

PEACE: The Elm

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 17 Jul 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2727>

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Roy C. Lackey — 17 Jul 2001, 15:52

"The elm tree planted by Eleanor Bold, the judge's daughter, fell last night."

For all the times I've read that sentence, it is only now that something strange about it strikes me. How is it that Weer knew the tree in question to have been planted by her? There are two possibilities: 1) he recognized the site as one known by him (while he was alive, of course) to be the grave of someone other than himself, another of Eleanor's friends, or 2) he recognized his own (prearranged, necessarily) grave site and only assumed the tree to have been planted by her. The first possibility is unlikely and lends nothing to the rest of the novel. The second possibility has its own problems. Even if Weer and Eleanor had agreed in advance that the grave tree would be an elm, for Weer to associate the fallen mature tree with Eleanor and her hobby, then--duh--he must be dead. No matter whose grave it was, saplings do not grow to maturity and die, normally, in a lifetime; if Eleanor planted that tree, then everyone he knew must be dead, and so must he.

So, Weer had to know, from the first page of the novel, that he was dead. Leaving aside the metaphysical questions of how and why he came to be writing his post-mortem memoir, knowing himself to be dead, why keep up the charade of his *frametale* physical maladies? He did know his consultations with the doctors weren't real--he said as much to Dr. V. A non-existent 4lb. axe weighs no more than a non-existent 2lb. axe, and the axes could not exist, not unless the museum-roomed house had in fact been built and was still standing, intact, however many years after his death that the elm tree had been standing, and he had been buried on the grounds of his estate, under that elm. That's pretty farfetched.

Of course, any writer who writes about life after death gets to make up his own rules, so Wolfe was free to compound as many impossibilities as he cared to. But, not knowing the ground rules Wolfe was playing by makes it very hard to make judgements about Weer, whether based on his words or deeds. Of course, that's not going to stop me. <g>

In *CASTLE OF DAYS*, where Wolfe talks about *PEACE*, he brings up the psychobabble term "normalization" to describe what Weer is going through in the *frametale*, the process whereby individuals commonly (and unconsciously) attempt to impose an order on reality that isn't necessarily there. How can I argue with that? When Weer writes of eating, sleeping, feeling cold or sick, chopping wood, lighting candles, writing, etc., he only imagines he does those things; it's his way of coping with the situation he finds himself in. For the dead to really do any of those things is "contrary to everyday experience".

At one point Weer speaks of being "sicker, even, than I was this winter, before Eleanor Bold's tree fell". In the *frametale* it is early spring, so it can be inferred that he remembers a time before the tree fell, although that contradicts the theory that the tree falling is what freed his spirit, which woke him from the oblivion of death to his *frametale* existence. Yet his account begins after the tree fell. So, which is it? Does his memory extend, in the *frametale*, for some unspecified length of time before the tree fell (perhaps all the way back to when the tree was

first planted), or does it begin with the tree falling? If the latter, then what did he mean about being "sicker" before then?

-Roy

Michael Straight — 18 Jul 2001, 09:11 · follows Roy C. Lackey

On Tue, 17 Jul 2001, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Does Weer say that the tree was mature? Maybe it was a sapling that fell. I don't like that idea. The language implies a full-sized tree. If it were a sapling one would be more likely to say it got smashed or uprooted by the storm.

I just figured that Weer knows who planted the tree because it was over his grave, not because he was hovering around as a ghost and watched her plant it, but that he just has that knowledge because of its connection to him. Weer, like the reader on her first time through the novel, hasn't thought through the implications and realized what it means.

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If Weer's ghost just "woke" with the falling of the sapling in early spring, then the most recent winter he remembers is the winter before he died, which, being before the tree was planted, is also before it fell.

-Rostrum