

# THE STRANGE “FOX” HUNTS IN CONNELL’S *THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME* AND UROBUCHI’S *PSYCHO-PASS*

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“So far from hunting’s being a reasoned pursuit, reason can be described more appropriately as the greatest threat to the existence of hunting.”

José Ortega y Gasset

Hunting used to be a way of life. People hunted to survive and to trade. But civilization brought with it the invention of work and everyone started having an occupation until hunting became more and more recreational, a leisure activity limited to a few people. In a modern world of work and drudgery not everyone can afford the time and the resources for this activity. Hunting even became a great privilege of men of leisure and now we speak of sport hunting.

*The Most Dangerous Game* (1924), a short story by the American writer Richard Connell, and *Psycho-Pass* (2012–13), an anime written by Japanese Gen Urobuchi,<sup>1</sup> are

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<sup>1</sup> *Psycho-Pass* is a dystopian anime that presents a society managed and controlled by an Artificial Intelligence system called Sibyl. Through a vast network of cameras, scanners, and sensors the Sibyl works to maintain order, prevent crime before it happens and maximize collective wellness and satisfaction, but on the detriment of other important political and ethical values such as liberty and democracy.

two dystopian works which feature examples of sport hunting, but an unconventional and strange type of sport hunting. It is unconventional in its nature, method, purpose, and participants. Before proceeding to the analysis of this activity, a few words about the theoretical vantage point on which the study will rely may be needed. The theoretical insights in question are from Blaise Pascal and José Ortega y Gasset.

For Pascal, man needs constant diversion from his thoughts on his own human condition which is misery, vanity, and a state of constant unhappiness and uncertainty which is partly caused by routine and drudgery. "As men who naturally understand their own condition avoid so much as rest, so there is nothing they leave undone in seeking turmoil" writes Pascal in Fragment 139 of his book *Pensées*<sup>2</sup>. Humans have an urge to seek everything which diverts their thoughts from dwelling on the fragile and inconsistent condition that no one can escape. For him, the only escape is to find a distraction in any form: benign but most certainly malign and destructive as well. Sometimes the diversion can be very extreme because the human imagination is boundless. Hunting, and the metaphor of hunting, is an example that Pascal resorts to in order to illustrate his point about diversion.

Borrowing his gambling analogy, we can say that, for Pascal, providing the hunter with a lot of prey by the end of each day on condition that he does not hunt will only make him miserable and unsatisfied. The reason is that the hunter seeks first and foremost the amusement and the diversion that the activity of hunting itself supplies and not the gain itself. On the other hand, if you make him hunt but for nothing, he will not become engaged and excited over it and will feel bored. Although the process itself is the peak of distraction, the hunter does not only seek amusement because this alone will weary him. He must excite himself over it and have the prospect that he will be happy to win and gain something by the end. He must make for himself an object of passion and excite over it his desire, his anger, and his fear to obtain his end. This is why, for Pascal, we like the chase and the activity of hunting *per se* better than the quarry and what we gain after the process.

In his book *Meditations on Hunting* José Ortega y Gasset builds on a similar line of arguments. He contends that calling the activity of hunting an act of diversion is inaccurate because the word diversion suggests comfortable situations which are free of hardships, risks and which do not require a great deal of effort, energy, and concentration. For Ortega the occupation of hunting involves precisely all of those

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<sup>2</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977)

things. It engages one's passions and emotions and it calls for investment of energy and effort. For him every good hunter has dedicated a part of his existence to this endeavor.<sup>3</sup>

The two strange artistic figures General Zaroff in Connell's short story *The Most Dangerous Game* and Toyohisa Senguji in Urobuchi's anime *Psycho-Pass* fit the Ortega-Pascalian profile of hunters. Both of them live so compulsively by and for hunting that they go to extremes in performing this activity. Hunting is not just part of but all of their existence and they do not invest part of their energy, time and resources in this activity but get immersed in it almost totally and without constraints.

