

Weer is not dead.

The Urth list — 12 messages, 5 voices, 25 Aug 1998

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1058>

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Michael Straight — 25 Aug 1998, 10:34

On Sun, 23 Aug 1998, Jason Voegele wrote:

For starters, it does appear the Weer is dead from the outset of the book--many have noted that the falling tree disturbs his grave.

For starters, I agree that Weer is not only 'dead,' but has been for a long time. Recapping evidence others have presented before: Eleanor Bold's hobby is planting trees on the graves of her friends, elm trees are said to be planted to keep the dead from walking about as ghosts, Weer says that the elm Eleanor planted fell (freeing his ghost), the time from planting a tree until it falls is likely to be very long.

However...

On other theme in the book that I'm fond of (though I've had little luck convincing anyone of this) is solipsism. Weer's universe seems to exist solely in his thoughts, but his relating of the stories of the dead breathes new life into those old bones.

I think the very end of the book hints that you are righter than you know. The book ends with a reference to the story of the Chinese pillow and with a voice calling Dennis to wake up. I think this is the glimmer of grace that redeems the whole book.

Just like the young man in the Chinese story, young Dennis has been given a dream of an entire life (and even part of an afterlife) that might await him if he makes certain choices. It is a life of power and riches, that from the outside looks very successful, but perhaps a lonely life, a life in which he might have to kill to get and hold on to his wealth. And then, at the end of the book he wakes up, with the opportunity to make a choice (perhaps the choice not to fight/kill Bobby that day? Is that where it all started to go wrong?)

In the story of the Chinese pillow, we are not explicitly told why the young man, when offered a life of power, wealth, and many sons, would, when he wakes, choose to take another path, although much of the poignancy of the story is in imagining why. But in Weer, we see the same story from the inside. We are experiencing the dream of the Chinese pillow along with Dennis, and so we see why he might not choose this life. The story told in Peace is the life (and death) Dennis *might* live.

The story of the Sidhe near the end is a message to Weer: trying to prolong yourself as a ghost is fruitless (the Sidhe living on as the flock of geese are like Weer living on as a ghost). You must die (in baptism we die and are buried with Christ) in order to live again. But how can Weer, who is already dead, die? He can't, but young Dennis can wake from sleep (=death) in order to live a new, different life.

-Rostrum

Jason Voegele — 25 Aug 1998, 11:35 · follows Michael Straight

|For starters, I agree that Weer is not only 'dead,' but has been for a
|long time. Recapping evidence others have presented before: Eleanor
|Bold's hobby is planting trees on the graves of her friends, elm trees are
|said to be planted to keep the dead from walking about as ghosts, Weer
|says that the elm Eleanor planted fell (freeing his ghost), the time from
|planting a tree until it falls is likely to be very long.

I believe we have a consensus here.

|However...

|

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|> anyone of this) is solipsism. Weer's universe seems to exist solely in his
|> thoughts, but his relating of the stories of the dead breathes new life into
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|a voice calling Dennis to wake up. I think this is the glimmer of grace
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[snip]

Wow, you've summed up in a few paragraphs exactly what I've been looking for in this book. It has always bothered me that Wolfe would right such a beautiful and poignant book about the life of a probable murderer. I failed to see the point, although it didn't decrease my love for the work. The end, I thought, was always touching from a sentimental point of view but I failed to grasp completely its significance.

Obviously, I think there is more to the book than this, but this certainly provides a focus. It still leaves unanswered the significance of all the life-stories in the book. It can be argued that they are there simply as a cross-section of Weer's life, but I find little satisfaction in this view. The stories are given too much weight for such a simple explanation (even considering the tricks Wolfe likes to play) and I still think the "Necronomicon" theme to the work is primary. Consider the scene in which Aunt Olivia, Julius Smart (?), and Weer all observe the skull in the cave but fail to mention it to one another. I'd like to delve a little into a more "existential" view of this book, but it will have to wait (unless someone would like to take up the baton here).

Jason Voegele

William H. Ansley — 26 Aug 1998, 00:12 · follows Jason Voegele

Rostrum (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) said:

And

then, at the end of the book he wakes up, with the opportunity to make a
choice (perhaps the choice not to fight/kill Bobby that day? Is that
where it all started to go wrong?)

