

Peace_ by Gene Wolfe (SPOILERS)

The SF-Lovers list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 18 Sep 1996

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adam louis stephanides — 18 Sep 1996, 00:42

I recently reread Peace_ by Gene Wolfe. I accept that Weer is dead, but I'm not sure I found all the evidence for this, or that I fully understand what's there. Here is the internal evidence I found, in roughly descending order of importance (as distinct from the external evidence that Wolfe has apparently said Weer is supposed to be dead):

1) At the start of the book we are told that the elm tree planted by Eleanor Bold fell outside the window of Weer's house. Towards the end we learn that "Mrs. Porter's" hobby is to plant trees on the graves of her friends. It is indicated that Mrs. Porter is Eleanor Bold.

2) It is very unlikely that a wealthy man who is as sick as Weer purports to be would be living entirely on his own, without a nurse or housekeeper; and why would he be unable to see a real doctor?

3) The ghost stories incorporated in the book, which are no proof of anything, but set us thinking in that direction.

Is there anything I've missed?

I also have to admit that I don't fully understand how the elm tree is supposed to work. How do we know that the tree is planted on Weer's grave? Because it is outside Weer's house? But wouldn't it be more usual for Weer to be buried in a cemetery?

Somebody once suggested in this group that Weer's house was a "memory palace": a mnemonic device existing only in Weer's mind. This would take care of the problem in the last paragraph, but it seems unlikely to me for two reasons:

1) Weer clearly recalls consulting with an architect about the blueprints of the house.

2) In my understanding of such "memory palaces" (which is drawn primarily from Little, Big_, so I might very well be wrong), the idea was that you filled the rooms or other places you imagined with objects which were supposed to call to mind whatever you wanted to remember, not with the exact furnishings those rooms had in real life.

Any help would be most appreciated.

Thanks in advance.

Adam

Peter Cash — 18 Sep 1996, 15:49 · follows adam louis stephanides

slight SPOILERS for PEACE and SOLDIER of ARETE

I haven't read PEACE yet, but I do recall that Latro builds just such a "memory place" (or memory palace) in SOLDIER of ARETE. I'm not sure how relevant that is, though... Well, perhaps if you're dead, you need a "memory place" to remind you of your life, and who you were? And what would be better for this purpose than your actual house, with the furnishings tied to your actual memories? And since you're dead, the house is perhaps in some mystical way coincident with your grave... that would explain the tree.

adam louis stephanides — 16 Nov 1996, 18:51 · follows Peter Cash

kmaroney at crossover.com (Kevin J. Maroney) writes:

First, Wolfe has confirmed that Weer is a ghost, wandering through a ghost's life; further, most of the events of the novel only make sense in that context.

I accept this; but I think it would be a Good Thing if somebody (not me; I don't know the book well enough) were to spell out the case for this in detail.

In my original post, I listed the evidence I saw for Weer being dead, which was

- 1) the elm tree bit;
- 2) the unlikelihood of somebody as rich and as sick as Weer ostensibly is being left completely alone (no servants or medical supervision), as he supposedly is;
- 3) the ghost stories embedded in the book.

Damien Broderick, in the New York Review of Science Fiction, has pointed out the quote from Gold's Necronomicon about "the soul of the dead man, seeking now in all the chambers under the vault of the skull its old resting places." (Which does support the view that Weer's house is imaginary.) All this convinces me, but I'm not sure it would convince a skeptic.

Regarding Wolfe's testimony, without getting into an argument about the "intentional fallacy," I think it would be a flaw in the book if it were not possible to determine from the text alone that Weer is dead (assuming, as I do, that he is intended to be dead).

Adam