

the Ellis response to Genealogies Redux

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

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Robert Borski — 08 Apr 1998, 20:05

Bravo, Tony!

Nice post and I applaud the sensibility of your counter-arguments.

Here follow my own in this multi-generational thread (pun intended).

In regards to my accusing you of having one too many -greats in the Wolfe genealogy, you respond:

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.

If I said I thought Number Five was a fifth generation anything I did not mean it. He is more precisely the fifth _iteration_. The original GW, his three cloned sons (fils to his pere), and Mr. Million comprise the five.

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.

I think they might find it ironic, true, but certainly would never pass up the attempt to marry or sell off poor Phaedria, especially after her governess relayed the news about Number Five's possible interest. Greed and venality may also have dulled their reasoning abilities.

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?

Here I respectfully agree to disagree, standing by my original argument.

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.

Likewise here. Many viable alternate scenarios suggest themselves, all of which would allow for Phaedra to come into contact with Number Five and not involving a broken ankle. People sit in parks all the time; some even contrive to meet others. Phaedria could have asked her governess if they might sit down for a while and enjoy the day, or been picnicking nearby; she could have done the dropped hanky bit or needed to tie/buckle her shoe, etc., etc.

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 still maintain the plastic surgery supports my theory and vitiates yours. Also why a genetic clone of Michael Jackson would not resemble Michael Jackson. <g>

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?".

Given the polyallusional nature of Wolfe's writing, there is no reason to believe this can't be both a sly nod to the Trotwood reference (for which I'm deeply indebted to you for the gloss, it having been a million years since I read DAVID COPPERFIELD), as well as meant to convey the information about Number Five having a sister. In fact, much of Wolfe is like this, with multiply-resonating references, and there is no reason to believe this is not one of them.

Any thoughts, Tony, as long as we're mentioning associative works, on why GW called Phaedria Phaedria, if not for the extraliterary reference to incest?

One last new thought I haven't brought to the table until now, then:

David, we learn, has blue eyes (p.9). Phaedria has violet eyes (p.29). Violet is considered a shade of blue by geneticists and follows the same pattern of inheritance; i.e., both eye color alleles (one from each parent) must be blue for it be manifested. Number Five having brown eyes means Maitre has brown eyes, but also carries the recessive blue (otherwise David would not been blue-eyed). Phaedria's mother then must have carried at least one gene for blue/violet, which when combined with the paired blue recessive from Maitre would manifest itself anywhere from blue to violet, including intermixed shades (the same way eye color does in children born of a blue-eyed, green-eyed couple). I submit this as still further evidence that Maitre is Phaedria's father.

I'm starting to feel like Tony Ellis and I have subsumed the roles of David and Number Five, with our pcs becoming Mr. Million, and we're both arguing over the works of someone who approaches for us the stature of Homer. Maybe it's not as edifying as the alga-nutria dialogues, but we're having fun!

Now if we could just find the equivalent of a sister...

Robert Borski