

PEACE Birkhead and Elm

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 26 Oct 2000

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Roy C. Lackey — 26 Oct 2000, 15:04

What is it with Miss Birkhead? Like Fr. Inire, she is often mentioned but seldom seen, in fact only makes one direct appearance in the book, when she brings coffee to Den and Bill Batton and the hairy man shows up (168). Weer gives some sort of physical description of almost every woman who appears in the book, even her replacement, Miss Hadow, but not Miss Birkhead. We don't even know her age. Weer has a habit of persisting to call women by their maiden names, even after marriage (e.g., Margaret Lorn, Eleanor Bold), which is a breach of manners hard to believe from someone of his era, and must have been an annoyance to newlywed women. So it isn't until the book is almost over before we learn that she is in fact not a Miss, but Mrs. Helen Birkhead Tyler, with two children and a husband, Ben. Why did Wolfe wait that late to drop that little detail? Why not leave her Miss Birkhead?

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes wrote:

<<Finally, Mantis also asked...

Since many of the streets have tree names, does this mean that Olivia's house is on "Elm Street" (which is not one of the given street names) and the other streets have their name trees along them, too?

<<I _sincerely_ hope not. If so, the China Pillow interpretation becomes irresistible, so we can say that it was all a dream... or rather a Nightmare...>>

Well, not to belabor the point, but when Den gives us the layout of Cassionsville he writes: "The north-south streets are all named for trees: Oak, Chestnut, Willow, Elder, Apple, Plum, and Sumac. And others." That two-word sentence stands out, and given the importance of the elm in PEACE, it is conspicuous by its absence. Also, the library, Vi's old house, is in the ELmwood phone exchange. (162) (I'm surprised someone hasn't tried to make something of those three phone numbers.)

Roy