"Alex David Groce" <adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu> said:

The

Necronomicon, "the book that binds the dead," is appropriate, in that it is by
binding his life into a story that Weer comes to terms with his painful

(although not, in my opinion, murderou, other than Bobby) and solitary life.

I really find it hard to support the idea that a five-year-old Alden Dennis Weer can be said to have *murdered* Bobby Black. They were engaged in what seems to be normal, if somewhat rough, play. Also, if we can believe Weer, and if we can't then we have no witness to the events at all, he didn't push Bobby. They were wrestling on the stairs and both (probably) fell. (See Peace, p. 8, the short middle paragraph, Orb ed.) Weer also gives us no motive; he seems to have no reason to kill Bobby. Weer certainly seems to dislike him, but I get the impression that Bobby Black is an older, or at least bigger, kid and a bully.

In any case, the events that up to Bobby's death seem to be an accident, unless Weer is lying (always possible) or just mis-remembering to suit his own sense of what should have happened (as he says he may be doing to a set of Christmas memories - p. 20 last paragraph and continuing onto p. 21). But again, who else do we have to ask?

What I am trying to say here is that I find this event to be a very poor choice for a turning point in Weer's life, if it is one. Weer is too young to realize the consequences of his actions and his actions certainly do not lead inevitably to Bobby Black's death. It really is not a matter of choosing to push or not push Bobby, but a choice of whether to fight him or not fight (leaving capitulation or flight, if flight from the attic is even possible). So it seems to me that we have a boy of five who has to make a choice to eschew violence or embrace it, a choice that will change his life forever, if we accept that this is seminal event that forms Weer into what he becomes.

Let me try to be clear (for a change) one final time. I think that the events that followed from Bobby Black's death (Weer's parents leaving for Europe for two (?) years without him and his time spent under the care of Aunt Olivia) definitely did have a great deal of influence on the man he grew into. But, if the outcome of the fight with Bobby was a test for Weer, I don't think it was a fair one.

By the way, Rostrum, thank you for your post from which I quoted above. It makes the case for Weer's possible redemption better than anything I have seen before and I found it quite heartening.

William Ansley

Alex David Groce — 26 Aug 1998, 13:29 · follows William H. Ansley

On Aug 26, 12:12am, William H. Ansley wrote:

I agree--I only meant that Bobby is the "best" case I see for someone killed by Weer (and a poor case, although it's easy to see how people blamed him and how it surely changed his life)--and I don't see it as his test, or failure. I'm not sure that there IS an exact turning point where things went wrong for Weer--I think the book is more about coming to understand what did happen to him, not what might have been (although the headrest story does seem suggestive of that...)

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"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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Michael Straight — 26 Aug 1998, 13:58 · follows Alex David Groce

On Wed, 26 Aug 1998, William H. Ansley wrote:

Rostrum (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) said:

then, at the end of the book he wakes up, with the opportunity to make a choice (perhaps the choice not to fight/kill Bobby that day? Is that where it all started to go wrong?)

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I was arguing more that Bobby's death seems to have been an important turning point. Isn't there an implication that it had something to do with Weer's parents leaving? The way it is presented screams "this was a formative event" and it is at least symbolic of Weer's lifelong

choices "to eschew violence or embrace it" even if you don't want to hold young Dennis completely responsible for that particular event.

Would the "test" be more fair if the night before the fight, Dennis had a dream revealing to him the consequences of a life embracing violence? :-)

-Rostrum

William H. Ansley — 27 Aug 1998, 00:32 · follows Michael Straight

Rostrum (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) said:

On other theme in the book that I'm fond of (though I've had little luck convincing anyone of this) is solipsism. Weer's universe seems to exist solely in his thoughts, but his relating of the stories of the dead breathes new life into those old bones.

I think the very end of the book hints that you are righter than you know. The book ends with a reference to the story of the Chinese pillow and with a voice calling Dennis to wake up. I think this is the glimmer of grace that redeems the whole book.

Rostrum,

Your recollection of the end of the book is a little bit off.

It is time, I think, that I see the enchanted headrest of the Chinese philosopher looming behind me, and I wait its coming. My aunt's voice on the intercom says, "Den, darling, are you awake in there?"

Peace, p. 264, Orb ed.

