

twins and phantom-twins

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Dec 2000, 17:59

Today I've been thinking of a pattern in Wolfe's fiction, that of twins, and most specifically a thing I am calling "phantom-twins." This is the category of twin-ness that is not biological, nor clonal/oedipal, nor even perceived by the two people so linked.

In 5HC, Number Five is to Maitre as VRT is to Dr. Marsch; both cases are quite similar, along the clonal/oedipal lines, an awareness shared by three out of the four subjects. But when we compare Number Five directly to VRT, that is, not twins by category but twins by some sort of psychic link (established in the test, mind you), then we have a case of "phantom-twins." They aren't aware of it, but the reader is.

Branching out from this, we have the case of A.D. Weer and Crazy Pete: they might be phantom twins. (In some interview somewhere, Damon Knight said of "The Changeling" that "the guy is dead but he doesn't even know it," which at first blush made me think he was confusing the short story with PEACE, but then again, maybe not--certainly Crazy Pete is an "unperson," and if we read that as a deadman/ghost, as Wolfe often likes to play, it has an interesting effect on the story).

In PEACE there is a clear twin-ness in Den and Bobby Black; an almost clonal twinning between Olivia and Lois; a spooky sort of twinning between Lois (Arbuthnot) and Louis (Gold), with their names like Agia/Agilus, and their hearts bent on similar mischief (involving disguise).

Another sort of twin is a theme-twin, like the two musicians in "Bluesberry Jam" and its twin story, "Ain't You 'Most Done?" Here the two meet and interact and they can see their similarities and their differences.

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