

Someday they'll want us

The Urth list — 13 messages, 7 voices, 25 Jun 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5641>

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Lee Berman — 25 Jun 2010, 13:48

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.

An interesting perspective! I had tended to think of Mr. Million as a kindly great grandfather with a true soft spot for his boys (David too, yes?) who perhaps regretted the process he set in motion and was concerned for the self-clones which had been sold around the city as slaves. I guess that kindly aspect is perverted by the fact that it is a monstrous sort of conceited self-love.

If you are correct that Mr. Million remains a manipulative, murderous person I guess that is hardly a shocker, given the details of the plot. Thanks for a new perspective.

James Wynn — 25 Jun 2010, 14:40 · in reply to Lee Berman

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Another hint is Number 5's dream. The dead man steering the ship has Mr Million's face. Obviously it is his own face too. But Number 5 specifically connected it with Mr. Million.

JBarach at aol.com — 26 Jun 2010, 19:52 · follows James Wynn

severiansola at hotmail.com (mailto:severiansola at hotmail.com) writes:

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Why have a robot raise the children? It seems to me that it's to ensure that the education they receive is exactly the same. After all, "Gene Wolfe" wants to make sure that all the other Gene Wolfes that follow him are not only Gene-etic (a pun I suspect Wolfe had in mind, given the focus on his name throughout the story: we think he's only talking about wolves in stories, but I suspect he's also talking about genes) replicas but also replicas in every other way, especially education and upbringing. Of course, he can't control *everything* but as many things as he can control he is controlling in order to make sure that every cloned son is as like him as possible until he/they finally achieve/s his/their full potential.

Our own Jim Jordan (aka Patera Nutria) has pointed out the similarities between cloning and incest in one of his essays, and he mentions Fifth Head (and the movie Chinatown) in this connection. Both cloning and incest exclude the other -- cloning more dramatically, of course. Cloning, as Maitre practices it, is designed to keep "yourself" intact, to keep exactly the same genes instead of mixing them with the genes of others and thereby "debasement" them. Mr. Million allows you to give your clones and their clones and so forth *exactly* the same upbringing, with no pollution from outside. But the result is that there can be no growth. The result is stagnation.

The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, with incest: The family is idolized, and to keep the family going *and staying the same*, you have children with your daughter (idolatry in particular of the father: "I father my children, my grandchildren, and so forth") or your son marries your daughter (that is, a girl with exactly the same upbringing, same family traditions, etc.). After all, you've developed your traditions (e.g., opening gifts on Christmas Eve, not on Christmas Day) but if your son marries some girl outside your family, he might change all those traditions. He might not even come home for Thanksgiving. You have your family secrets, but if your daughter marries some guy outside the family, she might tell him your secrets. And so on. To "keep the family strong," the family is restricted to its own bounds ... and the result, instead of strength, is weakness, stagnation, and debasement.

Change and growth and maturity and glorification require interaction with and intermarriage with the Other, with someone outside. (There are some profound theological reasons behind this, which Jordan explores in his essay, as does Peter Leithart in a forthcoming essay in a festschrift for Jordan). You have to marry someone different, someone outside your own family. You don't clone your children; attempting to "save your life" (your genes) in that way will result in losing it and losing the world. The only way to "save your life" and gain the world is to lose it, to give it away, to care not at all about preserving your genes. If you're concerned about your Genes, you become a Wolf.

John

David Stockhoff — 26 Jun 2010, 20:13 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

BotNS has similar concerns.

Nice punwork!

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John

Gerry Quinn — 27 Jun 2010, 11:19 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

Why have a robot raise the children? It seems to me that it's to ensure that the education they receive is exactly the same.

Possibly. But it may also be that in Port Mimizon, public education leaves something to be desired. Indeed, it appears standard among the rich or middle classes of Port Mimizon not to be attending what we would recognise as an ordinary school - though it could also simply be, of course, that Phaedra, Marydol etc. are the only other children the narrator knows.

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Controlling everything? I suppose you could consider writing a book that way...

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See also Urth/Ushas.

And maybe 'The Outsider'?

- Gerry Quinn

James Wynn — 27 Jun 2010, 12:46 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

Why have a robot raise the children? It seems to me that it's to ensure that the education they receive is exactly the same.