General Zaroff is an affluent retired army general who learned how to hunt from a very early age. His aristocratic cultural background is exhibited in his carefully selected taste of French champagne, cuisine and classical music. These important "amenities of civilization"<sup>4</sup> are always present in his daily life and must be preserved as a sign of nobility and civilization. French champagne always accompanies his conversations just as classical music his preparation for hunting. "God makes some men poets. Some he makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger"<sup>5</sup> says General Zaroff. All his life had been "one prolonged hunt."<sup>6</sup>

After successfully chasing every possible prey he could: small and big, easy and hard, safe and dangerous, and after exhausting all possibilities, the activity of hunting ceases to interest him and he starts to feel bored so he decides that he will "invent a new animal to hunt."<sup>7</sup> He realizes that the casual game animal has "nothing but his legs and his instinct and [that] instinct is no match for reason."<sup>8</sup> As a result, he comes to the conclusion that the ideal quarry should match him by exhibiting more behavioral and especially intellectual challenges. It must have "courage, cunning and above all it must be able to reason."<sup>9</sup> He decides that *Homo sapiens* is the most dangerous game and for someone who "live[s] for danger"<sup>10</sup> this is the ideal game to chase and hunt.

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<sup>3</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting*, trans. Howard B. Wescott (Belgrade: Wilderness Adventures Press, 1995), 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Connell, *The Most Dangerous Game* (Feedbooks, 1924), 3, <http://www.feedbooks.com>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

General Zaroff buys a whole island, "ship-trap,"<sup>11</sup> with jungles, swamps and hills in it. He prepares a lot of trails through it, furnishes it, sets up a lot of traps and makes it his hunting ground. His hunting assistants consist of a pack of hounds with Lazarus his "finest hound"<sup>12</sup> in the lead role. To rationalize his behavior, he believes that calling his human chase-and-kill-activity murder is just a Victorian and romantic view about the value of human life. The strange hunting he does is not murder but "a genuine new thrill"<sup>13</sup> to keep him entertained and drive his boredom away.

In the anime *Psycho-Pass*, Toyohisa Senguji is a similarly compulsive hunter who also fits in the same profile. He is an affluent businessman in the construction and real estate business. He believes in the prerogatives of science and technology and makes full usage of them to transform himself into a cyborg. Like General Zaroff, he enjoys every fine taste civilization has to provide: technological progress, fine tobacco, French wine which accompanies his conversations as well and Beethoven's "Ode to joy" which is always present before he goes to hunt. He similarly prepares his hunting field, an underground maze-like site full of traps and trails which he stocks with people before embarking on his hunting missions also with his two companion cyborg hounds that he named Kafka and Lovecraft.

These hunting cites may be associated with what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopias:"<sup>14</sup> worlds within worlds which may be of disturbing and upsetting nature.<sup>15</sup> More specifically, they are "crisis heterotopias"<sup>16</sup> which can be forbidden places where the activities conducted by the individual take place out of sight. Just like General Zaroff, Senguji created his own utopia where he can do what he likes most outside the eyes of society, yet at the very heart of it.

Senguji is also a sociopath who has no regard for human life as long as it cures his boredom and keeps him exhilarated. For him human being is the most cunning animal

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986), 24.

<sup>15</sup> In "Of Other Spaces", Foucault defines them as: "real places — places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society — which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality."

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

who does not risk extinction no matter how many are hunted and killed.<sup>17</sup> His obsession with human hunts emanates from the thrill and excitement a cunning and reasoning quarry will provide: "The smarter the prey the more enjoyable the hunt becomes."<sup>18</sup> He takes Plato's thought about our souls being imprisoned in our bodies to extremes. He believes that he is helping his victims get rid of their "limiting bodies"<sup>19</sup> not that he cares about absolving and freeing them, but because it gives him thrill and energy and it "regenerates his aging mind"<sup>20</sup> when he chases and kills them.

