

Someday they'll want us.

The Urth list — 12 messages, 7 voices, 24 Jun 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5640>

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Gerry Quinn — 24 Jun 2010, 11:12

"Someday they'll want us" is the last line of The Fifth Head of Cerberus, written three years after the narrator's release from prison. The subject, clearly, is Phaedria and her child. Who are the "us" of the example?

I have sometimes heard the phrase used where "us" means the singular "me", but I do not think it fits the narrator's education and speech patterns.

The narrator's known family at this time consists of only Mr. Million, and David, who lives in another city. Are we to infer that he has already created a 'Number 6' clone?

A little earlier comes the sentence "I have written to disclose myself to myself, and I am writing now because I will, I know, sometime read what I am now qwriting and wonder". This can be read in two ways; one in which "myself" and "I" may refer to a clone, and another which suggests that in writing the narrator has found a better means of self-examination.

Anyway, I was wondering what people think.

- Gerry Quinn

Adam Thornton — 24 Jun 2010, 12:49 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 06/24/2010 06:12 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Did you read the novella standalone, as it appears in Best Of, or as part of the collection of three novellas published as Fifth Head?

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 24 Jun 2010, 13:04 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 6/24/2010 6:12 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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He may mean all the clones to come, as he is inextricably on the same track as Maitre and his predecessors. He's also probably lying to himself, but at the same time leaving a written record for his posterity to read after they have done away with his generation or otherwise failed to learn from his example in his lifetime.

I wonder if this also an ironic commentary on the youth counter-culture of the time.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
IEEE Student Chapter Blog at
< <http://ieeetamut.org> >

Gerry Quinn — 24 Jun 2010, 13:29 · in reply to Adam Thornton

From: Adam Thornton

On 06/24/2010 06:12 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Did you read the novella standalone, as it appears in *_Best Of_*, or as part of the collection of three novellas published as *_Fifth Head_*?
Does it matter?

I read it as part of the collection, but I don't see what difference it could make. All the action in the other two linked novellas (as well as all the other action in *_Fifth Head_*) takes place before this time.

- Gerry Quinn

Tony Ellis — 24 Jun 2010, 14:08 · follows Gerry Quinn

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The subject is humanity. 'Us' is the family - for want of a better word - of which he is a part. Someday humanity will want us.

They haven't been experimenting on themselves for generations for the fun of it. Maitre wants them to be at the very least rulers of the planet.

The significance of this as a last line is that it confirms what we've already begun to suspect - that Number 5, the narrator we've followed all this time, no longer exists. He's become Maitre.

Are we to infer that he has
already created a 'Number 6' clone?

Absolutely. That's 'the child'.

James Wynn — 24 Jun 2010, 14:13 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

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education and speech patterns. The narrator's known family at this time consists of only Mr. Million, and David, who lives in another city. Are we to infer that he has already created a 'Number 6' clone?

I am pretty certain that "the child" with Phaedra is Number 6. Phaedra *works* at Cave Canem and we know the jobs available there. "Us" is Mr. Million and all the clones before and after Number 5. As "Dr. Marsch" has explained, "us" and "me" are equivalent in their case.

A little earlier comes the sentence "I have written to disclose myself to myself, and I am writing now because I will, I know, sometime read what I am now qwriting and wonder". This can be read in two ways; one in which "myself" and "I" may refer to a clone, and another which suggests that in writing the narrator has found a better means of self-examination.

I think it is the former. He knows that he will pass on this position to another at one point. He must know on some analytical level that Number 6 will murder him one day.

Lee Berman — 24 Jun 2010, 14:39 · follows James Wynn

The subject, clearly, is Phaedria and her child. Who are the "us" of the example?

I read the ending very differently. I think Phaedria has long moved on and that is recognized by #5.

My understanding is that Mr. Million and his successors are exceedingly narcissistic, which is why they continue to clone themselves. Their thinking is that the goal of planetary or even inter-planetary rule could, of course, be accomplished by such a superior person if only they had more than one lifetime to pursue the goal. Frustration is expressed over the fact that after several lifetimes they have not progressed beyond being an aristocratic pimp on St. Croix. So the "us" is the succession of clones and the "they" are the fellow humans who refuse to acknowledge and submit to his superiority.

Gene Wolfe nicely expresses the underlying problem with a dream sequence of a ship which Matre refuses to untie from the dock until he can learn what is keeping it from sailing.(i.e. with cloning there is no evolution, no progress).

I'm glad this ending was brought to attention. 5HoC is the novella which first drew me to Gene Wolfe's writing and I consider the final denouement to be among the two most chilling, sad and lonely endings in SF.

(the other being Heinlein's All You Zombies in which we learn *Spoiler* the main character, who longs for a lost lover and family, has managed, through time travel and gender surgery, to be his/her own lost lover as well as his own mother, father and child in a closed loop. The final line, "You aren't really there at all. There isn't anybody but me here alone in the dark. I miss you dreadfully." I must suspect this 1959 story was an influence on Wolfe)

James Wynn — 24 Jun 2010, 15:58 · in reply to Lee Berman

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I think the only manipulator who actually counts is Mr. Million. All the other clones are his test subjects. Note that Auntie Jeanine died rather precipitously after she began acting as though she owned the house.

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Gerry Quinn — 24 Jun 2010, 23:42 · in reply to Tony Ellis

----- Original Message -----

Gerry Quinn wrote:

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Indeed, I think this is correct. I had thought that the child was Phaedria's by way of her failed marriage, which allowed another reading. But of course the failure of the 'family' had become their driving obsession and that must be what is meant.

My initial reading was more optimistic; I thought perhaps the narrator had broken the cycle. But it does not seem tenable.

- Gerry Quinn

Adam Thornton — 25 Jun 2010, 01:37 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

On 06/24/2010 08:29 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

From: Adam Thornton <mailto:adam at io.com>

On 06/24/2010 06:12 AM, Gerry Quinn wrote:

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If you've read the other parts, then you know that cloning isn't the only way to get confusion between the plural and singular.

Adam

Gwern Branwen — 26 Jun 2010, 20:34 · in reply to James Wynn

On Thu, Jun 24, 2010 at 11:58 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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Did she? I haven't read it recently, but she's described as digging up the house for a while and searching for Maitre's hidden fortune, and only when she finally dies does Mr. Million try (and fail) to run the brothel. She had enough time to damage it quite a bit, which isn't very consistent with Mr. Million offing her quickly, and given his own predictable failure, he wouldn't want to off her.

gwern

James Wynn — 26 Jun 2010, 22:23 · in reply to Gwern Branwen

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When I say "acting as though she owned the house" I mean when she relinquished her duties running the family business to search for the fabled hoard. We know this only occurred, coincidentally, "in her last days". And Jeanine lived less than three years after Maitre's murder although she was apparently healthy enough prior to that. And she could not have been more than in her early 40s at the most. Number Five does not tell us, I believe, if he knows, how long "her last days" were. Nor does he say how much damage she did. It was probably trivial since

there is no discussion of extensive renovation. N5 only says the house was "in a confused state". After she ceased to be a benefit from stand-point of the experiment she passed away. As I said, very convenient. But, probably, one of the principle reasons she was kept around was as a legal backstop in the case a clone did something that made him incapable of direct inheritance (this situation had arisen before with Maitre). So she would not have lasted long anyway once N5's release became imminent.

It would have not been a trivial act to eliminate her with Number Five in prison for the foreseeable future. It had to have been a drastic act. As a robot, it would not be a physically simple thing in any case. But more importantly, he could not himself continue to run by himself. After her death, he had to lay off all the household and shut down any attempt at business because, as a robot, he couldn't enforce his will.

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