The purpose of their education was to observe the differences in intelligence and adaptability between the clone (N5) and the "control" (David). This experiment could not be performed in a sterile environment in any other setting. The variant chance experiences would be impossible to calculate.

Presumably, the robot was the most educated person there.

Of course, I think there is a third, over-riding issue. Million was performing the experiment, so he was the only one to do it. He was observing N5 and the control, just as he was observing Maitre's performance simultaneously.

U+16B9

JBarach at aol.com — 27 Jun 2010, 15:25 · follows James Wynn

I wrote:

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Gerry responds:

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Sorry for the confusion. I put "Gene Wolfe" in quotation marks because I wasn't referring to the *author* of Fifth Head of Cerberus, but to the character. Number 5's name (and the name of his father) is "Gene Wolfe," according to Borski's essay, and I think he's right. So the "Gene Wolfe" I was referring to was Maitre.

John

Gerry Quinn — 27 Jun 2010, 20:08 · in reply to JBarach at aol.com

I understood that. I agree that 'Gene Wolfe' can very well be the name of the narrator of 'Fifth Head' (same applies to 'Procreation') and I wasn't disagreeing with you... I was alluding to the fact that Wolfe controls everything in his books. He is known to edit multi-volume works as a whole, going back to change things in the early pages that might disagree with his grand scheme - I was only making a reference to this, not to anything that you said.

- Gerry Quinn

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

From: JBarach at aol.com

To: urth at lists.urth.net

Sent: Sunday, June 27, 2010 4:25 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) Someday they'll want us

I wrote:

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Jeff Wilson — 27 Jun 2010, 20:22 · in reply to James Wynn

On 6/27/2010 7:46 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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The purpose of their education was to observe the differences in intelligence and adaptability between the clone (N5) and the "control" (David). This experiment could not be performed in a sterile environment in any other setting. The variant chance experiences would be impossible to calculate.

I'm not sure this can be a valid controlled experiment other than on the purely genetic level, where technically #5 is the control (no introduced variation) and David would be the "treatment group" in that he represents some sort of deviation from the numbered series. Behaviorally, it's not controlled at all, since both boys are being raised with companions different from themselves rather than alone or with fellow clones of #1.

And this may be the point in that outside of #1's discovery of the cloning technique, the clones are hacks who are hazy on experimental science, explaining the emphasis on history and evolutionary biology as fields safely free of experimental possibilities (at the time of writing).

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

James Wynn — 28 Jun 2010, 01:19 · in reply to Jeff Wilson

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I say David is the "control" because N5 is actually the subject of the experiment. David and Jeanine represent "all the other people on the planet". Maitre is uninterested in them. N5 and his forebearers are the puzzle. They don't advance in influence despite their superior intellect, resources, and scientific method. You've put your finger on the problem, though...the experiment should be examining the types of people who have advanced without the clones' advantages using clones as the control. This is hinted at in N5's dream: They don't advance because they have been engineered not to.

Having read 'Fifth Head' first, I was quite skeptical of the viability C. Doctorow's society in "Down & Out in the Magic Kingdom" which accomplishes much the same thing by turning everyone into Mr. Millions.

~ U+16B9

Jerry Friedman — 28 Jun 2010, 01:39 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

From: Gerry Quinn <gerryq at indigo.ie>

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wasn't disagreeing with you...

In fact, I think it's crucial that his name can be (almost certainly is) Gene Wolfe. Anyone, including the author, would give rise to people as evil as Maitre and Number 5 if they embarked on that cloning project. And how does /Pirate Freedom/ fit in here, since Chris may be a clone? (Proposed interview question: "Human cloning may be possible now or soon. What do you think would happen if you were cloned? Could the story resemble 'The Fifth Head of Cerberus'?")

I like the theory, which I may have read on rasfw many years ago, that we should read "someday they'll want us" as meaning that one of the clones could become the Antichrist or the Beast. Their address is 666 Saltimbanque Street, after all. (A clone/clown pun?)

Jerry Friedman

David Stockhoff — 28 Jun 2010, 02:25 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

For a similar theme, see John Crowley's "Great Work of Time."

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Jeff Wilson — 28 Jun 2010, 04:03 · in reply to Jerry Friedman

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I bet they have one hell of a Mardi Gras there.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
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