

PEACE: The visit to Van Ness

The Urth list — 6 messages, 2 voices, 10 Dec 2000

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2502>

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.

Adam Stephanides — 10 Dec 2000, 11:36

I wrote "Weer's narration of the start of the visit has, to me, a dreamlike quality". For the sake of completeness, I might as well state what makes me say this.

1. At the starts of the "visiting the doctor" segment, Weer says: "It is important, going to the doctor. Even in some mad way more important than a board meeting." (3, H & R). What is "mad" about it?
2. Later in this paragraph we have: "Margaret tosses down her copy and goes in to see the doctor, and I know, somehow, that this is a mark of contempt." (3) This may mean no more than what it says, that Weer knows that Margaret is contemptuous but can't verbalize why. But it is reminiscent of that dream-thinking when you "know," with no rational basis, that something signifies something.

3. Shortly afterwards, there is this exchange between Weer and the nurse:

"Please, I've got to see the doctor. I'm dying."

The nurse: "All these people are ahead of you."

Ted Singer and Sherry Gold are both obviously much younger than I, but there is no use arguing with that kind of thing. (4)

Weer is uncharacteristically obtuse here (I can't recall any similar instances).

All these lapses in logic suggest to me that Weer is not fully in command of his thoughts in this passage.

--Adam

Michael Straight — 11 Dec 2000, 08:04 · follows Adam Stephanides

On Sun, 10 Dec 2000, Adam Stephanides wrote:

3. Shortly afterwards, there is this exchange between Weer and the nurse:

"Please, I've got to see the doctor. I'm dying."

The nurse: "All these people are ahead of you."

Ted Singer and Sherry Gold are both obviously much younger than I, but there is no use arguing with that kind of thing. (4)

Weer is uncharacteristically obtuse here (I can't recall any similar instances).

When Weer says he's dying and the nurse says the others are ahead of him, he takes her to mean (perhaps knowing she doesn't really mean) that Ted and Sherry are closer to dying than he is, although, being younger, they are probably further away from dying than Weer.

Possible ironies: Weer is closer to death than he thinks. Or perhaps it's been a very long time since he died, making him further from death (in the other direction) than Ted and Sherry.

-Rostrum

Adam Stephanides — 11 Dec 2000, 21:10 · follows Michael Straight

Michael Straight wrote:

On Sun, 10 Dec 2000, Adam Stephanides wrote:

3. Shortly afterwards, there is this exchange between Weer and the nurse:

"Please, I've got to see the doctor. I'm dying."

The nurse: "All these people are ahead of you."

Ted Singer and Sherry Gold are both obviously much younger than I, but there is no use arguing with that kind of thing. (4)

Weer is uncharacteristically obtuse here (I can't recall any similar instances).

When Weer says he's dying and the nurse says the others are ahead of him, he takes her to mean (perhaps knowing she doesn't really mean) that Ted and Sherry are closer to dying than he is, although, being younger, they are probably further away from dying than Weer.

I was aware of that. But that obviously isn't what the nurse meant, and I read Weer's comment as indicating that he doesn't know that's not what she meant.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

This seemed fairly clear to me. "Ahead of you": They died first.

That happens to be true, but it can't be what the nurse meant, since the other characters in the doctors' visits don't know the "future" (nor does it fit the context). Nor is it what Weer thinks she meant, otherwise his comment makes no sense.

--Adam

Adam Stephanides — 11 Dec 2000, 21:19 · follows Adam Stephanides

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

I agree about the "dreamlike quality", but I think an even more telling detail in the passage is that when Weer enters the waiting room he sees five people, one of whom is himself. This brings to mind the common phenomenon in dreams of being both observer and participant.

I had missed that. The passage reads: "At one-thirty I enter the Cassionsville and Kanakessee Valley Bank Building through bronze doors, more bronze doors for the elevator, and a glass door for the waiting room where five people sit listening to Glinka's *_A Life for the Czar_*. They are Margaret Lorn, Ted Singer, Abel Green, and Sherry Gold. And me." (3) I'm not sure whether I'd read it as you do, or read Weer as jumping ahead in his narrative between the words "and a glass door" and "where five people sit listening..." so that the end of the sentence refers to after he enters and sits down. (If it read "into the waiting room" instead of "for the waiting room," I would be more certain of your reading.) But either way, it's another glitch in his narration of his visit.

--Adam

Michael Straight — 12 Dec 2000, 22:15 · follows Adam Stephanides

On Mon, 11 Dec 2000, Adam Stephanides wrote:

"Please, I've got to see the doctor. I'm dying."

