

The Changeling

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Jim Jordan — 16 Jul 1997, 00:18

"The Changeling" continues to be a mystery to me, but maybe Mantis or Alga knows something, or has read something, or someone else has caught some clues I've missed. Here goes:

In a rough way, the narrative is pegged to a Peter Pan scenario, just as *Free Live Free* is roughly pegged to *The Wizard of Oz.* But I don't see any other Peter Pan bits. (Peter Pan somehow relates to Peter Palmer/Palmieri.) But I've never read the original Peter Pan.

It looks a whole lot like the Italian family is a code for the Church. (Compare the Italian Restaurant in *There Are Doors*.) Mama is the Church, and the infallible Papa is Jesus or God, companion of wandering friars and also of the down-&-out; and because he/He is dead (has died) he can perceive things others can't (see below). The kids are Maria (Mary), Peter, and Paul, leaders of the Church in that order.

Now, a class picture was taken at Immaculate Conception School in the fourth grade. Why? I submit that this is because that's when the sacrament of Holy Confirmation is given to kids. And if I'm right, this may be a key. Suppose at that point, a True Spiritual Peter (Palmieri) is split off from the old Peter Palmer. Peter Palmer recalls another Peter Palmieri, but no one else does. He recalls fighting him. In the fight, Palmer was the cruel kid, and Palmieri was his good half.

Palmer attacks Maria and kills a frog; Palmieri defends both. When Palmer moves away, and goes bad in Korea, Palmieri remains behind, always a spiritual child who has never grown up. Let's put it another way: Peter Palmer was confirmed, but was spiritually stillborn. He did not accept the gift of the Spirit. His new "self" thus remained in the Church with Mama and Papa and Maria and Paul, but never grew up. Meanwhile, Peter Palmer went his own way. (Every Christian has two halves, the old Adamic "flesh" and the new person "in Christ.")

In the photo, there is only one Peter. Palmer remembers two, but he is spiritually split, and that is why.

Meanwhile, the town does not know of Palmer's adult life. For them, he has remained a child, adopted into the Palmieri home (the Church).

After a time of being an adult, and ruining his life, Palmer returns to Cassonsville. He reverts to being a child, and lives on the kids' island, like Peter Pan. His attempt to find fulfillment as an adult apart from the Church has been a failure, and he reverts to an isolated childhood that can have no fruition of any sort.

Now, suppose that Palmer accepted the Palmieri's offer, and moved into Maria's room (into Mary's house, into the Church), and became part of the society of the Palmieri (Italian; Church) homelife. In that way he might start over again, beginning at the point of his Confirmation, and become one with Peter Palmieri.

Now, some points:

1. Who is dead? Peter Palmer's father, from the beginning of the story. He was the last of Palmer's family. Is Papa dead? It would not seem so, though he is described in a way similar to Palmer's father. Rather, I suggest that just as Palmer has somehow been adopted into the Palmieri family, so his dead father is in that family also (since, being Italian, it is the Church), and his dead father's spirit may give insight to Papa.

2. The rock throwing incident. On the shore, as an adult, Palmer sees the island as near and large. Once on the island, Palmer becomes as a child again: the island becomes boy-sized, and farther from the shore. When Paul throws the rock, he sees it hit the near land; while Palmer and the other boys see it splash into the water, the shore being farther away. It would seem that both are "true."

3. Assuming all the above is valid -- and boy, I'm sure not sure at all -- maybe the permanent Peter Palmieri is the Papacy. Thus, he is unchanging, while others are born, grow, and die around him. He is with a group of boys (disciples?). On the island, he is one of three, surrounded by crosses (swords with crosspieces stuck in the ground): Peter, James, & John? And: Where is Cassonsville and the Kanakesee River? Are they near St. Louis, where the Cardinals play baseball? Notice the baseball game in the story.

Well, that's it, folks. I've done my job of spitting out as much as I can make of the story. Time for you to tear it down and do a better job.

I'm waiting.

Nutria