Both antagonists then devised these strange human hunts almost for the same motives and purposes: a disregard for human life and the value of human life and a pursuit of thrill and excitement. This is enough for them to rationalize their savagely strange and strangely savage behavior. Hunting, writes Ortega, is not a "reasoned pursuit... It is however strangely, a deep and permanent yearning in the human condition."<sup>21</sup> By taking this opinion to extremes, the two artistic characters are showing us the dark side of the human condition, that yearning for violence that we try to repress and avoid.

This point can be further illustrated by the paradox which can be traced in both characters. It is the paradox between a total belief and embrace of civilization on the one hand and the primitivism of the needs of the two characters on the other hand. Both of them firmly believe in civilization and in what it has to offer. Senguji for example enjoys an ethereal body full of prostheses, the latest of what science has to offer. He is the synthesis of what is most technically achieved (civilization) but also of what is most archaic and primitive (nature). Thus, is there the gloomy vision of a humanity which will never know how to get rid of its accursed side even when it is enjoying all the possible and conceivable technological progress? This is the question which pops up in our mind while trying to cope with this strange behavior. The answer to this question, according to what these two characters show, is a yes.

This issue of primitivism may also invoke the myth about the hunting hypothesis of human origins, which is, according to sociologist Matt Cartmill, the story of how some

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<sup>17</sup> *Psycho-Pass*, episode 9, "Paradise Fruit," written by Gen Urobuchi, December 7, 2012. Blu-Ray.

<sup>18</sup> *Psycho-Pass*, episode 10, "Methuselah's Game," written by Gen Urobuchi, December 14, 2012. Blu-Ray.

<sup>19</sup> *Psycho-Pass*, episode 7, "Symbolism of Bletilla Striata," written by Gen Urobuchi, November 23, 2012. Blu-Ray.

<sup>20</sup> *Psycho-Pass*, episode 9, "Paradise Fruit," written by Gen Urobuchi, December 7, 2012. Blu-Ray.

<sup>21</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting*, 40.

apes became human when they took up weapons and started to kill.<sup>22</sup> Matt Cartmill also argues in his book that from the Renaissance to the present day, writers who have seen hunting as a sign of man's depravity have assumed that the hunter takes a psychopathic pleasure in inflicting pain and death. These hunting writers, like Humberto Fontava, Wood Krutch, Joy Williams, etc., insist that such hunters' urge to kill is something they were born with, an instinctive blood lust inherited from our killer-ape ancestors.<sup>23</sup> Wood Krutch writes: "Most wicked deeds are done because the doer proposes some good to himself.. The killer for sport prefers death to life, darkness to light. He gets nothing except the satisfaction of saying: I am the spirit that denies."<sup>24</sup> To satisfy their boredom and to pursue excitement, General Zaroff and Singuji decided to play the role of gods and deny life from people.

"Essential human nature, writes Paul Shepard, is inseparable from the hunting and killing of animals."<sup>25</sup> Our two antagonists extended the list to include humans and extended the reach of darkness and horror to inscribe amusement and thrill as part of that, two rewards which go hand in hand with death. Intelligence, that highly specialized function of our species, is no longer used to plan the human's capacity to master, tame and hunt animals, but also his capacity to do the same with fellow humans: hunters chasing hunters, exploring in this regard the dark side of our species which is curious enough to play a game of life and death with each other.

Nietzschean philosophy has showed us that there should be no such distinctions as better and worse or superior and inferior between human beings among themselves and even between human beings and animals. Man is neither better than nor superior to the animal and the animal is neither worse than nor inferior to man but both creatures are just different. Does the recreational hunting of humans by humans then create not only a post-Nietzschean world, but a post post-Nietzschean world where not only god is dead, but also humans and especially humanity, that trait which makes humans human.

Dystopian art plays again its warning and preventive role by showing us what may happen if we lose awareness and judgment. The two dystopian works, the short story by Connell and the anime by Urobuchi, remain after all optimistic as the two antagonists are eventually eliminated during one of their own dances of death. This may signal the

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<sup>22</sup> Matt Cartmill, *A View to Death in the Morning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 6.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

relative triumph of the human intellect but it nevertheless rings again this warning bell about the potential evil inherent in all of us to keep it always under check.

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