

PEACE

The Urth list — 6 messages, 2 voices, 12 May 1997

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Jason Voegele — 12 May 1997, 01:33

Hello everybody. I'm new here so I hope I'm not retreading any old ground, but I do have a few questions/observations.

Having determined that Weer is in fact dead, it seems to me that an important question to ask is does he *know* that he is dead, or does he believe that he is a dying man whose imagination has the power to conjure (real or imagined) elements of his past? To quote part of a conversation Weer has with Dr. Van Ness:

Dr.: "Do you feel you can control the whole world--just with your mind?" Weer: "Not the real world--but this world, yes. In the real world I am an elderly man, sick and alone, and I can't do anything about that. But this world--your only world now, Van Ness--I have conjured from my imagination and my memories. This interview between us never took place, but I wanted advice about my stroke."

This passage seems to support the latter, but there is the fact that Weer is--and knows--that he is utterly alone in this world.

Whichever case is true, this book is a showcase for the solipsistic tendency in Wolfe's writing, which ties in with Wolfe's use of stories as shapers of memory and thus reality. In fact, PEACE (or at least one layer of the "PEACE onion") seems to be saying that all of existence is held within memories. This would explain Severian's ability warp reality (via the "claw") due to his eidetic memory.

Another question relates to this passage:

"Who's that behind you?"

"It's just little Den, Katie. He's been there before." "Yes, but there's another, dimmer yet, behind him." "I can only see the one behind me, Katie."

Why is "little Den" a ghost (so to speak) in this scene? And who is it behind him?

One more question. Has there been a discussion on THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS? If so, is it available in an archive somewhere?

PEACE be with you,
Jason Voegele

m.driussi — 12 May 1997, 15:12 · follows Jason Voegele

Reply: Item #9570055 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET01#

Jason Voegele,

Welcome aboard!

Re: Wolfe's "solipsistic tendency," I'm pretty sure I know what you mean (even though I'll admit that I'm imagining this whole conversation while caught in a daydream about being a human being . . . <g>), but I would argue or qualify the solipsism in each text. In some Wolfe stories, like "Melting," sure, that one is 100% pure solipsism. "Toy Theater" is much more ambiguous. But I find I disagree with readings of New Sun that veer too far into solipsism--not that you've done this, mind you.

Re: is Weer aware that he is dead? Interesting question. I have a sense that if/when he finally comes to grips with that fact he will cease his haunting.

Re: "Who's that behind you?" I have to admit that this rings bells in the literary dept. of my brain--T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland," wherein the same haunting question is derived from the journals of English adventurers climbing Mt. Everest and having hallucinations from lack of oxygen. (It also evokes the missionaries in the jungle garden of Nessus sensing the presence of Severian and Agia.) But, to get back to PEACE, I suspect that the dimmer one is the reader. "You."

(And what does =this= reading do to the solipsistic mode? It opens the "one alone in universe" into that literary construct of "reader and author alone in universe"; feeding the stream of fictions that self-reference their own fictitious nature; etc.)

I am not aware of any discussion or archive thereof focused on THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS.

=mantis=

Jason Voegele — 11 Jun 1997, 02:00 · follows m.driussi

OK, I've just finished rereading PEACE, and, of course, it was wonderful. As with most Wolfe works, it's beautifully written, subtle, multi-layered, thought-provoking, and extremely intelligent. What I don't understand about this book (well, *one* of the things that I don't understand) is why Wolfe has written such a beautiful book about a (probably mass) murderer. I understand that having the narrator kicked-the-bucket from the outset opens a whole slew of narrative possibilities, but what new facet is added by his killing spree? With any other author, I could probably be convinced that the murders were thrown in just to see if the reader could spot them, but not with Wolfe. There is *nothing* in a Wolfe story that doesn't have some sort of significance.

Personally, I think this probably ties in with the solipsism thing (assuming there is a solipsism thing.) Are the murders perhaps signifying that when Weer passes on, that the world he has evoked in PEACE will also pass on? Is PEACE intended to be Weer's catharsis, telling his story and the stories of his victims so that they can at last Rest In PEACE? (Pun intended, but not merely as a joke.) If so, then it's odd that Weer never actually admits to any killings.

Anyone have any other ideas?

Jason

m.driussi — 11 Jun 1997, 14:11 · follows Jason Voegele

Reply: Item #2522919 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET03#

Jason,

FWIW, in that recent People Online Chat, Wolfe seemed to say that Weer was not a mass murderer. Which would appear to throw a spanner into the elaborate machine of "Weer killed every character"; but I haven't heard anything from the killing machine theoretician(s), originator(s) of the notion, so I don't really know.

I agree with you re: solipsism and "R.I.P." in PEACE. Have you reread "The Changeling" yet? Set in the same town.

=mantis=

Jason Voegele — 12 Jun 1997, 10:20 · follows m.driussi

I haven't had a chance to look at the People chat yet. Is Wolfe denying that Weer killed most/all characters or is he denying that Weer killed anyone at all? I seem to recall reading somewhere (I think in CASTLE OF DAYS) Wolfe saying that he tried to keep "the sinister elements" hidden in PEACE, and that he believes that "some people did not even notice the sinister elements at all." To me "sinister" seems too strong a word to refer to the fact that Weer is dead, so I believe Wolfe was referring to the murders here.

I did pick up "The Changeling". Wow! I don't think Wolfe intended this story to be explicitly horror, but this kind of story scares me a heck of a lot more than your average Stephen King novel. Are the two Peters in the story (the narrator and the mysterious kid) are the same? How so?

Jason

m.driussi — 12 Jun 1997, 20:57 · follows Jason Voegele

Reply: Item #0140781 from URTN at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET00#

Jason,

Well "sinister" could also be non-Weer related; like the (al-)chemist who helps turn normal people into circus freaks, for example. Wolfe said nearly the same thing with regard to the story "A Solar Labyrinth"--are you certain you aren't remembering that quote? (No offense intended; nor am I insisting that Wolfe wouldn't say similar things about similarly encrypted stories; just that I remember the one and not the other, is all.)

Re: "The Changeling," I can't find my notes at the moment. It is an enigmatic little puzzle. The hero is a cold-war "changeling" because he went over to the Chinese after the Korean War--then he changed again; his life in China seems like the usual time in fairyland. The boy Peter never ages--that's his thing, what marks him as an elf (not to alarm you, but his secret name is "Peter Pan"). Maybe some of the "erasure" of the hero Pete can be answered by backwards time traveling by third party agents? I only mention this because other "elfish" Wolfe stories ("A Cabin on the Coast," "The Ziggurat," etc.) often involve time travel. I have the sense that old Pete is a victim of Peter Pan, who took his place for a while and then made him disappear.

Anyway, I do remember that "Peter" is mentioned in PEACE, just before the group goes out on that picnic (where they visit the cave and ignore the skull).

=mantis=