

# Peace as history

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

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1539>

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Dan Rabin — 13 Apr 1999, 22:56

A lot of the recent commentary here on Peace has centered on Weer's life story: was he a murderer, was he a sad man, what unfulfilled task leads to the persistence of his ghost, and so on. I myself get pleasure from the way in which Weer is a witness to a remarkable slice of American history. I'm an urban history buff, and the progress of Cassionville from small midwestern town to the home of a big orange-drink plant has a lot of resonance for me. As do the connections with the aboriginal inhabitants, both via the mythologized ladies-club version of the settlement of the town, and via the skull in the cave. As does the progression from the railway and trolley journeys of Weer's childhood to the encroachment and eventual dominance of cars. Wolfe reminds us that all these enormous changes happened within a single lifetime.

Weer is less vivid a character to me than Aunt Olivia, her suitors, the librarian, and Louis and Sherry Gold. His main function, perhaps, is to \*remember\*. He doesn't seem very remarkable, either as a child, or as Ron Gold's officemate, or as a slick old company president. Sometimes I think that Peace is \*not his story, primarily\*, that the great tale of Irish and Dutch and other and later European invaders turfing out the Indians and turning potatoes into orange drink is a bigger story than one man's life.

Or just maybe Peace is a Book of Gold, brought forth by the fictionizer Gene Wolfe to fill a need just as the forger Louis Gold rationalizes that he does with his forgeries. Perhaps his claim that the Venus de Milo is a forgery is a shock-tactic to get us to question the role of authentic provenance in evaluating art. Does it \*matter\* whether Peace is a reminiscence by a man, or a plausible fiction by a Weer-Wolfe?\*

Which pondering leads me to inquire whether other contributors here have noticed how often Wolfe embeds the fictional source of his writing in the work itself? From Severian to Latro to Eyebem to the protagonists of "Feather Tigers" and of "Tracking Song" to Horn, I find it notable how often Wolfe shows us the origin of the story we're reading. He does this so much that I read the first three volumes of Long Sun thinking "Ah, a refreshing change--third person omniscient!" And then the entry for "Horn" in the list of names at the beginning of Exodus, and later, Horn's own entry as narrator, reminded me with whom I was dealing...

-- Dan Rabin

\*Readers may wish to decide for themselves whether Peace more closely fills the role of the Necronomicon or The Lusty Lawyer. Any avid aficionados of alliteration and assonance out there?

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Alex David Groce — 14 Apr 1999, 11:12 · follows Dan Rabin

On Apr 13, 10:56pm, Dan Rabin wrote:

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the persistence of his ghost, and so on. I myself get pleasure from the way in which Weer is a witness to a remarkable slice of American history. I'm an urban history buff, and the progress of Cassionville from small midwestern town to the home of a big orange-drink plant has a lot of resonance for me. As do the connections with the aboriginal inhabitants, both via the mythologized ladies-club version of the settlement of the town, and via the skull in the cave. As does the progression from the railway and trolley journeys of Weer's childhood to the encroachment and eventual dominance of cars. Wolfe reminds us that all these enormous changes happened within a single lifetime.

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History as the main character--I like that--and it would be one answer to why the stories don't end... It fits the idea that PEACE is a story about a man whose story is actually everyone else's story. It's also interesting to consider what kind of changes Cassionville has gone through by the time Weer's tree has become as large as the first chapter suggests...

There are even more examples of the "explained document" by Wolfe: the central portion of "Seven American Nights," "'A Story,' by John V. Marsch" from 5HC, "The Last Thrilling Wonder Story," and other examples in less memorable stories. In BOTNS, of course, and the Latro books it's partly for the sake of including Wolfe himself--like Hitchcock, he has a tendency to hide himself somewhere in the story (the narrator's name in 5th Head, himself as the translator for BOTNS and the Latro books, the strong similarities to parts of his own life in PEACE, etc.--I can't think of a Long Sun example). Beyond that, I'm not sure what the deeper reasons for the obsession with making stories that are "real documents" are, although it certainly works well. Nabokov did the same thing--PALE FIRE (especially) and to some extent LOLITA seem to be

ABOUT the fact that they're "real" documents, to some extent... But since Wolfe didn't become a Nabokov fan until well after starting it himself it's not a direct influence. Perhaps a similar concern with artificiality, authenticity, and layers of text that verify themselves, even if we know they are in fact fictions.

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

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