

5th Head Genealogies Red

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Apr 1998

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Tony Ellis — 08 Apr 1998, 16:05

08/04/98

09:52

RE>5th Head Genealogies Redux

Robert Borski wrote:

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.

I'm glad you've taken my arguments in the friendly spirit which I intended. Here, if you can bear to wade through them, are my thoughts on your thoughts on my thoughts on your thoughts:

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?

...

I believe you have one too many -greats here....

Well, not by my reckoning! <g> You're saying that the GW Mr Million is simulating (Five's great-grandfather) was the first of the line, but I'm saying there has to be another one behind him if Number Five is to be the fifth generation.

Our difference centres around your counting Mr Million twice, as himself and as the GW he simulates:

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...

Given that all the clones are effectively the same "mad scientist", surely the fact that Mr Million is so passive is remarkable regardless of which GW he may be simulating? I would suggest that the explanation lies at least partially in the poor ability of his simulation to feel emotion.

But notice that Maitre regards Mr Million as "more sentimental" than he is. This suggests that there _are_ differences between the clones, and that the GW Mr Million is simulating was simply a milder person. This again argues that he is _not_ simulating the original GW, your "mad scientist".

To liken each to the other therefore strikes me as specious and tautolgical, especially since all of the other cloned Wolfes are one and the same.

As you say, the _cloned_ Wolfes. Mr Million isn't the product of cloning, which merely reproduces the same DNA, but of a mechanical process which copies the very neurological patterns of the brain. The whole idea is that the person simulated _lives on_. If you want a new self, you make a clone, but if you want to extend your own life you make a simulation.

Here's how I interpret your pertinent quote, all brackets mine: "We seek self-knowledge. You [#5] are here because I [#4] did and do, and I am here because the individual [#3] behind me did --who was himself originated by the one [#2] whose mind is simulated in Mr. Million." [#1] is a further figure, who stands behind all these.

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.

Well let's see: Dr Marsch thinks that Number Five is 18, Maitre nearly fifty. Lets say that Maitre's father was also 30ish when he created Maitre. It's a fair assumption: Number Five, after all, is also 30 when he becomes a "father". Let's say that Maitre's father's father, the person simulated by Mr Million, was 30ish too when he made Maitre's father. We've gone back 110 years. There's room for another GW _before_ Mr Million, who originates the line.

On to the Phaedria-as-sister theory!

I submit Phaedria's parents would have no idea she is Maitre's daughter

I wasn't actually arguing that being Maitre's _daughter_ would stop Phaedria's parents attempting to marry her back into the family, rather that the fact she came from Maitre at all would make them think of her as of little further value to him.

Aunt Jeannine is _not_ legless, but "has legs no thicker than my wrists"

Yes, sorry, that was very careless of me, but my point still stands: a broken ankle is very, very different. If Wolfe wanted to imply a link, why not give poor Phaedria an affliction, however mild, in both legs? Or a bone disease which, it is implied with Wolfean subtlety, might one day prevent her from walking?

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.

Well, Number Five's poor health required him to be seated. It's simply good writing to give a reason for an otherwise healthy girl to be sitting there too.

To think it is mere color or coincidence does not do justice to Wolfe's masterly writing.

One of the reason's I enjoy Wolfe's writing so much is precisely his use of colour. I submit these 2 points from Wolfe's advice to would-be writers:

"Main characters should be striking in some way, attractive or grotesque or interesting in appearance. Spear-carriers should be more or less ordinary for contrast. If you can't decide which a character is, make him striking."

"Perfection is not sexy."

I concede your point that Phaedria has had plastic surgery, but that would make her the _only_ member of the family without some resemblance to the original. David may have blonde hair

but even Number Five concedes that "Maybe he looks a little like me". Wolfe goes out of his way to underline the family resemblance wherever we see a family member, from the four-armed fighting slave to Aunt Jeannine, so this doesn't ring true.

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...

No one is. Aunt Jeannine is arguing hypothetically.

As for Wolfe toying with us, in a sense he is. The significance of Aunt Jeannine's question is that it reminds Number Five of Aunt Betsey Trotwood in "David Copperfield" - as well it might: not only was Betsey another formidable little lady, but the whole theme of that novel is the past, and the uncovering of buried experiences. Aunt Betsey sets her heart on David's mother giving birth to a girl, and is exasperated when the child turns out to be a boy. It becomes a running joke through the rest of the novel: Betsey is always observing how David's angelic, non-existent sister would have done this or wouldn't have done that. I think this is what Wolfe had in mind - and all he had in mind - by making Aunt Jeannine say "Your father had a sister - why shouldn't you?".