

Napoleon's Hand

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 30 Apr 1998

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David_Lebling — 30 Apr 1998, 15:10

From: "William H. Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net>

Does anyone in this group know what Wolfe is referring to here? And is there really biography of Napoleon by a man named Ludwig?

I'd like to know as well. To answer part of your question, there indeed is a biography of Napoleon by Emil Ludwig, which was published in 1926. It was a best-seller.

How old is Weer on page 2? He's just a kid, right? This gives a good shot at his birth year, perhaps. If true, it seems likely to me that the very beginning of _Peace_ takes place in our future: the tree planted on Weer's grave has grown and fallen down. Weer would only be about 80 right now, were he alive today. He lived to at least age 65, according to his estimate of his age at the time of his stroke.

There's an article in ART BULLETIN (March, 1995) called "Re-dressing Classical Statuary: The Eighteenth Century 'Hand-in-Waistcoat' Portrait," by Arline Miller. It claims, plonkingly enough, that this was a standard portrait cliché that indicated "manly boldness tempered with modesty." Napoleon is associated with this pose because of David's famous painting. The article suggests Napoleon may have learned the pose from Talma, the actor who taught the First Consul how to act imperial.

I've also heard the claim that the hand-in-waistcoat was because Napoleon suffered from scrofula, but I don't have any references.

--viz

(david_lebling at avid.com)

Michael Straight — 30 Apr 1998, 15:56 · follows David_Lebling

On Thu, 30 Apr 1998 David_Lebling at avid.com wrote:

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Perhaps it was that "debunking" sort of answer that offended people, to Weer's surprise. I find people are often disappointed rather than gratified when you debunk a story with something ordinary, in this case debunking the myth that this was a particularly Napoleonic thing to do and that he had some nasty disease that made him do it.

I can see Weer being the type who would think people might enjoy hearing the truth and being surprised at negative reactions.

-Rostrum

William H. Ansley — 02 May 1998, 01:05 · follows Michael Straight

From: David_Lebling at avid.com

From: "William H. Ansley" <wansley at warwick.net>

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Were actually gives his age in the passage I am talking about. He is 13. He says he read the book a year or so before. Let's say he read it at 10 at the earliest. If he read it the year it was published, then the year he was born was from 1914 to 1916 at the earliest. (You seem to have made very similar calculations, since you say that Weer would be about 80 if he were alive today, but I had to work it out for myself.) Of course he could have been born at any time after that. If Weer is a temporally equivalent alter ego for Wolfe, then I would suppose Weer was born in 1931, as Wolfe was. Weer certainly describes no "large" historical events that can help us place him in time. The world outside Cassionville and its immediate vicinity might as well not exist in his narrative for the most part.

If I understand you, you are saying that Weer's "awakening" from death, caused by the falling of the elm tree on his grave, occurs in our future. I have to agree with you here. If we take the earliest possible birthdate for Weer, 1914, and assume he dies at age 60 (almost certainly too early) he would have died in 1974 and the oak sapling would have been planted then. I am a little vague about the growth rate of elm trees, but the fallen tree Weer describes seems quite large and I would guess it would take 25 to 50 years to get that big.

This places the earliest date of Weer's "awakening" at 1999. If Were were born in 1931 and lived to be 65 and the tree grew on his grave for 50 years then he "awakens" in 2046. This is probably a reasonable bracket for the latest date, unless we want to assume Weer or the tree lived longer than this.

Well, I have gone on long enough here (most likely too long)!

William Ansley