

# 5th Head Genealogies Redux

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 07 Apr 1998

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Robert Borski — 07 Apr 1998, 14:07

Hooray! Some legitimate objections to my Fifth Head genealogy have been raised! Believing that a multiplicity of viewpoints is paramount to a list of this sort, and mindful that a friendly debate may inspire still other subscribers to reread FIFTH HEAD (my truer goal), I happily accept the challenge of defending my theories, all the while proclaiming they may be no more valid than anyone else's suppositions.

Tony Ellis writes:

Having said that, do we know for sure that even Mr Million's "father", Number Five's great-great-grandfather, was the first of the line? Dr Marsch's remark could be taken to suggest that the line of clones stretches back quite far.

I believe you have one too many -greats here. Or as the most pertinent quote from 5TH HEAD puts it, with Maitre addressing Number Five: "You are here because I did and do, and I am here because the individual behind me did--who was himself originated by the one whose mind is simulated in Mr. Million." (p.66, Scribners).

As for Dr. Marsch's remark, remember that cloning is illegal on Earth and that Saint Croix has been inhabited "less than two hundred years" (p.37) and that the Maison du Chien (the structure, anyway) is 140 years old (p.37). Five generations in 140 years, four of them cloned, seems acceptable to me.

Tony also has troubles with my Phaedria-as-sister theory.

(1) If Maitre had sold his daughter to Phaedria's parents, why should they now hope, as they do, to marry her back into his family?

If you purchased a child from someone running a house of prostitution, would you assume the child was one of the whoremaster's own or more likely the child of a prostitute whose birth control had failed? Remember also that the machinations of the Wolfe clan remain oblique often even to one another; I cite in this regard Number Five's first encounter with his aunt, which doesn't come until he is 11 or 12. I submit Phaedria's parents would have no idea she is Maitre's daughter and furthermore would find the idea of either marrying her into or selling her to the clan to be quite palatable. As Number Five astutely claims, "Our family, of course, would be ideal for either purpose." (p.40)

(2) The broken ankle\Aunt Jeannine link seems very tenuous: a broken ankle really isn't that much like having no legs at all!

Aunt Jeannine is not legless, but "has legs no thicker than my wrists" (p.44) and when Number Five first sees Phaedria in the park he remarks how she has "an injured leg." (p.29) I submit that this is still a potent link or else why would Wolfe (the writer) give her a broken ankle? It advances no plot point--Number Five could just as easily have met a strolling, or seated, unencumbered Phaedria in the park. To think it is mere color or coincidence does not do justice

to Wolfe's masterly writing.

(3) If Phaedria's name is supposed

to be a classical allusion, why not actually name her after someone who committed incest with her brother, rather than a stepson?

To my knowledge, there is no brother-sister incest tandem in classical mythology that conveys the tragic dimension of violating such taboos, although the figures of Jocasta and Electra come close on a slightly different level (parent-child). I submit, however, these are too in-your-face for a writer of Wolfe's skill. Moreover, I still believe Phaedra is more than apposite, especially since among major literary works Racine's PHAEDRA ranks probably only second in its treatment of the incest violation to OEDIPUS REX. Again, think plot-point here: given the signifi- cance Wolfe has always attached to names, why name your character Phaedria if not to draw upon the incest connotations associated with the name? Caprice? Because it's a nice sounding name?

I'm not sure I understand why you think letting his girls attend the play would further any designs Maitre might have.

This to me is your most salient objection. I can only surmise a well-intended play might engender further such productions and thus afford more time for romance to bloom between Number Five and Phaedria.

Another objection is that Aunt Jeannine looks strongly like Maitre. You would expect any sister of Number Five's to have the old family likeness too.

This I categorically reject. David and Number Five appear quite dissimilar, after all (David is blond and fair, Number Five dark-haired and brown-eyed), so why wouldn't a sister be equally dissimilar? More importantly we also learn that Phaedria has had plastic surgery to improve her looks! (p.40). I would maintain in light of the above that it would be remarkable if she did look somewhat Wolfean.

I now have a question for Tony: if Phaedria is not Number Five's sister, who do you think is? Surely, you don't believe Wolfe is toying with us when he has Aunt Jeannine mention her--this type of thinking would also lead us to conclude Severian had no sister and we know this to be false.

Now on to Pedro Romero's post.

Here is my theory. The original GW is the baby with the girl in the picture Jeannine shows #5. After all, she says she is the his true mother, so it is easy to figure out the girl is the mother of the original GW and the baby is #1.

This theory recapitulates my own and is 100% congruent. To quote myself from several posts back (v009,n004), "Gene Wolfe #1 is the original patriarch. He is naturally born and it is his parents we see when Aunt Jeannine has the sepia photograph fetches for Number Five." Check it out and see.

Lastly then we have this from Dan Rabin (along with a very interesting observation about Baldanders--neat!).

About the number of heads, I accept Robert Borski's persuasive scheme, but if we count the original and Mr. Million as the same head, then the child at the end could be the fifth.

I find this to be an interesting fine alternative, and while others may have their own subsets of five (I could probably configure several more, as well as a nine to support the Jeannine=Gene 9

theory), I'm still sticking to my original proposal. After all, the title of the novella is THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS and our narrator is called Number Five; to call his son a fifth or #5 (unless you wish to substitute him for the murdered Maitre) seems a ready miscalculation.

I also reject the notion that Mr. Million and the Gene Wolfe he simulates are one and the same. Mr. Million is the most benign character in all of the narrative, while the person he simulates is the mad scientist who clones a line of monstrous progeny, and who if the temperament of his temporally-removed twins are any indication could not have been pleasant. To liken each to the other therefore strikes me as specious and tautological, especially since all of the other cloned Wolfes are one and the same.

Robert Borski (who now feels pretty tapped out about FIFTH HEAD and henceforth can probably best be described as born-again lurker)

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Pedro Jorge Romero — 07 Apr 1998, 19:28 · follows Robert Borski

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Well, it could be because Jeannine is a woman and she assumes #5's sibling must be a girl too. She does not seem aware of David, so she could be just guessing. After all this is a Gene Wolfe novel and what a character thinks (in opposition to what he or she knows) could be wrong.

My real problem is: who is Jeannine? Is she the "control" of the previous experiment?

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You are right. I did not read your post slowly enough.

Best

Pedro Jorge (out of witty remarks)