

PEACE: The Egg; Bah, humbug!

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 27 Nov 2000

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Roy C. Lackey — 27 Nov 2000, 23:40

Almost all of the stories in PEACE, imbedded or "real-life" ones, are unfinished, presumably because they are painful to Weer, one way or another. The imbedded stories are analogies, evidently, of real-life situations which were too painful for him to even begin to tell. Two of the real-life stories, the Tilly tale and Charlie Turner's letter, are ostensibly true, but neither have anything to do with Weer's life, and Charlie himself, small as his role is in the two stories, is the only apparent link between them. The events related in the letter are complete, but the letter exists in a vacuum; we don't know what came before, why Charlie, a minor character in Smart's Tilly tale, should suddenly appear in Weer's life forty years after he first heard the tale. Neither do we know the relevance of the people and events in the letter to Weer.

The Tilly tale itself is incomplete. We get a fragmented version of its conclusion from Blaine, but he is so wrong about everything else he says about the tale that his testimony is hardly trustworthy. What was it about the tale that was so unsettling to Weer that he couldn't finish it, even though it was one of the longest segments of the book, and seemingly had nothing at all to do with his life?

Is it the mere fact that the tale is, in some sense, a ghost story? Did Weer leave out Smart's finding of Mrs. T's pickled body because he knew himself to be dead too, just another ghost? Then why tell the story at all? After all, we didn't get even a hint of Macafee's or Blaine's stories, not to mention Eleanor Bold's.

Then Charlie Turner shows up after Smart's death (whom Charlie has to thank, presumably, for forty years of continuing to be a hairy freak), and starts telling Weer all about the travails of perfect strangers, and follows up with a fractured Cinderella story that doesn't end happily-ever-after. What is the point? If a character in a ghost story I heard forty years ago suddenly showed up in my life . . . well, I don't even want to think about it.

I said that Blaine was wrong about most everything regarding the Egg Hunt and Smart's Tilly tale--but was he? Why did Wolfe put Blaine's account in the book then? His testimony is the only instance in the text of an alternate account of something Weer related. Weer says, in effect, that his childhood memories are suspect, that they may reflect things not as they were, but as they ought to have been (19,20). Consider this: the Egg Hunt and the story telling at Macafee's 41st birthday party, both occurring in the summer of his ninth year, together constitute nearly one-half of the book. Read Blaine's brief account of them (173-175), especially regarding the presentation of the Egg, then think back on Weer's account of the party, which he twice states was to be the occasion when Olivia was to give the Egg to Macafee (74,171). _Why was there not a single mention or hint of the famous Egg at the birthday party_? It should have been the center of attention, but doesn't seem to have been there at all.

Weer's mention of his malleable memory comes in the course of his account of the Christmas he spent at Grandpa Elliot's. It concludes with his reflections on who switched his mother's and Mab's gifts, and why. As a boy he thought his saintly mother had switched them, as a cynical

teenager that his grandfather had done it for sexual favors, and as an old man that he had been right as a boy. I don't think so. His cynical self was correct. Mab's bedroom was on the second floor (21-22). His grandfather's bedroom was on the first floor (27). Christmas morning his "grandfather came down" to shave in the warm kitchen (25). Merry Christmas, Grandpa! Elliot was vain and dyed his beard. The placement of his dead wife's picture shows that he wasn't exactly mourning her. If he had bought an expensive diamond-and-pearl necklace for one daughter, he would have to have given his other daughter something of equal value, which doesn't seem to have happened. When the holidays were over his daughters would go back to their husbands; Mab was there to keep his bed warm year round. Della, and even Den, were aware that their semi-formal housekeeper/employer relationship was a pretense, put on by Mab out of respect to Della for her recently dead mother. By recently dead, I mean that she died during young Den's lifetime, but when he was too young to remember her (25). I don't see saintly Della slighting her own mother's memory by endorsing her father's carrying on with another woman by exchanging gifts, even if she had known what the gifts were before Christmas morning.

Roy