

Weer weird

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Nov 1998

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Alice Turner — 13 Nov 1998, 00:06

I wouldn't dare post this if the list weren't somewhat comatose, but here's something I just read that I thought might speak to the Weer group (of which I am not one). No chance that Wolfe read it, as it wasn't published till 1984, but it does seem to have some resonance. From Robert Darnton's -The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History- in the chapter "Readers Respond to Rousseau."

"When the Balinese prepare a corpse for burial, they read stories to one another, ordinary stories from collections of their most familiar tales. They read them without stopping, twenty-four hours a day, for two or three days at a time, not because they need distraction but because of the dangers of demons. Demons possess souls during the vulnerable period immediately after a death, but stories keep them out. Like Chinese boxes or English hedges, the stories contain tales within tales, so that as you enter one you run into another, passing from plot to plot every time you turn a corner until at last you reach the core of the narrative space, which corresponds to the place occupied by the corpse within the inner courtyard of the household. Demons cannot penetrate this space because they cannot turn corners. They beat their heads helplessly against the narrative maze that the readers have built, and so reading provides a kind of defense fortification surrounding Balinese ritual. It creates a wall of words, which operates like the jamming of radio broadcasts. It does not amuse, instruct, improve, or help to while away the time: by the imbrication of narrative and the cacophony of sound, it protects souls."

-alga