

Various and sundry matters

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 13 Apr 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1532>

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Alex David Groce — 13 Apr 1999, 13:46

Re: Weer

First, I'd like to welcome Ed van der Winden to the list. You definitely have some interesting insights into PEACE, although I think I'm going to disagree with them somewhat.

The name and new axe simply don't convince me of the repetition theory--my model of PEACE is more purgatorial than infernal (your idea sounds a little like Flann O'Brien's THE THIRD POLICEMAN, which I strongly recommend as one of the best afterlife fantasies). I still think the nailed down notes indicate aspects of Weer's past he HAS come to terms with--the stories are all left unfinished because (A) in our lives, stories don't have tidy endings, they drift into each other and are left with open parenthesis as the various characters unexpectedly die or move or grow uninterested and (B) the real "completion" of Weer's stories is his letting go of them and moving on to something else ("peace"). The strongest, for me anyway, indication that Weer does (literally) "escape from his skull" is the scene of the Sidhe, which is one of my favorite passages in Wolfe's writing.

I think you're correct (as I've said before) in discounting the Wer as mass-murderer theory, and since I'm convinced Weer does find "peace" I'm not as inclined to search for a damning incident he's hidden. His life as it is seems plenty to keep him from immediately storming the gates of heaven, although I think he is a decent man at heart. However, I'm going to reread some and think about the suggestion that he killed Smart. Wolfe's "trying to remember who killed who in that book" suggests there's more than one hidden crime in PEACE, and the motive makes sense, and it would explain the weirdness of Weer's comment that Smart is the central character. The knife is possibly a red herring on this, though--Wolfe's essay on PEACE in CASTLE OF DAYS suggests to me that the knife is there as a link to Wolfe himself, which is a fairly common trick of his. I still think the best explanation for the "Smart as central character" line is simply that PEACE is a book about how Weer's story is really everyone else's story--and by implication that this is so for all of us.

Time loop:

Nice idea. The support is really tenuous, but that's not uncommon here. It extends the "Self-supporting Severian" to the extreme. The Baldanders analogy may be reversed though--Wolfe's always defended Severian as not being a devilish figure--so perhaps instead of separating himself from the Increate, Severian is a creation out of nothing (with a mother from within the "time stream" or what you will) inserted by the Increate, either directly or through Hierodules, etc.

Sex in Wolfe:

First, I want to defend Father Inire--I think he's clearly modeled on Lewis Carroll, hence his association with little girls. And if so, I'd say that like Carroll, there's no evidence he ever did anything improper at all, whatever possible sexual inclinations he might have had.

In general, it seems to me that Wolfe's various uses of sexuality are

to (A) in the book of the New Sun indicate the culture and morality of Severian's world and of Severian himself--and others, IE nasty old Baldanders and (B) in general it doesn't seem that Wolfe's works are over-sexed. Weer adn Sherry Gold isn't exactly child-molestation, although it's possibly statutory rape. It's a powerful insight into Weer and Sherry. Wolfe uses prostitutes, whorehouses, and various other themes no more than most other serious 20th century authors seeking to portray human life in its complexity--in fact, one nice thing about the BOTNS is that rather than the usual slightly titilating and adolescent treatment of sex, it's an adult look at desire in it's complexity. Wolfe uses sexual themes for roughly the reasons Nabokov, Faulkner, Kafka and Joyce.

A Side Note:

I found a quotation from J. M. Barrie that would make a great epigraph for the whole Island/Doctor/Death set of stories:

"To be born is to be wrecked on an island."

Barrie, of course, wrote "Peter Pan" which is (I'd say) a direct influence on the three major island stories, as well as THE major influence on "The Changeling." Not to mention "Mary Rose's" prominent place in Seven American Nights.

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

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CRCulver — 14 Apr 1999, 00:11 · follows Alex David Groce

Alex Groce said:

<< Wolfe's "trying to remember who killed who in that book" suggests there's more than one hidden crime in PEACE>>

Wasn't he talking about OPERATION ARES with that comment? I'm not sure.

On the other hand, he was very tight-lipped when someone asked if Weer killed the librarian and buried her body in the bed of the stream. If it was truly an implausible notion, I suspect Wolfe would have immediately discounted it.

- Christopher Culver

Alex David Groce — 14 Apr 1999, 00:19 · follows CRCulver

On Apr 13, 8:11pm, CRCulver at aol.com wrote:

Subject: Re: (urth) Various and sundry matters

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I'm pretty sure the "I'm trying to remember who killed who" was re: PEACE. Although it was an online interview, so there was some chaos and confusion in the transcript. Nobody asked anything about OPERATION ARES (for which I'm sure Wolfe was thankful...) I haven't read anything where he clams up about Weer/Lois. Remember which interview it's from?

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