

Gene Wolfe's PEACE

The Usenet list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 Sep 1983

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/usenet/12>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Donn Seeley — 05 Sep 1983, 08:12

Nice to see that someone else (Tim Bray) liked this novel. (Besides the Chicago Foundation for Literature, which gave it its award in 1977.) It is an extremely strange book, and the new paperback reprint of it has a cover by Gahan Wilson (another strange person).

The book is not really a novel in the normal sense. Wolfe is obsessed by stories; every twist and turn in the book is designed to let him tell another story. The book is narrated by one Alden Dennis Weer, a man in his sixties who lives alone who has had a stroke and is incapable of leaving his house to get a doctor to treat him. So he travels back into his past to find a doctor who can give him some advice. Going back into the past he finds many other things than just a doctor, and he relives many of the experiences of his life. Because of the stroke he has lost control over time (not unlike Billy Pilgrim) and he moves back and forth with very little warning, sometimes changing times in the course of a single sentence. This means that many of the stories are continued across large gaps, or abruptly terminate. (A few times we miss the climax of a story only to hear the narrator mention the outcome offhandedly at a later time when talking about something else.) Some of the more extended stories deal with a birthday party where a boy dies accidentally, a ghost story about carnies, a peculiar book called THE LUSTY LAWYER and its author, and a ghost story that takes place in a dried orange juice manufacturing plant which Weer comes to own. There are also a few beautiful self-contained stories, about St. Brandon and Finn M'Cool, ben Yahya and the marid, and the young man of Ch'in and the china pillow.

This book is really extremely deep and I have read and re-read the book trying to understand it; I think I finally have an explanation for it. (And yes, there is one -- this is not one of those novels which is meant to be annoying by cheating you of an explanation.) Of course I may be awfully dense to have missed the point the first few times I read it; other people with better literary backgrounds may have caught the trick right away. I had to have some help: there is a story collected in GENE WOLFE'S BOOK OF DAYS entitled 'The Changeling' which is the key to the whole novel. 'The Changeling' is just a fantastically beautiful story and well worth reading if you can find it (it originally appeared one of Damon Knight's ORBIT anthologies). The trick is that the protagonist of this story makes an appearance in PEACE... I won't give any more away than that.

I would agree with Tim Bray that Wolfe's THE FIFTH HEAD OF CERBERUS is (at least) one of the best science fiction novels ever written in terms of both style and content; I am also ga-ga over Wolfe's four-volume fantasy novel THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN... I'm obviously a rabid Wolfe fan.

I know who comes after Number Five,