

PEACE: The Elm that binds the dead

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

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 17 Jul 2001, 16:27

Roy,

We did talk about this before, but it may be too time-consuming to review it.

IIRC, I brought up many of the questions you are raising now. Buried on grounds of estate, etc. Right, the dead don't eat, chop wood, get sick, and so on . . . OTOH, there are a lot of traditions from around the world about feeding the dead . . . but it also shows some of the dilemma around Weer (perhaps he is "faking" these things in order to prove to himself that he isn't dead; or to the contrary, perhaps these things conflict with his sense of what being "dead" is all about, that is, he didn't imagine that the afterlife would be like this). It also lends itself to the post-apocalyptic "last man on Earth" sense that Weer seems to have (or seems to project, to me at least).

Right, using Either/Or logic, Weer either began his afterlife when the tree fell, or not.

And yeah, that ref to "last winter" might just be an overly specific sense of "before now," i.e., he is thinking back to his last days of life in the 20th century and projecting them onto last winter. Filling in the gap between life and afterlife.

OTOH, and I think I mentioned this before, there is some stuff in PEACE about binding the dead, holding the dead down, like that flat tombstone holding the bell witch down (iirc), and the NECRONOMICON, and, whaddayaknow, the practice of planting trees on graves!

So maybe the elm tree is, in effect, a weird kind of revenge on Weer for having killed Bobby Black? That is to say: judging by the effects at hand, the tree seems to have pinned him down, halting his afterlife progress until such time as the tree falls down. And rather than some memory of sickness before death, perhaps a later period is what is being referred to as the sickness before the tree fell -- maybe he was in an inarticulate state (no pen, no notebook in the coffin) of discomfort (i.e., a lesser hell) for all those realtime years. Then the tree falls like the stone rolling away from the tomb, and he rises up to take up pen and notebook, beginning the narrative.

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.

Yes, but I think this is like arguing that the conclusion of "2001: A Space Odyssey" is far-fetched because the aliens couldn't possibly ship all that white furniture from Earth on such short notice. <g> That is to say, it may be that astronaut Bowman is going through the same sort of normalization that Wolfe is saying that Weer is going through.

Bowman goes through a psychedelic light show and then bingo, he's in this white bedroom, where he goes through some kind of accelerated life span and dies, to be reborn.

Perhaps Weer goes through a long period of discomfort, and then the tree falls and he finds himself at the memory mansion.

We definitely went over the "was it ever really built or not" angle before. It gets tricky, because Weer will say strong things like there was never a Persian room, which makes it sound as if the thing was concrete; comments about the contractor; and that the blue plans were on the table back in the Commons apartment.

Maybe the answer is it never really went beyond the blue plans stage. Thus, the thing is a dream drawn out but never actually realized as a physical "Winchester House" type of building (but it appears as a healing labyrinth in his afterlife).

"Solipsism or Not?" This is something we come back to time and time again in dealing with Wolfe's fiction. At the moment it expresses itself as: is Weer locked in his little universe by himself, or not?

I still tend to think that Weer really is talking to these other ghosts, either by channeling them somehow, or by moving back in time to talk to their spirits at fixed points along the time/space continuum (those examples of ghost stories in PEACE showing how time travel is natural for ghosts). Before I've said that he is like one of those pagan underworld judges, interviewing people of his realm -- it's like that, what I'm talking about now.

=mantis=

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