Like so many things Wolfe writes this passage seems contradictory. On the one hand, the reference to the "enchanted headrest of the Chinese philosopher" seems to indicate that Weer's memories of his life (but from what point?) were a dream or illusion and didn't happen. But we know from earlier in the book (p. 64 of the Orb ed.) that when Aunt Olivia say "Den, darling, are you awake in there?" it is time for Weer to stop reading, put out his light and go to sleep. So, on the other hand, it seems as if Weer's restless spirit may finally be going to its final rest at the end.

Perhaps Weer isn't working out where his life went wrong (because until he does his spirit cannot rest) but is just going through a period of adjustment (which is more or less automatic and inevitable), of leaving all the things that bind him to his old life (including his memories) behind so that his spirit/soul/essence can go to its final destination (heaven/hell/oblivion?).

This is reminiscent of what happens to the dead man in Peter S. Beagle's novel, A Fine and Private Place. (I read this many years ago and liked it a great deal at the time. Whether I would now, I don't know.)

William Ansley

William H. Ansley — 27 Aug 1998, 00:46 · follows William H. Ansley

Rostrum (Michael Straight <straight at email.unc.edu>) said:

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Would the "test" be more fair if the night before the fight, Dennis had a dream revealing to him the consequences of a life embracing violence? :-)

Maybe. But it definitely would be more fair as a test if he was a great deal older than five.

"Alex David Groce" <adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu> said:

I agree--I only meant that Bobby is the "best" case I see for someone killed by Weer (and a poor case, although it's easy to see how people blamed him and how it surely changed his life)--and I don't see it as his test, or failure. I'm not sure that there IS an exact turning point where things went wrong for Weer--I think the book is more about coming to understand what did happen to him, not what might have been (although the headrest story does seem suggestive of that...)

Well, we all agree that the struggle that lead to the death of Bobby Black makes little sense when considered as a test for Weer or as a murder. But it certainly can be seen as one of the most formative events in Weer's life since it led directly to his parents leaving for Europe for 2 (or more?) years which resulted in permanent estrangement between them and Weer. It also lead to Weer living with and being cared for by his Aunt Olivia, who allowed him a great deal more independence and probably offered him less affection than his parents (or at least his mother) would have done.

Olivia Weer (and her relationship with Alden Weer) is certainly a very large, important and interesting part of the book. I intend to post about it when I finish my "critical" rereading of Peace.

As far as murder goes, I think a better case can be made for Weer killing someone other than Bobby Black. Because I am out of time for today, I will leave this as an exercise for the reader. <g>

William Ansley

Michael Straight — 27 Aug 1998, 09:52 · follows William H. Ansley

On Thu, 27 Aug 1998, William H. Ansley wrote:

It is time, I think, that I see the enchanted headrest of the Chinese philosopher looming behind me, and I wait its coming. My aunt's voice on the intercom says, "Den, darling, are you awake in there?"

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darling, are you awake in there?" it is time for Weer to stop reading, put out his light and go to sleep. So, on the other hand, it seems as if Weer's restless spirit may finally be going to its final rest at the end.

Excellent catch! That's what I get for spinning after reading just once and without a copy of the book.

It also means that, if it's a dream, it takes place after Bobby's death and Dennis going to live with Olivia, which torpedos my theory that the fight with Bobby is the fork where Dennis gets the chance to take another path.

Unless his aunt's voice is like the fire engine in your dream that turns out to be an alarm clock.

I still think the Chinese pillow implies some chance do it all differently, but perhaps I've been reading it too literally. Are there any Roman Catholic traditions in which Purgatory provides a chance to undo the wrongs done in life?

-Rostrum

Alex David Groce — 27 Aug 1998, 16:29 · follows Michael Straight

On Aug 27, 12:46am, William H. Ansley wrote:
Olivia Weer (and her relationship with Alden Weer) is certainly a very large, important and interesting part of the book. I intend to post about it when I finish my "critical" rereading of *Peace*.

Not to go for the overt psycho-analysis school (which would probably be an especially bad idea with Wolfe, but he has said that Weer is closer to him than most think), but wasn't his mother's name Olivia?

