

Peace: Stories within Stories

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 Oct 1997

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/223>

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.

Michael Straight — 08 Oct 1997, 11:03

I recently read Peace for the first time and would be interested in discussing the book. Spoilers follow.

I remember the story of Finn M'Cool and his cat from Wolfe's Book of Days (I think). Was it originally composed for Peace or was it published earlier? Is the anthologized version the same as the one in Peace? It must be a little different because the Peace version has an aside to Dennis ("and [the dog] would have had this tale if you hadn't laughed at the cat"--which is odd in that it implies a version of the story with the dog in the cat's role). This is one story where I think I'd like to see one of Nutria's allegorical interpretations; the exchange "who are they? Well, one is wickedness, and the other a fairy cat" seems to invite it.

I really liked the story of the sidhe at the end. In fact, I found Peace to have one of the most satisfying endings of any of Wolfe's novels. The last paragraph in particular is great in which it ties Weer's story to that of the ceramic pillow. Maybe Weer isn't a ghost, but young Den's dream of the future. Not only does the ceramic pillow add dimensions to Weer's story, but Weer's story illuminates the pillow story, helping us imagine some reasons that the Chinese officer might wish to relive his outwardly successful life.

I was disappointed but not surprised that Wolfe didn't finish the story of the princess and the tower. I go back and forth between suspecting Wolfe just couldn't think of a good ending for the story and fearing he's given enough clues to guess the end of the story and nature of the fourth lover ("fire") myself.

Where does the story of the jinni telling a story come from (in the narrative, I mean, not where did Wolfe get it)? The only clue I can find is that maybe Dennis is remembering it from the same book that had the princess and the tower as he rides in the car, since he mentions that book in the preceeding paragraph. Or maybe it's not young Dennis remembering but the older Weer remembering the story because he remembered thinking about the book as a boy. Or maybe young Dennis dreaming about an older Weer who remembers reading a story that young Dennis might one day read. Ha! Wheels within wheels within wheels!

Does Weer's company make orange drink out of potatoes?

As I page through this story, I find so many wonderful bits I can't begin to mention them all: "The newspapers love correcting people, and they would have had a field day explaining the difference between Eve and Aphrodite to readers who had hardly heard of either."

Or this:

"This book I hold in my lap was composed in the seventh century, probably in Damascus, by a native of the ancient city of Sanaa, in what is now Yemen. In 950 it was translated into medieval Greek, and a hundred years later it was burned by Michael, the Patriarch of Constantinople; that

should have been the end of it, but two hundred years later a Latin translation of the Greek was placed on the Index Expurgatorius by Pope Gregory IX. It was not printed until the Latin version appeared in the Cadiz edition of 1590, and never mentioned in print anywhere until the providential gentleman I spoke of a few moments ago made the entire thing up. Now it has achieved reality, and in another hundred years ten thousand copies may exist."

Does Wolfe really think the Venus de Milo is a fake? That sounds congruent with the "we don't really know as much as we think about the ancients" stance he has in the introduction to the Soldier books. I wonder if this passage says anything about Wolfe's attitude toward the Bible?

Please follow-up and tell me what you think about these things or something else about Peace.

-Rostrum