

The genres of PEACE

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 31 Oct 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 31 Oct 2000, 11:29

I don't know if this observation has been made before, but each of PEACE's five parts is "in the mode," so to speak, of a different genre. (I'm referring to the predominant action of each part, not to the short tales embedded within them.)

Part one is, I think, in the "genre" of serious realistic fiction, the "Dickens and Jane Austen and Proust and Stendahl" that Charles Turner craves. We see a scene of childhood innocence about to be shattered, as in the beginnings of many "literary" novels. (Actually, I'm less sure about this first part than about the others.)

Part two is a screwball comedy, with its eccentric, spirited heroine baiting her stuffy suitors, the "scavenger hunt" for the Chinese egg, and its farcical discovery in the barn.

Part three is a horror story, of course; even the storytelling frame is a frequent device of horror stories.

Part four is a hardboiled detective story. We have a crime being investigated (forgery) and an alluring but treacherous woman whom the "detective" gets entangled with. The bogus treasure is out of THE MALTESE FALCON, and Gold's dusty bookshop is out of THE BIG SLEEP. Weer even compares himself to "Humphrey Bogart or Charlie Chan." (213)

And part five is a documentary, or a journalistic expose: a day in the life of a corporation.

I doubt that Weer intended this structure. But Wolfe has experimented with telling a single story through several different genres elsewhere, in the four-part story beginning with "The Dark of the June." Here he applies the technique to a man's life.

Incidentally, I take back what I said earlier about beginning to understand PEACE. I still think there was a lot of truth in what I said about Weer's psychology; but I no longer think that the book can be seen as fundamentally a straightforward psychological novel in disguise, as I was trying to read it. There's too much more going on.

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 31 Oct 2000, 08:49 · follows Adam Stephanides

Re: the five genres of PEACE, good call Adam! It seems so self-evident after you've said it that it seems surprising that we haven't been using it as a mantra!

Part four is a hardboiled detective story. We have a crime being investigated (forgery) and an alluring but treacherous woman whom the "detective" gets entangled with. The bogus treasure is out of THE MALTESE FALCON, and Gold's dusty bookshop is out of THE BIG SLEEP. Weer even compares himself to "Humphrey Bogart or Charlie Chan." (213)

That part is especially good, Adam. (Although technically: wasn't the bookshop in THE BIG SLEEP more an open, uncluttered, false front for something else? I remember Bogart bamboozling the faux-bookwoman regarding obscure titles. Or were you talking about the bookstore across the street from that one, with the real bookwoman who keeps a bottle in her desk and looks better without her glasses on?)

=mantis=

Adam Stephanides — 01 Nov 2000, 21:29 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Michael Andre-Driussi wrote:

Part four is a hardboiled detective story. We have a crime being investigated (forgery) and an alluring but treacherous woman whom the "detective" gets entangled with. The bogus treasure is out of THE MALTESE FALCON, and Gold's dusty bookshop is out of THE BIG SLEEP. Weer even compares himself to "Humphrey Bogart or Charlie Chan." (213)

That part is especially good, Adam.

Thanks. I actually got the part four-detective story connection first, and that encouraged me to go after the others.

(Although technically: wasn't the bookshop in THE BIG SLEEP more an open, uncluttered, false front for something else?

Well, I was seeing the bookshop as just an allusion, not evidence for any real parallelism with THE BIG SLEEP (although the decrepit Blaine, with his "proud, cold eyes (184) does put me in mind of General (?) Sternwood). It's actually been a long time since I either read or saw THE BIG SLEEP.

One thing I didn't mention in my original post was that my list of genres was surprisingly cinematic. "Screwball comedy" is really a film genre, and part four owes as much to film noir, it seems to me, as to written detective stories. And parts three and five could also easily be films. Surprisingly, because there are almost no explicit references to films, although there is that unexplained projector and can of film in his memory office. (Any other references aside from the Bogart mention I quoted above?)

--Adam