometime today.

Wishing you all a great day.

Eric

On 3/16/2018 4:20 PM, Robert Pirkola wrote:

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Robert Pirkola — 19 Mar 2018, 15:55 · follows Eric Bourland

Eric:??Point taken on Wolfe putting himself into the characters. I certainly don't dispute that he does so and it can be quite fun and interesting (see, e.g., "Houston, 1943"). My tendency is to think GW is having a laugh at one level, but providing something deeper for the novel as well, doing double duty. Certainly, not everything he writes needs such depth, however much I'd like it to be so. I have done a good deal of looking on that Jack Pot thing and have not uncovered anything, and I've tried to visit all the old watering holes. I did ask a few of those questions of you to see if you had come up with any good explanations that may have eluded others as it seemed you have given AEG a good bit of time and thought, and praise you for that. I think that CC is eating so darn much because she's pregnant and despite everyone's protestations to the contrary, objectively she's?not as slender as most everyone insists. Margaret seems to know her true proportions. A portion of my write-up might help explain where I am coming from:

The Biblical story told in the Book of Revelation 12 about the woman and the dragon shares much with the latter narrative of *An Evil Guest*. James B. Jordan, a Gene Wolfe scholar steeped in a deep knowledge of Christianity, has discussed the details from a theological perspective. See Urth List, "AEG: More Theology", James B. Jordan, October 28, 2008. The text of Revelation 12 practically speaks for itself when read in combination with Chapter 24 of *An Evil Guest*, but it also provides several subtle confirmations of things only hinted at. For one, Revelation 12:2 reveals that the woman clothed with the sun "being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." Cassie is fat throughout the book and getting fatter. Is she being fattened up for sacrifice? Perhaps, perhaps not. While she has the glamour, she doesn't realize (and since everyone is affected, no one else can either [India Dempster?thinks that CC weighs just over 100 lbs., pg. 135.]) that she is steadily putting on weight. She eats terribly fattening foods. Even when she vows to change her eating habits and stop drinking, she very quickly reverts. She also talks about fattening up on hotel food and she continues eating decadently in Takanga. She is described as having a tiny little waist, pg. 106. This appears to be part of her transformation, pg. 106. However, she is measured by Margaret and has a?37 3/8? waist, pg. 107. This is XL/XXL in Women's sizing charts.

<http://www.tactics.com/info/womens-sizing-charts>? Margaret tells CC that her skirt is too big, but CC puts it on without allowing Margaret to adjust its size as she offered to do, pg. 108.??CC thinks herself fat, pg. 108. "If I get any fatter that grass skirt's going to slide down to my knees.?, pg. 135." This is an odd statement.??What does it mean? If you have an extremely large belly then you might have to wear a really large grass skirt. If it were to slip past the large belly, nothing would hinder its sliding to your knees after.??She ?struggled into her wool coat?, pg. 216. She says??I'm too fat? for a bikini, pg. 220. She admits that she likes to eat "much too much", pg. 225. On Takanga, she is eating and eating, chugging pi a coladas, pg. 228. She thinks she will be too fat when she gets back from Takanga to fit into her costumes, pg. 228. She has been "fattening on hotel food", pg. 244. She is said to be fatter than she is beautiful and kind, pg. 244. Diana Diamond calls her plump, pg. 279. Before her island ordeal, women thought she was fat, pg. 300.

She is, of course, pregnant. But pregnant with whose baby? And what happens to the child? One can hardly talk about the idea that CC may be pregnant without bringing up her mysterious statement: "The devil's son is born tonight." (pg. 281). Note that when CC says it, it is not night, nor is it night when the sacrifice occurs. So what is she talking about?? The "Midnite Movies" DVD cover for the film of *The Dunwich Horror* (1970) bears the words??the devil's spawn?. See also, "The Dunwich Horror", *The Thing On the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, pp. 211, 245. "some day yew folks ll hear a child o" Lavinny's a-callin? its father's name on the top o? Sentinel Hill!? After having watched the movie, however, no similar line is spoken. ??Even so, I

don't think it is just a coincidence that these connections can be made. There are resonances between "The Dunwich Horror" and Revelation 12 as well.

Revelation 12:5 "she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and [to] his throne." Wilbur Whateley is himself a man child, growing at faster than normal rates after being born, eventually reaching nearly 9 feet tall at the age of fifteen. ?[The Thing on the Doorstep, "The Dunwich Horror", pg. 223]. The man child of An Evil Guest could be a reference to Gideon himself or to Rian Reis. Both seem to age too quickly for the timeline information we are given.?

Marc: I have finished the Latro books. Nearly a year ago now. I guess I can join the chorus of pining for further installments.

