

Five Severians -- Severian-as-Clone

The Urth list — 10 messages, 5 voices, 17 Dec 2013

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6485>

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Michael Thayer — 17 Dec 2013, 15:16

Lee (severiansola at hotmail.com): Personally, I find the five coffins in the mausoleum to be impossible to plausibly understand at just a narrative level. I find it to be most essentially autobiographical in the manner of a puzzle in its referent, *The Fifth Head of Cerberus*. . . . I first posted these ideas on this board a number of years ago, so perhaps there is a chance this is what you were looking for Michael?

Thanks, Lee - this is certainly a component of what I'm looking for. I agree that in order to understand tBotNS or tFHoC, we need to take account of Wolfe's propensity for autobiography, self-reference, etc., and I think your thoughts (which I certainly do recognize) shed a lot of light into the shadowy mausoleum. But the five coffins -- *two empty, three closed* -- should work not only on the level of authorial symbol, but the level of narrative as well, shouldn't they? I think this meticulous author and his meticulously plotted book deserve the benefit of that doubt. Severian tells us: "Before you assume that I have cheated you, read again . . ." (*Citadel*, 405).

*New theory (? - or maybe you've heard it before - is there anything new under the New Sun?).
**Five coffins, two empty, three closed.* In *Citadel*, Severian our narrator tells us of a second "first Severian." What if Severian is, like the narrator of tFHoC, a clone? One of five clones, each initially housed in the mausoleum, which is dislocated in time like the house of Master Ash or one of the botanical gardens? At the time our narrator Severian is leaving Urth for his trial, two of the clones have left/been released from the mausoleum (narrator-Sev and the "first Severian" who came before). If the mausoleum is dislocated in time, then it is possible that each one of the clones would exit into a different strand in the "tapestry" of time. Perhaps whoever constructed the mausoleum and put the five Severians there was/is planning to release them one by one until one of the clones successfully brings the New Sun?

*Clones in the text. *I remember reading in a Wolfe interview that the prostitutes in the House Azure, the "khaibits," are in fact clones of the Chatelaines. I think we need to entertain the idea that Father Inire -- "alive so long beyond the span of his short-lived kind" (*Citadel*, 405) -- who seems (to me) to be many places at once, is not a single person but a multitude of clones (reminded of Borsky's Palaemon as Inire theory, Wright's Ceryx as Inire theory (AD 84), and all the "bent" "crooked" or "small" men who show up cowed or masked in the text -- servitor who confers with the Autarch and escorts Sev to the Green Room (*Claw* 338), the masked medicine man escorting Sev in the jungle toward the end of *Citadel*).
tFHoC certainly alerts us to the clone as a Wolfe convention and plot device -- could it be a key as well?

Could a Severian-as-clone theory explain the baffling scene involving the grotesque homunculus who addresses Severian as "brother" (*Citadel*, 388)?

If this theory has any legs at all -- a dubious prospect! -- we would need to account for a sixth Severian, the natural born man, son of Ouen and Catherine, grandson of Dorcas, etc., who was cloned five times.

Thoughts?

Date: Mon, 16 Dec 2013 10:48:13 -0500

From: Lee <severiansola at hotmail.com>

To: "urth at urth.net" <urth at urth.net>

Subject: (urth) Five Severians

Message-ID: <BLU175-W2411168E0A6AD4248F13D5CFD80 at phx.gbl> Content-Type: text/plain; charset="iso-8859-1"

Michael Thayer: Druissi's eight Severians theory is a bit opaque.

I agree. Driussi is usually fairly circumspect in injecting his own interpretations onto Wolfe. But now and then, as in this case, he demonstrates an ability to go off on his own tangent with almost Borskian intrepidity.

Personally, I find the five coffins in the mausoleum to be impossible to plausibly understand at just a narrative level. I find it to be most essentially autobiographical in the manner of a puzzle in its referent, The Fifth Head of Cerberus.

I think most here are aware that Wolfe once (remarkably) admitted that the solution to the puzzle of figuring out Maitre's name in Fifth Head of Cerberus is: "Gene Wolfe".

