

PEACE: Bobby Black, imaginary friend

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 11 Jul 2001

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 11 Jul 2001, 11:11

Adam Stephanides wrote:

At the time of the big PEACE discussion, I dreamed up a theory as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the unreliable Weer: that nothing interesting actually happened to Weer--he made up Bobby Black, the egg hunt, the coldhouse prank, the treasure hunt, and all to conceal the fact that he led a boring life. It sounds like you've been seriously contemplating something like this theory (which I'd actually be more willing to take seriously now than I did then).

I think that Bobby Black seems so real because his episode comes very early in the text (we have nothing to test it against), and the events around the accident are quite detailed (motive, method, perpetrator, follow up). Later episodes are contrastingly sketchy in one or more ways, in fact, there seems to be a progression away from easily determined historicity to full-blown fantasy, culminating in the Doris/Cinder-ella episode, such that it seems somewhat like a spectrum from history to fantasy.

The Bobby Black episode also doesn't have to solve a lot of things: because of its position in the text, it sets things in motion. At the very least, there is the sense of blood-guilt, and dread, and morbidity. Some readers also take it as the springboard for the flight of the parents to Europe (but this is not explicit in the text), which then leads to Weer being left with Olivia and the rest of the story. There is also the one conversation with Doctor Black much later, where Weer tries to bend history by telling the Doctor about the future (rather heroic, come to think of it, especially for Weer).

But they may in fact all be equally fantastic. The murder of an imaginary friend could be used by the child to explain why his parents abandoned him and went to Europe, for example.

It is possible, but I'm not weighing it as my favorite. It is part of the all-or-nothing danger in dealing with this level of unreliability, just as the search for motive, method, et cetera, leads to its own thicket (witness the coldhouse prank example I gave before; or who killed Olivia; or the strange case of Mr. Tilly).

Or to return it to you: if you feel that the Treasure Hunt is a fiction, then how are you taking it? Is it at all based on history, or is it pure wish-fulfillment, or a mixture? Are you building a fort in the thicket yet? <g>

No? Well here, then: consider the term "gold-digger," a person who courts another for his/her wealth. If the Treasure Hunt is a dream, then "Lois" is very neatly identified as a literal digger of gold, so if there is a hidden truth behind this dream, then perhaps "Lois" entered into a relationship with Weer believing that the family fortunes were still intact, that is, she was a gold-digger who then dropped him when she had evidence that there was no money. Recall how lavish he was with his money around her (the restaurant, talk of buying rare books), and this idle thought begins to take on some force.

Meanwhile, hey everybody: our imaginary friend Robert Borski has another Wolfe essay in "The New York Review of Science Fiction" (July 2001), this one titled "Wolves in the Fold: Lupine Shadows in the Works of Gene Wolfe."

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