As far as murder goes, I think a better case can be made for Weer killing someone other than Bobby Black. Because I am out of time for today, I will leave this as an exercise for the reader. <g>

William Ansley

Aye. I know the various Weer as murderer/Weer as serial killer eliminating the whole cast of characters theories. I'm just skeptical. You can make a case for the librarian, possibly, more tentatively for Sherry Gold. I just don't buy the cases I've heard. On the other hand, I think the Professor did kill Aunt Olivia (Wolfe in the interview suggests there is at least one murder--something like "I'm trying to remember who killed who in that book") with his car. I think the thing that tends to lead people to suspect Weer of murder is his odd habit of mentioning someone over and over and then suddenly completely avoiding their name. It is strange, but I tend to view it more as when he has "come to peace" with that person, bound another dead soul to his. He's finished with them, their memo is on the pad, and no more needs to be said.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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William H. Ansley — 27 Aug 1998, 23:57 · follows Alex David Groce

Alex David Groce (adgroce at eos.ncsu.edu) said:

As far as murder goes, I think a better case can be made for Weer killing someone other than Bobby Black. Because I am out of time for today, I will leave this as an exercise for the reader. <g>

William Ansley

I shouldn't have left this hanging. Sorry, I was tired.

Aye. I know the various Weer as murderer/Weer as serial killer eliminating the whole cast of characters theories. I'm just skeptical. You can make a case for the librarian, possibly, more tentatively for Sherry Gold. I just don't buy the cases I've heard. On the other hand, I think the Professor did kill Aunt Olivia (Wolfe in the interview suggests there is at least one murder--something like "I'm trying to remember who killed who in that book") with his car.

Nope. I don't think Weer is a serial killer and I never have, although I have heard this theory before. But there is one caused death in the book that might be said to be morally equivalent to murder, even if it doesn't fit the legal definition. Weer may have had nothing to do with it and even if he did he was not solely responsible.

I am talking about the worker at Julius Smart's OJ plant that froze to death in the juice freezer. The incident is described on p. 247 (_Peace_, Orb ed.) and further illuminated on p. 249. The death has been publicly been attributed to accident - the latch on the freezer froze up while the guy (a young man of eighteen or so) was inside stacking boxes of juice.

But, on p. 249, Weer reveals that it was actually a practical joke that turned fatal. An object was put through the hole in the latch designed to receive a padlock hasp by some men who worked with the guy. The guy stacked juice crates near the door and sent them crashing against it to try to batter it open. The man on the outside (who was not much older than the guy inside) was frightened because he couldn't imagine what was happening inside the freezer. The door and latch were bent and the hinges partly sprung, so he couldn't open the door when he tried and he was frightened of what the guy would do to him when he got out so he went home.

When the guy was found dead the next day, plant management hushed it up and didn't discipline the man who failed to let the guy in the freezer out.

Weer tells the story as if the man outside the freezer were someone else (although he doesn't name him or anyone else involved) but it is very tempting to believe it was him. His description of the events is very vivid and he was working at the plant at the time and was the right age.

If it was Weer, then I would say that this incident was a conscious choice and an action for which he could be legitimately judged.

William Ansley

Alex David Groce — 28 Aug 1998, 13:58 · follows William H. Ansley

On Aug 27, 11:57pm, William H. Ansley wrote:

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Oh--then we are actually in agreement here. I think there's a good chance that it was Weer (or Wolfe meant it to be Weer--the correspondence model of truth is tricky when dealing with a fictional reality...) And that definitely if so it's one of the most important things preventing him from finding Peace. I was thinking of all the theories where every time there's a scene change Weer goes and shoots some character. It's probably not exactly murder, legally or, more relevantly, morally--but it's very close, and would definitely be something a Wolfe character would be likely to hint at rather than outright admitting.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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Jim Jordan — 07 Sep 1998, 01:30 · follows Alex David Groce

At 09:52 AM 8/27/98 -0400, you wrote:

I still think the Chinese pillow implies some chance do it all differently, but perhaps I've been reading it too literally. Are there any Roman Catholic traditions in which Purgatory provides a chance to undo the wrongs done in life?

-Rostrum

Though not a Catholic myself, as a practicing theologian I have never heard of such a thing. Purgatory in RC theology is a way of coming to peace with all that has happened in your life; it is the anteroom of heaven (not some separate place). And I think that this is the basic meaning of **Peace**.

On the house question: Weer has built this house out of his life; it is the house of his life, not a physical building. As he explores this house, he comes to grips with his life -- passing judgment on it, so to speak, before standing before the Supreme Judge. Remember Jesus' words in Matthew 7: all of us build houses either on rock or sand, and such "houses" are our lives. Thus, I don't think Weer's house is really a "memory palace" (such as Latro uses) or a physical building.

Nutria (Jim Jordan)