

Interpreting Peace

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 17 Apr 1998

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Paul C Duggan — 17 Apr 1998, 13:41

SPOILER WARNING if you haven't read Peace.

The final story of the geese seems to be crucial for making sense of Peace. As Adam Stephanides already said Weer is the one who has dwindled. But if Christian Baptism is the only hope for Weer in the novel, one might ask where else is this intimated and does Weer ever receive it, or possibly demonstrate the "baptism of desire".

Some thoughts, since I just finished reading Peace and had a small book club discussion on it.

[1] The Book of Gold in Peace are the books of Mr. Gold, including one that has a greek name that translates "The Book that Binds the Dead". In other words, the Necronomicon, fitting right in with Cultes des Ghouls, which was purchased for a small Massachussets university library (Miskatonic). Weer himself may be similarly writing a "Book that Binds the Dead" as he passes through so many stories of his won life and tells his own ghoulish ghost stoires along the way.

(Another Lovecraftian nod is found on p.6 of the Orb trade paperback, where in a brilliant musing on the potential for other racial stereotypes Wolfe writes:

the bland chance of the scientists (whose blind,
piping ape-god, idiot god, we have met before; we
know you, troubler of Babylon)

whichg seems to bear more than a passing resemblace ot Azathoth.)

[2] The Necronomicon is a "fake", though described by Lovecraft, but Gold has brought it into existence and in a few hundred years there will be thousands of copies.

[3] Weers old childhood home has been converted into a library, filled with books. But significantly, the library purchaces the fake diary of Kate. This purchase generates the interest in searching for the burried treasure, which creates a rift in the developing relationship bewteen Weer and the librarian (when she pulls a gun on him).

[4] Weer is searching through the memories of his mental house and calling up stories. Are the stories true or false? Are they beneficial, or harmful, leading to similar ill-fated relationships?

[5] Weer's "true love", Margret Lorn, find the Ressurrection Egg after running through the rain to the farmhouse. If anything this might qualify for a baptismal scene which will save Weer from his indulgent self-referential memory trip.

Also of note is his meal of donuts and tea with sugar, which Maggie slips him under the table.

What of the Egg? It contains scenes of the 'less dramatic' elements of the resurrection narrative. One of which (breakfast on the shore) is the story of Peter's restoration after his betrayal, also relevant for Weer's situation.

The Egg as art-object though causes no end of trouble as Macafee and Olivia scheme to get each other to give it to them in return for marriage.

[6] What's with the memos and such nailed to Weer's desk?

[7] The general themes of inheritance and carrying on into the future are all over. The town will revert to the Indians. The women play at being Indians. Olivia is concerned with how archaeologists will perceive her breeding project. Weer considers himself the last human being and feels as if an archaeologist's spade is digging up his skull. Gold "salts" the future with fake books. Weer leads the plant tour in reverse, going from final product, up the conveyor belt, into the processing plant.

I realize that there's not much coherence in these observations. Maybe someone else can piece these together.

"I am an impure thinker. I am hurt, swayed, shaken, | paul + | + elated, disillusioned, shocked, comforted, and I | --|-- have to transmit my mental experiences lest I die." | + | +
-- Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy | pduggan at world.std.com

adam louis stephanides — 19 Apr 1998, 15:58 · follows Paul C Duggan

On Fri, 17 Apr 1998 Paul C Duggan wrote:
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I don't know. The idea just came to me when I reread the sidhe story a couple of days ago, and it's been quite a while since I last reread the whole book, so I just threw it out as a speculation. But given Wolfe's own religious convictions, which appear explicitly in several other books and stories of his, it seems a reasonable surmise.

And I didn't mean to suggest that Weer had not been baptized, or that if he had been baptized he wouldn't have become a ghost. Rather, my idea was that religious belief in general might have helped fill the void that clearly exists in Weer's life, and in that way possibly have gained him "peace" after death.

Incidentally, what is the position of the Catholic church on ghosts? I would think that the idea of all souls going to heaven, hell or purgatory would be inconsistent with the idea of ghosts remaining on earth. (While I seem to recall reading an article stating that the Catholic church had within the past few years declared purgatory no longer official church doctrine, that would have been after the publication of Peace.)

[1] The Book of Gold in Peace are the books of Mr. Gold, including one
Nice. There's also a reference to Louis Gold in Bibliomen.

--Adam