

PEACE: From the thicket

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Jul 2001

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Roy C. Lackey — 13 Jul 2001, 14:46

As has happened to me all too many times on this list, by the time I get around to posting something I find that someone else has beaten me to the draw, said what I wanted to say, at least in part . . . blah . . . blah, and that is what's happened with this post, but I'm still too lazy to re-write it. <g> So, some of what follows has already been touched on by others.

Adam's doubts about whether or not the conversation(s) between Weer and Gold ever took place has caused me to re-evaluate the basic assumptions underlying my interpretation of PEACE. What if Adam is right? To go further; what if all the episodes dealing directly with Weer are fabrications, entire or partial? It has been mentioned before, by others, that much (most) of what is related in the book has little or nothing to do with Weer. Of what remains, the autobiographical details are scattered, all too skeletal, almost arbitrary and incidental to what he has chosen to write about.

If it were not for the fallen elm, and Wolfe's own testimony to the contrary, one might reasonably argue that Weer isn't even dead, that the whole book is just a boy's idle bookish dreams, from which Aunt Vi will soon wake him, or an old man's bitter regrets, which death will soon make more palatable. But Weer is dead, and that is the one solid fact from which an understanding of PEACE must proceed. The frametale--even if that frame exists only in the hollow of his grave-bound skull--is Weer's only "reality", the backdrop of his life-after-death. So far as can be determined, Weer is the sole occupant of the frametale. (Never mind the door he thought he heard close, or his aunt on the intercom; there was no Persian room either; it's all his imagination, and Wolfe is reported in an interview to have denied, in effect, that any such memory-mansion would have existed.)

All those instances where something from his frametale existence intrudes into some seeming "real-life" event that he is "remembering" (consulting Dr. V for a non-existent stroke, telling the future to Dr.B, telling Lois that he was waiting at his desk when he was sitting in his car, giving her his future phone number, begging Sherry's forgiveness for not rising due to his "stroke", etc.) clearly could not be true, did not happen in the real world, or at the least did not happen quite as he describes them. I think those anachronisms are Wolfe's way of telling the reader that Weer is fabricating those episodes, in whole or part, as his way of coping with the life-after-death situation he finds himself in, however and whyever he came to be in that situation.

As mantis pointed out early on in last autumn's big PEACE discussion, even when Weer re-tells an almost familiar tale, say from Lang or Burton, the story he tells is never quite right, not as it was in the original. More recently, I noted the same type of thing was done with the Sidhe story. The point is that Weer is not above changing around the stories to serve his own ends, which fact might be noticed by the knowledgeable reader. I think this is Wolfe's way of letting that reader know that what Weer writes about can't be relied on as gospel.

The bit of the Boyne diary mentioned by Adam is told from the third-person pov; diaries aren't

written that way, nor is the excerpt quoted. When Gold starts to read to Weer from the NECRONOMICON, what he translates starts off in quotation marks, then Weer stops to describe Gold's demeanor. When the text continues in the next paragraph it is no longer quoted, and remains that way to the end of the chapter. Gold is no longer reading. When Hannah starts to tell Den the story of Jack and Molly, they are in his mother's kitchen, but the scene soon shifts to Sugar Creek and Katie is telling the story to Hannah and Maud Mill, complete with interruptions from Maud. Weer has to be making that up; he wasn't there to hear it. For that matter, even very early in the book, at his birthday party, when his mother asks Hannah where the children are, he obviously wasn't there to hear her ask.

I think mantis may be right about the Walter Mittyish nature of Weer's life, that he lived vicariously through books--and lived to regret it. The coldhouse prank may have been no more than just another ghost story, like those told by his Aunt Bella and Uncle Julius. The whole Charlie Turner/Doris part has always struck me as very improbable. Sherry giving herself to Weer to save her father strikes me as unrealistic, more like a sexual fantasy. The "non-explanation", as Adam put it, of the gun and its disposal is another instance of the frametale intruding on "reality"; one of the options he tells Sherry for getting rid of it is to throw it in "the bottom drawer of my bureau". That not only doesn't get rid of the gun, but the bureau is in the museum-room duplicate of his Commons apartment. As happens elsewhere in the text, his mind wanders back to his frametale existence and his distractedness is glossed over or ignored by the "real-world" character present, in this case, Sherry. As for Lois and the Gold Hunt, well, I think mantis has covered that part of the story already in a recent post, even if not even he is buying it. <g>

Mantis's dissatisfaction comes, I think, because if all, or even most of what Weer writes about is lies or fantasies, then what are we left with? What is the point? I'm no happier than is he with this kind of interpretation, but how else to account for those real-world anachronisms above? And those were just off the top of my head; there're bound to be more.

-Roy