

Ideas about Peace

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1530>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Ed van der Winden — 13 Apr 1999, 14:38

Hello,

I'm new to this list. I've been reading the archives now for a while and now I'd like to contribute something. I've recently read "Peace" for the third time and I've had some ideas that I have not seen elsewhere. There are quite a lot of spoilers in what follows (there certainly are if I'm right).

First I like to talk about the situation that the main character, Alden Dennis Weer, is in. I think lots of people agree to the fact that he is dead, and has been dead for some time. I won't repeat the arguments that I've seen before. Some people suggested that the Chinese pillow that is mentioned at the end might mean that the whole book is actually a dream of young Dennis, about how his life might look. I don't think so: I think Weer is actually dead and that the Chinese pillow is pointing to the fact that Weer is reliving his life over and over again. I think that this is the quiet damnation that he is "living" in: endless repetition.

There are some other clues for this. The first is the only mention of the word "peace" in the whole book. It is in a passage from one of the books that Gold made up, a piece of text with lots of literation, i.e. repetition.

The second, very important clue, is his name: Alden Dennis Weer. I once read (I don't remember where) that someone had been wondering about the name and came up with: "All then, then is" for his first names. I never thought further about this, until when I last read "Peace" I came across the fact that Weer is a descendant from a Dutch family. I am Dutch, and you know what "Weer" means in dutch? It means "again". (It also means "weather" but that is not very important, I think ;^) So when I translate his name, we get: "All then, then is again". And again, and again, and again...

One last thing to mention is the talk about the "brand new" axe in the beginning of the book, although Weer admits to having used the axe many times before (I cannot quote because I do not own a copy of "Peace": it is in the library). I think this means that Weer is going to relive his life again in the book that is before us, but has lived it many, many times before.

In the beginning of Peace, Weer tells us that he is not going to tell us some of the details ("the story of Napoleon") because they "invariably offend". So we know from the start he is going to leave out parts of the story. What I think is that Weer relived his life many times, each time leaving out something else, until the offensive stuff is deleted almost entirely. Most of all, the offensive stuff that Weer himself is responsible for.

Now I want to move on to the next "big idea" I have. I cannot help but feel that I am right in what follows, ever since this idea came to me. I want to stress that I think it better not to read further if you have not read "Peace" and plan to do so.

The first time I read "Peace" I did not understand very much (although I understood Weer to be

dead), the second time I read it the thought struck me that Weer was a mass murderer, and the last time I read it I thought all the time: "No, he didn't do it. He did not kill this or that character." My hypothesis is that Weer doesn't lie to us, the readers. He only leaves things out, but he does not lie. There are a number of characters that have died in mysterious circumstances, and you cannot help but wonder if Weer killed them:

- * Bobby Black was obviously killed by Weer by accident, when he was only small;
- * His aunt was hit by a car, killed by Peacock (I read that Wolfe admitted this in a personal talk - I had not spotted it myself);
- * A man was killed in an accident in the factory. I do not think Weer did it himself. I have no real arguments, just then "it does not ring true", given the manner in which he talks about the accident.
- * Margaret Lorn may be killed, but I do not think so. He calls her on the phone sometimes in later life (without saying anything) when she has kids already. I could imagine Weer killing Margaret earlier in life but not after such a long time;
- * The librarian (I forgot her name) that went gold digging with Weer, may have been killed by him, but again I do not think so. There is a phrase in the book, after she went, (Sorry, I cannot quote) that implies that she left the town alive. She pulled a gun on him, they had a fight, but he did not kill her.
- * There are little clues everywhere in the book that other characters may have been killed, but none of them convinced me.

Then Gene Wolfe himself has said that Weer did not kill most of the characters in the book, so we know he cannot be a mass murderer (if we believe Gene). So, I'm left with Weer who did not kill. At the same time, the obvious answer to the question: "What did Weer do, that such a terrible fate happened to him?" is: "He killed someone", certainly in a book where the above clues are everywhere.

My answer to all this is: I think Weer killed only one person on purpose in the whole book. I think this person is Julius Smart. The most important clue I think is the phrase that Julius Smart may well be the "central (or main) character" in the book. How can this be if so little is said about the man, and Smart was meant by Gene Wolfe to be (his own words) "an ordinary middle-class American" (something like that). The answer: Smart is the central character of the book because by killing him, Weer ended up in the situation he is in now. Only by killing Smart, did the story that Weer tells us in "Peace" come into existence.

In the archives I came across a conversation that someone had with Gene Wolfe (the one in which the killing of Olivia by Peacock was mentioned) in which it was mentioned that Weer comes to own the juice factory because he inherits it from Julius Smart, because Weer was Olivia's heir and became Smart's heir when they married. I think this is "motive".

I think Smart was killed by Weer with the boyscout knife that he talks so much about. He cannot find it, because it is in a room of his "house" that he will not enter, one of the memories that he does not want to have. I think this is "means".

I now have means and motive, so I must try "opportunity". This is harder. Weer had the opportunity to kill Smart. Smart was a frail, old man, who worked in the same factory as Weer. As we know from the last chapter: accidents happen in a factory so Smart could easily have had "an accident" (but then again, would Weer have done this with the knife? Oops!) Well, so much for opportunity.

When I read the only fairly large piece of text in "Peace" about Julius Smart with the above theory in mind, it almost sounds as if Weer is telling us: "The man was old, frail and sad. Everyone mocked him. What I did was not terribly wrong. I helped him out of his misery."

I want to end this large piece of text with the observation that although Weer is, in my opinion, a killer, at the same time he is, as a lot of readers feel, a rather sympathetic man. The story of Weer is the story of a man that had a lot of misfortune in his life: he lost the love of his life (Margaret Lorn) without knowing why, he ends up with a lousy job (before he owns the factory) although this was not expected, later in life he loses another possible partner (the librarian) and a chance to get rich (there is no gold). Weer killed once, only later in life. I feel Weer is a sad man, not an evil one.

I hope this will stir up a lot of discussion because I still have questions about "Peace". Maybe my ramblings here will generate ideas in others.

One last clue to the fact that Weer killed Smart: I have not read "The Changeling" but is it not about one guy killing another and then taking his place?

Ed