I don't find this to be mere literary cleverness and sleight of hand. I think this is Wolfe's way of saying that much of the mystery of his work can find its solution in autobiography.

I find the title "Fifth Head of Cerberus" itself to be a similar puzzle (Aunt Jeannine suggests that it is). What are the "five" heads? We have Mr. Million, his first clone, Maitre and Number Five. So only four in the sequence. Who is the fifth?

I think the answer is the person who came before Mr. Million and who created him as a character. I think the fifth head is Gene Wolfe (the author) and only by catching that can you understand the title of the book and thus a main intended self-referential auctorial theme of the book.

So for me, the five coffins in the mausoleum are a direct reference to the earlier book title and a way of saying, "once again I, Gene Wolfe as author, am an integral part of this story and my character Severian is a clone/extension of me in some ways". Naming Severian's father "Ouen" (Welsh form of Eugene) may also make a similar point.

I find Driussi's essay on the similarities between Wolfe's and Severian's lives to also be relevant to this general idea.

Explaining why two of the coffins are open is a bit tough, but my best guess is that Wolfe is saying he has "cloned" himself into two of his previous novels, those being Fifth Head of Cerberus and Peace.

Interestingly, Daniel Otto Jack Peterson has recently posted a link to a review of Peace which mentions its autobiographical mysteries and the self-awareness of the author as he creates the story and its characters.

FWIW, I first posted these ideas on this board a number of years ago, so perhaps there is a chance this is what you were looking for Michael?

antonio at gmail.com — 18 Dec 2013, 13:14 · in reply to Michael Thayer

At the risk of sounding pedestrian, I just don't see why such clones would be stored in such a place (but maybe those aren't coffins? Certainly Sev's mention of liking to sleep inside looks like something that ought to draw attention in a book where so much isn't what it seems).

Don't be afraid to fire away theories! This list has seen all sorts of things with plenty of rhyme but not so much reason, whereas yours have the merit of being derived from the books.

David Stockhoff — 18 Dec 2013, 14:20 · in reply to Michael Thayer

On 12/17/2013 10:16 AM, Michael Thayer wrote:

*New theory (? - or maybe you've heard it before - is there anything new under the New Sun?). *_Five coffins, two empty, three closed._ In Citadel, Severian our narrator tells us of a second "first Severian." What if Severian is, like the narrator of tFHoC, a clone? One of five clones, each initially housed in the mausoleum, which is dislocated in time like the house of Master Ash or one of the botanical gardens? At the time our narrator Severian is leaving Urth for his trial, two of the clones have left/been released from the mausoleum (narrator-Sev and the "first Severian" who came before). If the mausoleum is dislocated in time, then it is possible that each one of the clones would exit into a different strand in the "tapestry" of time. Perhaps whoever constructed the mausoleum and put the five Severians there was/is planning to release them one by one until one of the clones successfully brings the New Sun?

The cloning theory is well grounded, but temporally dislocating the mausoleum is new AFAIK. In a way, I don't like this, because it seems to move the explanation further away rather than explain it. Where is this place? how does Severian get there? who put it there? But Lee is right, and the best answer may simply be "Gene Wolfe." Whether it's out of time or not.

I see none of the usual clues to time dislocation: Severian doesn't refer to time passing or not passing, and it seems like there are easier ways to store clones than by slowing time.

*Clones in the text. *I remember reading in a Wolfe interview that the prostitutes in the House Azure, the "khaibits," are in fact clones of the Chatelaines. I think we need to entertain the idea that Father Inire -- "alive so long beyond the span of his short-lived kind" (Citadel, 405) -- who seems (to me) to be many places at once, is not a single person but a multitude of clones (reminded of Borsky's Palaemon as Inire theory, Wright's Ceryx as Inire theory (AD 84), and all the "bent" "crooked" or "small" men who show up cowed or masked in the text -- servitor who confers with the Autarch and escorts Sev to the Green Room (Claw 338), the masked medicine man escorting Sev in the jungle toward the end of Citadel). tFHoC certainly alerts us to the clone as a Wolfe convention and plot device -- could it be a key as well?

Could a Severian-as-clone theory explain the baffling scene involving the grotesque homunculus who addresses Severian as "brother" (Citadel, 388)?

