

PEACE: conclusion consensus

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Jul 2001

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 12 Jul 2001, 16:43

Hello Dan, and welcome.

Dan quoted Adam and 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 Bobbly 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 don't know what the consensus is on the ending of the novel, but I took Weer's remark about waking, in the context of the Chinese garden dream, to mean either that he is at last waking to a higher, more realized existence (as in the Borges tale - I forget the title - of the man who dies and only after a series of nightmares realizes that he has in fact been in heaven all along), or that Weer is himself as a child dreaming of his own future and death.

We did talk about this a lot before, but the search engine might not be able to help (since it was all in the still-open volume?). There is no solid consensus on the ending, but the things you describe are well-mapped. The first is what we loosely call the "Purgatory" reading (although I'm not quite sure how you are tying in the enigmatic Chinese garden dream), which posits a happy ending -- Weer stops writing because he puts his worries aside and moves up to heaven. (This also gives emphasis to/derives power from the title of the book, PEACE: Weer is finally at peace after being a wandering spirit.) The second you describe is the "Loop" reading, supported by, for example, the China Pillow story (echoed in the final pages of the novel), and Weer's speculation that he may be still a boy passed out from the fumes of his chemistry set. The Loop reading can be "one loop" or "endless," and the ending is not usually seen as very happy.

This in turn reminded me of a fairy tale I read once upon a time (so long ago that though I can remember the shape of the book and the pictures I have no clue what the source was), in which a boy is given a magical ball of string. Whenever he pulls on the string his life advances by a proportionate amount. One morning in school he pulls the string and finds that school has already let out for the afternoon. When he's drafted into the army he pulls it a great ways until that's over. And so on. Until at last when he's an old man he realizes that he can remember nothing of his life because he never experienced it. At that point I think the angel who gave him the ball reappears and grants him a second go at it.

Which is a happy-ending version of the China Pillow story!

Now with Adam's and mantis's remarks I find myself thinking about that story again and wondering if a person who has essentially opted out of 'real life' wouldn't try in various ways to fill in the gaps, to at least speculate on what might have occurred. Weer might not be

fabricating his life in totum (except in the sense that he may be dreaming it) but I do think he wants his account to guess at bigger things. Of course Wolfe has a habit of leaving big things off-stage and may have a variety of aesthetic reasons for it, but I begin to suspect that his full-moon alter ego is coming as close as possible to outright lying in order to imply that (for instance) he shot Lois or locked the worker in the coldroom.

I don't think he shot Lois, though some readers have added her name to his list of victims: he keeps her gun in what appears to me to be the fear of a living person bent on revenge, rather than, say, a ghost or a victim with police on her side. If all he did was grab the gun and drive off in the car, leaving her stranded in the rural countryside at night, then that seems too little for the sort of fear he exhibits.

The Coldhouse Prank. Well, since Professor Peacock killed Olivia, then clearly Weer has a target in Peacock. But Peacock himself couldn't be the young worker (said to be "a kid of eighteen or so"), and since the prank happened ten years after Olivia's death (and 14 years after Peacock's courtship of Olivia), the worker also couldn't be, say, Peacock's son by another woman (hmmm, unless the worker was only 13 or 14 years old? Or this hypothetical woman became pregnant a few years before Peacock courted Olivia?).

Well, it goes on and on from there!

=mantis=

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