

PEACE: disintegrating barriers in "The President"

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 20 Aug 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 20 Aug 2002, 13:51

Roy wrote:

Many of the problems associated with the story of Doris would disappear if Charlie Turner's letter didn't exist. There is no reference to Doris outside that letter. The letter, too, would cease to exist if Charlie wasn't real.

[snip]

I am suggesting that this may be Wolfe's way of letting the reader know that Charlie is no more real than a unicorn.

To go along with Roy's belief for a moment: there is, I think, a strong sense of disintegrating barriers in the final section of PEACE, climaxing in the voice of Olivia coming over the office intercom at the very end. The appearance of Charlie Turner might be a sign of such barrier disintegration, in his case the barrier between fiction and reality.

We have talked before about the frametale, about what Weer is actually experiencing, and we often see it in terms of Billy Pilgrim's experience in Vonnegut's SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE: that Weer is reliving segments of his life in an often non-linear way.

But unlike Billy, Weer has a notebook and a pen; Weer is writing. He goes to different rooms of the mansion to better capture the feeling of that stage of his life, and then he begins. Begins what, exactly? Writing, with a few wrinkles that may be prosaic descriptions of the psychological process of writing ("evoking the spirit," "talking to characters") or semi-Billy Pilgrim-type experiences.

In any event, there are barriers: the memory mansion is one place, separate from the past yet connected to points in the past via memory rooms; the barrier between the living and the dead; the barrier between fiction and reality.

Weer has (or telegraphs to us) a sense of having done this before, which gives rise to the feeling in many readers that Weer's action is cyclic, unending, etc. We've talked about this before, I know, but today it resolves for me as a case of:

1. The tree falls, setting Weer free to wander in the non-existent memory mansion.
2. During this initial wandering, Weer learns a few things about the mansion and the interaction between his mind, his memory, and the mansion.
3. Once Weer obtains notebook and pen, his story begins. His writing stabilizes things to a certain extent (in the way that Latro's life is given form by the writing), and the sense of repetition might be due to that pre-notebook stage.

(Then again, maybe he was wandering the mansion for a year or more before the tree fell, since there are bits suggesting he was up before the tree was down. In which case the tree-fall is more the action that heralds the act of Weer writing; the act of writing is setting him free. And

the cyclical nature of the pre-notebook period is established.)

Weer learns his way around the barriers, first fighting against some (as when he tries to warn Dr. Black about Bobby) and later playing off them (his comments to Sherry about being old and suffering effects of a stroke, delivered calmly rather than the urgency with which he spoke to Dr. Black). His attitudes about certain rooms change: where first he is angry that there is a Persian room, in "The President" he entertains the idea of taking a long visit there: at this point in the text, Weer is nearly master of the maze, summoning spirits at will and/or dealing with spontaneous manifestations, piling impossibilities upon improbabilities, he knows and accepts the rules and the boundaries, like a child knows the jungle gym she climbs upon, yet both can still be surprised.

=mantis=

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