Eric Bourland — 19 Mar 2018, 19:17 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

Dear Robert,

Thank you for these interesting thoughts.

Speaking only for myself, it's not my business if Cassie is pregnant, or not. And, her weight is not my business.

Her body, her rules.

If I were to observe her, measure her, judge her, then I'm just an insecure, little man. Measuring and judging is what humans do to farm animals. So I look her in the face and I don't judge her. Even just reading her as a character in a fine, lovely story, I still do that -- I'm looking her in the face.

If Cassie were pregnant and felt I needed to know about it, then she (Wolfe) would tell me. For this reader, the story works just fine whether she is pregnant or not.

When Cassie worries about her weight, she is responding to unrealistic and damaging demands of a patriarchal society that seeks to force her to adopt a prescribed appearance, and submit to measuring and judgment -- or face penalties of every kind, up to and including death.

This is one component (of countless components) of rape culture.

I quite imagine Mr. Wolfe was well aware of this when he wrote the character of Cassie. I hope he was. I think he's a percipient, sagacious, and essentially kind man, though I have not met him except through thousands of pages of his stories that I have read over and over through many years.

Please consider something, if you would. I wonder if applying such a close study to Cassie's weight, and to the possibility of her pregnancy, forces Cassie to become an object that we observe and judge. Myself, I refuse to do this to Cassie or to any woman.

What would you say to Cassie if you were seated across from her in Walker's? I'd buy her a drink and talk about show biz and the weather on Woldercan.

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I also wonder if this is a dangerous position for any scholar. =)

Yours with respect,

Eric

On 3/19/2018 11:55 AM, Robert Pirkola wrote:

Eric:??Point taken on Wolfe putting himself into the characters. I certainly don't dispute that he does so and it can be quite fun and interesting (see, e.g., "Houston, 1943"). My tendency is to think GW is having a laugh at one level, but providing something deeper for the novel as well, doing double duty. Certainly, not everything he writes needs such depth, however much I'd like it to be so. I have done a good deal of looking on that Jack Pot thing and have not uncovered anything, and I've tried to visit all the old watering holes. I did ask a few of those questions of you to see if you had come up with any good explanations that may have eluded others as it seemed you have given AEG a good bit of time and thought, and praise you for that. I think that CC is eating so darn much because she's pregnant and despite everyone's protestations to the contrary, objectively she's not as slender as most everyone insists. Margaret seems to know her true proportions. A portion of my write-up might help explain where I am coming from:

The Biblical story told in the Book of Revelation 12 about the woman and the dragon shares much with the latter narrative of *An Evil Guest*. James B. Jordan, a Gene Wolfe scholar steeped in a deep knowledge of Christianity, has discussed the details from a theological perspective. See Urth List, "AEG: More Theology", James B. Jordan, October 28, 2008. The text of Revelation 12 practically speaks for itself when read in combination with Chapter 24 of *An Evil Guest*, but it also provides several subtle confirmations of things only hinted at. For one, Revelation 12:2 reveals that the woman clothed with the sun "being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." Cassie is fat throughout the book and getting fatter. Is she being fattened up for sacrifice? Perhaps, perhaps not. While she has the glamour, she doesn't realize (and since everyone is affected, no one else can either [India Dempster thinks that CC weighs just over 100 lbs., pg. 135.]) that she is steadily putting on weight. She eats terribly fattening foods. Even when she vows to change her eating habits and stop drinking, she very quickly reverts. She also talks about fattening up on hotel food and she continues eating decadently in Takanga. She is described as having a tiny little waist, pg. 106. This appears to be part of her transformation, pg. 106. However, she is measured by Margaret and has a 37 3/8" waist, pg. 107. This is XL/XXL in Women's sizing charts. <http://www.tactics.com/info/womens-sizing-charts>. Margaret tells CC that her skirt is too big, but CC puts it on without allowing Margaret to adjust its size as she offered to do, pg. 108. CC thinks herself fat, pg. 108. "If I get any fatter that grass skirt's going to slide down to my knees.", pg. 135." This is an odd statement. What does it mean? If you have an extremely large belly then you might have to wear a really large grass skirt. If it were to slip past the large belly, nothing would hinder its sliding to your knees after. She struggled into her wool coat, pg. 216. She says "I'm too fat" for a bikini, pg. 220. She admits that she likes to eat "much too much", pg. 225. On Takanga, she is eating and eating, chugging pi a coladas, pg. 228. She thinks she will be too fat when she gets back from Takanga to fit into her costumes, pg. 228. She has been "fattening on hotel food", pg. 244. She is said to be fatter than she is beautiful and kind, pg. 244. Diana Diamond calls her plump, pg. 279. Before her island ordeal, women thought she was fat, pg. 300.

