

Who am I? (was: Hues, HORARS: II)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Jul 1998

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William H. Ansley — 16 Jul 1998, 00:16

Anyone up for making a list of Wolfe stories where the narrator is mistaken about his own identity? Off the top of my head:

"HORARS"

"The Other Dead Man"

"Checking Out"

"The Changeling"

"Tracking Song"

"Forlesen"

Latro

Both Severian and Silk to some extent

Maybe Weer in PEACE

I think you are going to have to change your specifications if you want to include all the stories you mention. How about: a list of Wolfe stories where the protagonist (who may also be the narrator) is mistaken or confused about his identity (and where it may be impossible to tell from the text unambiguously what the protagonist's true identity is) and where identity can mean either personal identity or something more general such as whether the protagonist is dead or alive, human or nonhuman.

Hey, isn't that all of them?!? 8->

In HORARS whether the protagonist is a HORAR or a human surgically disguised as a HORAR is left at least slightly open.

In "The Other Dead Man" and "Checking Out" the protagonists know who they are, they just don't know that they are dead.

In "The Changeling" it's hard to know who is mistaken about the narrator's identity.

In "Tracking Song" as far as I can see, it is more a case of loss of identity than being mistaken; Cutthroat is never quite sure who he is (and neither are we).

I am assuming you are including "Forlesen" because either you think the protagonist, Emanuel Forlesen, is dead and doesn't know it which is certainly possible and even likely, but not, I think, certain or you think he has been given a wholly false identity, which may be true but there is little or no support for this in the text.

Latro, again, is a case of lack of (personal) identity due to lack of memory. Severian and Silk know who they are but not what they are; at least at first. I think that Alden Dennis Were is perhaps the least ambiguous of all of Wolfe's "dead and doesn't know it" narrators, although this fact is anything but obvious in PEACE.

You have left out the grand-daddy of all of Gene Wolfe identity confusion pieces: _The Fifth Head of Cerberus_.

I also nominate:

"Melting"

"The Eyeflash Miracles"

"The Packerhaus Method"

Free Live Free

"Three Fingers"

And possibly:

"The Death of Dr. Island"

"Sightings at Twin Mounds"

"A Solar Labyrinth"

"In the House of Gingerbread"

"The Last Thrilling Wonder Story"

William Ansley