The nurse: "All these people are ahead of you."

Ted Singer and Sherry Gold are both obviously much younger than I, but there is no use arguing with that kind of thing. (4)

Weer is uncharacteristically obtuse here (I can't recall any similar instances).

I was aware of that. But that obviously isn't what the nurse meant, and I read Weer's comment as indicating that he doesn't know that's not what she meant.

It's a joke. It's just not clear whether Weer is making the joke or Wolfe is.

Or Weer could be just complaining to himself that he, as a dying old man, should get priority over these hardy youngsters (but there's no use trying to get people to respect old age these days...)

Or Weer's so preoccupied with dying he really takes the nurse to mean the others are dying ahead of him).

-Rostrum

Adam Stephanides — 15 Dec 2000, 19:31 · follows Michael Straight

Michael Straight wrote:

On Mon, 11 Dec 2000, Adam Stephanides wrote:

"Please, I've got to see the doctor. I'm dying."

The nurse: "All these people are ahead of you."

Ted Singer and Sherry Gold are both obviously much younger than I, but there is no use arguing with that kind of thing. (4)

Weer is uncharacteristically obtuse here (I can't recall any similar instances).

It's a joke. It's just not clear whether Weer is making the joke or Wolfe is.

Or Weer could be just complaining to himself that he, as a dying old man, should get priority over these hardy youngsters (but there's no use trying to get people to respect old age these days...)

Or Weer's so preoccupied with dying he really takes the nurse to mean the others are dying ahead of him).

Without wishing to belabor this question, I'll just say that I don't find any of these readings more plausible than my own (that Weer's response is a sign that he is not fully in control of his thoughts). In particular, elsewhere in his narrative Weer does not seem to be preoccupied with dying; and he is only "visiting" the doctor to find out if he should exercise, not because he believes himself about to keel over.

It's a weird exchange anyway. Why doesn't the nurse react when a patient tells her that he's dying and he has to see the doctor? Why doesn't Weer protest "You don't understand, I'm _dying_," instead of just sitting down again, if he really believes he is dying?

There are other strange things about the "doctor's visit." Over a month

ago, Roy Lackey wrote:

If, in real life, Weer

ever had occasion to undergo psychological testing by Van Ness (how many MDs have such props to hand?)--then when, why? If he never took such tests, whence his familiarity with them, and why did he mention them in his account, especially as they seem to have been administered in consequence of an imaginary visit to a dead doctor for a stroke he hadn't had yet? Are imaginary people always so judgemental?

The question about how Weer is familiar with personality tests isn't too hard--he could easily have learned about them in the corporation, either as part of his executive responsibilities or from having had them administered to him--but the other questions are good ones.

We may also ask why he bothers with the visit in the first place. He believes that the visit is all in his head, in which case the doctor can't tell him anything he doesn't know. This isn't too bad in itself; he could be employing a variant of the "memory palace," in which his knowledge of strokes is embodied in "Van Ness." But he also knows that it really doesn't make much difference whether or not he exercises, and he also knows that he won't take Van Ness's advice, whatever it is, as definitive (3). So, as said above, why bother? It's not too implausible to see this as just a quirk on Weer's part, but it is odd.

It's also odd that two of the three women whom Weer has been involved with that we know of are in the waiting room when he arrives. Of course, this isn't a problem if we take the view, as I suggested, that the "visit" is not modeled upon a real-life visit.

Finally, what does it mean that the book ends with Weer having an appointment to hear Van Ness's "conclusions," but not having kept that appointment; and, the nailed-down reminder slip suggests, unable to keep it?

All these may, of course, be explainable separately, or not at all. But together they suggest a possible reading. I put this forth not as correct, or even necessarily as plausible (I can see plenty of objections to it), but as food for thought.

Van Ness is an independent entity, and not a creation of Weer's mind, as Dan'l argues. But he is not a psychopomp, but a judge. Weer only thinks he is consulting him on his own initiative; in reality he is influenced to consult him, possibly by the same force that prevents him from thinking about consulting a real doctor). The "doctor" shows him the TAT cards to elicit Weer's "testimony" as a defendant. The reason Weer cannot make his appointment to hear Van Ness's conclusions is that he has been condemned in absentia, and Olivia's "'Den, darling, are you awake in there?'" signals the beginning of his sentence: the "peace" of annihilation (these words are the signal to go to sleep, not to wake up: p. 65, H & R).

If you insist on seeing Van Ness as a spirit, I think this reading works better than the psychopomp-Purgatory reading.

--Adam