

Take it - Take another little PEACE of my heart, now, babeeeee

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 17 Jul 2001

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Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 17 Jul 2001, 08:47

It meseems that the logical conclusion of the current trend is to doubt whether Weer exists at all.

Look, folks, this is a weird book, but it ain't the X Files. "Trust no one," "doubt everything," are not valuable hermeneutic principles. Better to take things at their face value except where there's some specific evidence in the text to doubt.

That Weer's unreliable is clear. But frankly I see no evidence to suggest he makes things up out of thin air: he evades, elides, avoids, but his evasions, elisions, avoidances are themselves revelatory or there's no point, from the PoV of a reader (or, by extension, a writer) in the whole game. The truth is in there. (Sorry.)

Which is not to say that we can access a single linear, and consistent "true account," but -- I know I've said this before, but I'm standing by it -- that some true account exists.

Point of comparison: the structure of a mystery novel. A mystery novel has at least three -- well, I used to say "three plots," but I've come to find the concept of "plot" less and less useful with time. Say three "stories."

1. There is the story of what really happened (Professor Plum did it, in the library, with a meathook).
2. There is the story of what seems to have happened. This may be endlessly multiplied in the form of false clues, red herrings, misinterpretations, etc.
3. There is the story (and this would be the traditional sense of the word "plot") of the detecting protagonist moving from #2 to #1.

PEACE is kind of like that.

1. There is some sort of underlying fictive reality. I have heard and entertained arguments that Mr Wolfe did not in fact have such a fictive reality in mind. Barring concrete evidence (and I'm not sure what weight I'd put on interview data for this -- Mr Wolfe is a trickster), I hold that it does exist and that Mr Wolfe knew what it was when he wrote the book.
2. There is the book.
3. There is us, reading the book and trying to make sense of it -- trying to reach some reasonable approximation of item #1. The book, item #2, is the sum total of the

practical evidence available to us; external data (such as the abovementioned interview data) may be useful, but only in a supplementary way.

((Hermeneutic principle #1 for, at least, me: The Text Is The Text. Author's intentions _do_ matter, but, in the end, if, say, Herman Melville intended only to tell an exciting story about a boatload of crazies chasing a whale [and, no, I'm not saying he did. Or didn't], that doesn't mean the more, ah, _numinous_ interpretations of MOBY-DICK aren't valid.))

Now, I suspect that everyone bothering to take part in this discussion is convinced, at gut level, that there is some kind of meaningful item #1; otherwise this whole coinscription is vapidness at its finest.

Before jumping down my throat note what I am _not_ saying.

1. I am not saying that PEACE (item #2) actually gives us enough information to construct a unified and consistent item #1.
2. I am not saying that, if we had access to the "true" account, it would be something we would consider "rational" or likely.
3. I am not saying that everything Weer says is true, or even that it is true from his point of view.

- 1a. I am saying that PEACE is the only evidence we have towards an item #1, whether unified and consistent or not.
- 2a. I am saying that the "true" account, whatever it is, is likely to be internally consistent.
- 3a. I am saying that everything Weer says is in some way revelatory of item #1, though not necessarily in any obvious way.
- 3b. I am also suggesting that the events Weer describes are likely to be accounts, however inaccurate, of events that actually did occur.

Obviously, this involves completely rejecting the "Loop" interpretation, or at least its more blatant forms. I have no problem with that; Wolfe isn't writing FINNEGANS WAKE. His choice of a dreambook is Proust.

--Dan'l