She is, of course, pregnant. But pregnant with whose baby? And what happens to the child? One can hardly talk about the idea that CC may be pregnant without bringing up her mysterious statement: "The devil's son is born tonight." (pg. 281). Note that when CC says it, it is not night, nor is it night when the sacrifice occurs. So what is she talking about? The "Midnite Movies" DVD cover for the film of *The Dunwich Horror* (1970) bears the words "the devil's spawn". See also, "The Dunwich Horror", *The Thing On the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories*, pp. 211, 245. "some day yew folks ll hear a child o' Lavinny's a-callin' its father's name on the top o' Sentinel Hill!" After having watched the movie, however, no similar line is spoken. Even so, I don't think it is just a coincidence that these connections can be made. There are resonances between "The Dunwich Horror" and Revelation 12 as well.

Revelation 12:5 "she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and [to] his throne." Wilbur Whateley is himself a man child, growing at faster than normal rates after being born, eventually reaching nearly 9 feet tall at the age of fifteen. [The Thing on the Doorstep, "The Dunwich Horror", pg. 223]. The man child of *An Evil Guest*

could be a reference to Gideon himself or to Rian Reis. Both seem to age too quickly for the timeline information we are given.

Marc: I have finished the Latro books. Nearly a year ago now. I guess I can join the chorus of pining for further installments.

Paul Rydeen — 19 Mar 2018, 20:02 · in reply to Eric Bourland

Are you sure you're on the right list???

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

If Cassie were pregnant and felt I needed to know about it, then she (Wolfe) would tell me.

Eric Bourland — 20 Mar 2018, 03:41 · in reply to Paul Rydeen

Dear Paul,

I do not know if I am on the right list, but I hope I am. I did not mean to offend, and I know that shrill scolding accomplishes nothing. The matter is close to my heart. I have friends who have died and family affected and I got heated up. My apologies to Robert and to the list for my outburst.

To respond (perhaps) more usefully to the interesting points that Robert raised:

1) The James B. Jordan material is interesting, and I always appreciate an excuse to read Revelations again. My main reservation about Cassie's being pregnant is, who's the father? If it were Reis or Chase, then I think she would have lost the baby while she was stranded on the island. And that would be a terrible thing, and if it were true within the precincts of the story, I think . . . I just think this . . . Wolfe would have alluded to this terrible loss. To lose a child is a terrible, terrible thing.

And I do not think Cassie was pregnant when she was rescued from the island.

Know how I know? Madame Pavlatos would have known and she would have said something.

1a) It's been a couple of years since I read the book and if I have facts mixed up, please do correct me.

2) >>>Is she being fattened up for sacrifice?

Somehow I think not. It just goes against the idea of the story. I invoke no textual evidence. The idea feels wrong. Just my two cents. With Reis, there has been sacrifice enough.

3) There is no mention of morning sickness, or none that I can tell. She is busy spearing fish on that island where she was dropped, then going to Woldercan. While mourning the man whom she actually loves.

3a) She loves Reis. Not Chase, but Reis. Yet she is going to Woldercan, to be with Chase and perhaps for other reasons. I find this fascinating and undefinable. If she is somehow impregnated with the spawn of the Storm God, maybe she wants to move that spawn away from earth and onto another world, except that is a psychopathic action that I do not think

Cassie would do.

4) I think it is possible to overanalyze a lot of this. I think Wolfe means well for his readers and wants first to entertain. I think he did *An Evil Guest* mostly for fun. I can tell he was having a great time when he wrote it.

5) It's also a very ambitious novel developed with an economy that only a master writer can impose.

6) I am really quite mentally crackers, which requires a lot of personal energy and time, so I am sure I am missing a lot, and I am sure there is a lot I can learn from your ideas about Wolfe and AEG.

7) I'll have to go back and read the *Dunwich Horror* now, too.

Wishing you the best while cackling at that mad shadow over there and remaining your

Eric

On 3/19/2018 4:02 PM, Paul Rydeen wrote:

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

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Paul Rydeen — 20 Mar 2018, 20:17 · in reply to Eric Bourland

My comment was meant to be ironic. I could've dropped a smiley but I figured a Wolfe reader would catch on.

I'm not offended, just surprised and a little amused. Cassie **is** an object, you know - she's a character in a book.

BTW, my wife had three children and never once had morning sickness.

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

From: Urth [mailto:urth-bounces at lists.urth.net] On Behalf Of Eric Bourland Sent: Monday, March 19, 2018 10:42 PM To: urth at lists.urth.net Subject: Re: (urth) Palgrave History of Science Fiction (Eric Bourland)

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Eric Bourland
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<https://www.hwaet.com>