Absolutely!

Inire does get around (and so do his images), but then what does it mean when Inire says in his letter that he is away?

Not to mention: who cloned him, when, why? Does Severian know? I don't think we can use the "Gene Wolfe" answer twice. But his character does seem to have a form, if you will, that is larger than its content, much like Erebus, Abaia, and the others with Korean War parallels. He could very well be "someone else" or the agent of that person.

If this theory has any legs at all -- a dubious prospect! -- we would need to account for a sixth Severian, the natural born man, son of Ouen and Catherine, grandson of Dorcas, etc., who was cloned five times.

We also need to account for Valeria, her family, and the rest of the Citadel, which is only superficially a cluster of 1940s-style rocket ships---all but the Witches' Tower. (That and Valeria bug me most of all.)

Valeria may well be in the same time-dislocated space as the Severian clones in storage, as has been suggested. But nothing she tells Severian indicates this; rather, much time has passed since her family was involved in Citadel affairs, and while her family seems isolated it is plainly not completely so. If she seems old-fashioned, the evidence given points toward poverty and past wealth, not time dislocation.

Yet the Atrium does do something time related: she says the dials were put there because of its function, not the reverse. If so, her family may be affected by its proximity.

It may also be that she is related to Severian, with her "dark hair." If those are her family's towers, why not also the Atrium and the mausoleum? If her family produced all the Citadel's castellans at the peak of its power (both the family's and the Citadel's, and probably from Typhon's time onward), they would once have had access to the highest technology possessed by Man. They could even be related to Typhon's family.

If she is all her family's daughters and sons, then either she is merely the only one (meaning her family is about to die utterly with her) or she is genetically identified with others unknown (i.e., Severian). Either explanation could justify Severian's interest in her. But identifying Valeria with Severian might violate the parallel with Rosemary (may she rest in peace).

DAVID STOCKHOFF — 18 Dec 2013, 15:48 · in reply to David Stockhoff

"If she is all her family's daughters and sons, then either she is merely the only one (meaning her family is about to die utterly with her) or she is genetically identified with others unknown (i.e., Severian). Either explanation could justify Severian's interest in her."

Valeria's use of the word "breeds" bothers me the most. It just screams "clone" to me.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2013 9:20 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:

On 12/17/2013 10:16 AM, Michael Thayer wrote:

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We also need to account for Valeria, her family, and the rest of the Citadel, which is only superficially a cluster of 1940s-style rocket ships---all but the Witches' Tower. (That and Valeria bug me most of all.)

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Michael Thayer — 18 Dec 2013, 22:08 · follows DAVID STOCKHOFF

etonio at gmail.com: At the risk of sounding pedestrian, I just don't see why such clones would be stored in such a place (but maybe those aren't coffins? Certainly Sev's mention of liking to sleep inside looks like something that ought to draw attention in a book where so much isn't what it seems).

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Thanks, etonio, I assure you I am the pedestrian on this street! I don't have any idea why someone would store clones inside coffins in a time-dislocated mausoleum.* I admit it may be a fatal flaw in the argument. But I think that any explanation for the mausoleum -- with its five coffins, two empty, three closed -- will present similar difficulties (maybe not? if not, please pipe up!). In any event, my focus isn't on exploring the Severian-as-clone theory, but on answering the question: what's up with the five coffins in Severian's mausoleum, two open, three closed? What/who/which-versions-of-who was/is/will be inside of them? I can't help but think that this is -- if not the threshold mystery of the novel -- one of the first tier mysteries, and I can't find a satisfying theory anywhere!

*(Not for nothing, Father Inire's Second House consists of rooms that look like paintings, so why not a clone-storage unit that looks like a coffin -- Inire may be one of the walkers of the Corridors of Time that Severian tells us is manipulating his destiny - Citadel, pg. 405-406 - and, if so, he could be behind the mausoleum of clones. I think this is at least as plausible as some theories on other topics published by Borsky or Clute, so I figured I'd throw it out there and see if it strikes a chord with anyone else.)

