

PEACE: odd Dr. Van Ness and today's Doris

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 21 Aug 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 21 Aug 2002, 16:37

Roy Lackey wrote:

Other characters are being "puppetized", to the extent that words are being put into their mouths by frametale-Weer that could not possibly have been uttered by them in real life. In addition to Sherry's noncommittal response to Weer's comment about the stroke he hadn't had in real life, there is the business with Lois questioning Weer's having given her a future phone number, sans exchange letters, and his telling her that he had been waiting for her at his desk (and he was, so to speak--in the frametale) when in real life he had waited in his car. She asked if he meant he had propped a book against the steering wheel. Such comments would never have been made by her in real life. And, of course, the entire conversation 4-year-old Den had with Dr. Black never happened outside of the frametale. Parts of Weer's visit(s) with Dr. Van Ness contain dialogue that never happened except in the memory mansion.

Well yes, but these cases of frametale vs. main-tale interaction oddities do not rise to the level of puppetry as proposed in the case of Unicorn Charlie (where Baton and Birkhead see Charlie and comment about Charlie to Weer). I've said before and I say again that these cases you cite show how the others are =resisting= Weer's tinkering, how they are deftly avoiding becoming puppets. Weer does not have that kind of control over them in the early parts of the book. (I would like to correct an earlier mistake I probably made: Charlie Turner visits the plant in "Gold," section four; the letter from Charlie Turner, with the Doris story, comes in "The President," section five.)

As for the statement "Such comments would never have been made by her in real life," I strongly disagree. Her comments are exactly what we would expect from a person responding to a non sequitorial, off-topic, out-of-the-blue comment. The comments from Sherry and Dr. Black are the same.

There may be a difference in Dr. Van Ness, because he seems to engage with Weer at key points of what is apparently a huge pile of time-slippage. For example, if Weer in 1974 had a non-lethal stroke and went to Dr. Van Ness, this establishes a lot of the groundwork (which is then scrambled through time slippage), but at that point where Dr. Van Ness tells Weer his stroke is two decades in the future (and nubile Sherry Gold is in the next room), that means that Dr. V (1954) is really interacting with Weer (2274) via Weer (1974).

But this is one exception among many other cases.

Back to the Doris letter. We are agreed, iirc, that if it is real then it came to Weer in 1963 or so, not too long after the three visitors (including Charlie Turner).

When Weer tries to show the photos to Miss Birkhead, it is apparently 1974. More to the point, it is after Weer's stroke.

Because the Doris story comes after the Gold section, today I'm thinking that Doris is Sherry Gold herself, and as such the tale is about her post-Weer life, ending with her death in 1974, a span of 20 years compressed into a gothic carny fairy tale. (Mrs. Gold's comments about how the Jews could have been like gypsies feeds into this.)

So I am in a position where I can easily see the letter as a fictionalized warping, just as the fairy tales that Weer reads (the suitors; the marid) are based upon something (Grimm's fairy tales; Arabian Nights) but in reality are not found there sources they claim to be from: instead they are coinages to transmit disguised stories affecting Weer's heart.

That is to say: even though I cannot find the story of the suitors in Grimm's fairy tales, I do not deny the existence of Grimm's fairy tales, nor do I suppose that Weer did not read such fairy tales; the same holds for the Arabian Nights. Holding to this, I suppose that there really was a letter from Charlie, and it had a lot of the elements still recognizable in the letter we have (especially the scam angle, since I believe Charlie is trying to work Weer). The letter may have been forgettable in 1964, but it has become important because of what happens in 1974 (Sherry Gold's death closely followed by Weer's stroke), and Weer has warped the seedy scam come-on (with all its images of underage women and middle-age men) into a eulogy for Sherry.

(Still, I'll admit that I haven't found such hard evidence as the tale's suitors linking to Olivia's suitors, nor the way the character names in the marid story point the way.)

If one can follow this, then the wild time-splicing around Sherry Gold in the waiting room of Dr. Van Ness makes a lot of sense:

Weer (2274) remembers/relives Weer (1970-something), fat president going to the doctor for a check up, where he sees Sherry Gold (which reminds him of 1974: he talks to the nurse as Weer [1974]), and after distracting himself with magazines for a while, when he next sees Sherry she is 16 years old, i.e., Weer is now the skinny loser Weer (1954), but he persists in talking to the doctor as Weer (1974).

=mantis=

William Ansley — 21 Aug 2002, 17:41 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis wrote:

Roy Lackey wrote:

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[snip]

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I quite agree with you here, mantis.

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I see another problem here. Grimm's fairy tales and the Arabian Nights actually exist in the real world, so we can read them and see that Weer's stories do not come from these sources. But Charlie's letter exist only in the reality within PEACE, so we have no way of knowing that the version Weer presents to us is fictionalized, the way we do with the two stories. The parallel also seems to break down in that the two stories are *stories*, that is pieces of fiction (in the context of PEACE), from the beginning, whereas Charlie's letter is a real object in Weer's life (the original letter that is, if it ever existed). That is, the stories, on their surface, have no direct bearing on Weer's life although I won't deny that they (especially the "Tale of the Three Suitors") actually are about his life as soon as you delve below the surface.

But, you may have well hit on something that Wolfe had in mind. Weer does seem to be editing his reality in all of its aspects, retroactively, as it were, as he recounts his life.

As I have read this most recent discussion of PEACE, I keep wondering: How much more are we taking out of the book than Wolfe intended to put in? This may be a question that Wolfe himself can no longer answer completely. In the final analysis, however, this question probably shouldn't even be asked. The ability to take more out of a book than the author was aware of putting in it is one of the things that makes a great book great, or at the very least, a good book interesting. Or so I think at the moment.

William Ansley

Roy C. Lackey — 21 Aug 2002, 20:19 · follows William Ansley

mantis wrote:

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Maybe, just maybe, some of the responses to Weer's anomalous statements can be brushed off that way, but take the example of Dr. Black:

A four-year old boy knows words like "metaphysics"? Knows what a stroke is? Expounds on elements of the theory of relativity? Knows the future? Knows that Bobby will die in a few years from a fall he hasn't even taken yet? Mentions five people he couldn't possibly know (at least two of whom hadn't even been born yet)?

Dr. Black responds as if he hears Den say those things, doesn't like what he hears, doesn't want to hear more, and sticks a finger in his mouth to shut him up. Either Dr. Black heard Den say those things or he didn't. If he did, then that scene didn't happen in real life, not unless Den had supernatural abilities I'm unaware of. If he didn't hear Den say those things, what was he responding to when Den states: "'You don't believe me.'", and the doctor says: "'I think I do, but my business now is with your throat.'"?

Either way, whether the doctor heard him or not, that conversation never took place, as written, anywhere but in long-dead Weer's mind.

The same applies to the bit about the lack of a telephone exchange designation in the number Weer first gave Lois at the library. She questioned it, because the phone company didn't drop those exchange letters until sometime in the future of that conversation. Did he really give her a phone number from the future? If he did, where did the knowledge of that phone number come from? If he didn't, what was she questioning him about? Again, either Weer has supernatural abilities, or that bit of conversation didn't take place, as written, in the real world.

-Roy