Jeffery Wilson — 19 Dec 2013, 03:09 · in reply to etonio at gmail.com

On 12/18/2013 7:14 AM, etonio at gmail.com wrote:

At the risk of sounding pedestrian, I just don't see why such clones would be stored in such a place (but maybe those aren't coffins?)

It's a fine place to store dead clones. Three closed coffins = three dead clones, or three timeline doppelgangers paradoxed away. Two empties would suggest Sev the narrator has one more clone left somewhere, or one more timeline alteration yet to be

made before the Yesodis are satisfied.

Jeff Wilson - < jwilson at clueland.com >
A&M Texarkana Computational Intelligence Lab
< http://www.tamut.edu/cil >

Lee — 20 Dec 2013, 16:14 · follows Jeffery Wilson

Michael Thayer: I agree that in order to understand tBotNS or tFHoC, we need to take account of Wolfe's propensity for autobiography, self-reference, etc., and I think your thoughts (which I certainly do recognize) shed a lot of light into the shadowy mausoleum. But the five coffins -- *two empty, three closed* -- should work not only on the level of authorial symbol, but the level of narrative as well, shouldn't they?

I agree. Wolfe is meticulous enough to write at multiple levels and to impart real meaning at multiple levels. But surely some levels of meaning take precedence over others for certain sections. Wolfe is still human (I think). And for me, the mausoleum has more self-referential meaning than Severian/narrative meaning. For me, we are told there was another previous Severian and there are two coffins open, and that is sufficient narrative meaning for me.

I like Antonio's observation that perhaps they are not really just "coffins". The speculation by so many about possible cloning scenarios demonstrates that there is sufficient evidence in BotNS to at least speculate on possibilities.

I think we need to entertain the idea that Father Inire --
"alive so long beyond the span of his short-lived kind" (Citadel, 405) --
who seems (to me) to be many places at once, is not a single person but a multitude of clones...and all the "bent" "crooked" or
"small" men who show up cowed or masked in the text -- servitor who
confers with the Autarch and escorts Sev to the Green Room (Claw 338), the
masked medicine man escorting Sev in the jungle toward the end of Citadel).
tFHoC certainly alerts us to the clone as a Wolfe convention and plot
device -- could it be a key as well?

I very much think so. I've had a similar "Father Inire Theory" for a number of years. A key difference might be the mode of cloning. Cloning a human presumably means special biological laboratory equipment as we see in Maitre's and Typhon's and Baldander's labs. But key question:

Is Father Inire human?

As a "cacogen", surely not. Are we shown an alien form of "cloning" which might be a more natural biological function not requiring laboratory manipulation?

Yes, with Tzadkiel. In the Captain's chambers, the huge Tzadkiel has one of her fingers break off and form into a human sized Tzadkiel. A sponge (sea creature!)-like reproductive process is used to explain it. We see similar human-sized buds from giant sea creatures on Blue and on Urth with Great Scylla in the Short Sun trilogy. Perhaps something like this process has produced our multiple Father Inire "clones"?

I'll go further out on a limb. Tzadkiel tells Severian that he had been an acolyte of Severian's in a previous iteration. Is this a throwaway line or are we supposed to guess the identity of this "acolyte"? There are few plausible candidates.

But I go out on a limb and propose- Hethor. Even among Severian-as-Conciliator's followers, no character more deeply expresses fawning admiration for Severian and calling of "Master" than Hethor.

But how could Hethor be associated with Tzadkiel? Because he served on Tzadkiel's Ship. Because in his rantings there is talk of him being part of a mutiny to displace the Captain. Because Severian sees someone looking like Hethor among the "Jibbers". Might Hethor have originated as a broken off piece of Tzadkiel just like the tinkerbells of Tzadkiel? Yes, Hethor is a "demon". But what is a demon but an angel who has rebelled and has fallen to earth (Urth)?

How does Hethor relate to Father Inire? Both are from off-Urth Both are crooked little guys. Both use mirrors and are associated with monsters (Inire's "teratoid symbols"). Both seem to be keeping an eye on Severian through his travels and adventures. Inire's mirror book shows Tzadkiel. (FWIW, Inire has some connections to Dionysus, as does the Outsider in Short Sun).

Final summation, perhaps some "clones" in this series are part of a natural biological alien process. Tag question- How might Severian fit into that scheme? (to be addressed in another post)

Lee — 20 Dec 2013, 16:35 · follows Lee

I have not seen in the speculations on the Mausoleum and Severian as a clone is a mention of the end of RTTW, in which SilkHorn and his retinue travel to Urth and end up in the Necropolis and in a mausoleum (not Severian's) to inter the remains of the girl Cilinia.

Cilinia is associated with Scylla of the Whorl and also to Great Scylla, the giant sea creature with female buds on her back, each wearing an "abaia".

I find the Urth scenes in RTTW to function as the final Urth of the New Sun, written to give us hints to mysteries in the previous story that nobody has solved. So I think Scylla/Cilinia's mausoleum scene is meant to tell us something important.

My guess is that it tells us that Severian has an ancestry similar to Scylla's in some way. Somehow, somehow he is, at least partially, a product of the process that produced these giant, alien sea creatures and and electronic gods of the Whorl.

Severian is a Hero. And the BotNS is modelled to a degree on the mythological tales of epic heroes. I find that Severian, like Heracles, Perseus, Theseus, etc. is a guy who grows up thinking he is human, but secretly has "divine" parentage. He finds himself to have superhuman powers and miraculously able to live through anything (even death). He is inexplicably risen to power and ends up interacting with the highest of beings across time and universes, and in the end finds himself to be worshipped as a god.

Thus when the question of cloning Severian comes up, I suspect the answer, (as we see for the creation of his eidolons) will not be the same laboratory process that we might expect for the usual cloning of normal human beings.

David Stockhoff — 20 Dec 2013, 16:52 · in reply to Lee

On 12/20/2013 11:35 AM, Lee wrote:

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interacting with the highest of beings across time and universes, and in the end finds himself to be worshipped as a god.

Definitely! Good observation about RTTW too. Technically, Severian is a demigod.

Lee — 20 Dec 2013, 20:10 · follows David Stockhoff

David Stockhoff: Technically, Severian is a demigod.

Agreed! And for me that eggs the questions:

What are Typhon-Pas, Echidna and Scylla?

What are Tzadkiel, F, B and O?

What are Father Inire and The Cumaeen?

What is The Outsider?

If we condense the ancient god pantheons and judeo-christian beliefs into one scheme (as I think Wolfe does), I think we can make some very good, definitive guesses. Especially if we conflate the ancient pagan gods with judeo-christian demons.

Prometheus/Azazel is an example of the ancients doing just that. Jove/ Jehovah may be something similar.

Paul Watson: First, it's a family mausoleum, but I can't get that one to fit (too many of Severian's relatives still alive during the BotNS to account for 2 open coffins).

I think it works as a family mausoleum if the family is one such as found in Fifth Head of Cerberus with Mr. Million, Maitre and Number Five. Especially if we can concede that all of them, in some way, can be seen as "Gene Wolfe".

Marc Aramini: I never much cared for this kind of stuff, Jolenta as Marilyn Monroe and whatnot. Of course autobiography is in there in some way shape or form, but this kind of mapping always rubbed me as interpretationally barren.

I agree and disagree. I think it serves the general principle of acknowledgement of autobiography, which is so important it can barely be overestimated. But the problems kick in from being too detailed, subjecting each element to scrutiny and debate.

For example I think Marilyn Monroe is not the best choice as a model for Jolenta. She is too blonde and not busty enough. OTOH, there was a drab looking Hollywood brunette named Margarita Cansino who was transformed into "The Sex Goddess". With a huge make-over, which included plastic surgery and red hair dye, she became the silver screen bombshell Rita Hayworth. Her famous pin-up (seen in Shawshank Redemption) remained popular among soldiers through the Korean war.

I could argue with myself that Tina Louise, another busty, red-headed screen bombshell makes a good candidate for Jolenta also. Her dynamic on Gilligan's Island as Ginger in contrast with the pretty but less glamorous Mary Ann, is very similar to what we see between Jolenta and Dorcas.

But such arguments, while perhaps fun, distract from the original autobiographical message which I think is more important than identifying exactly what element from the real world matches elements in Wolfe's fiction.