

RETREAD Changeling

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Jul 1997

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m.driussi — 16 Jul 1997, 15:40

Reply: Item #1856700 from URTH at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET#

I finally found some of my old notes and present them here with hardly a dusting off.

RETREAD NOTES ON "The Changeling":

First off, last time I read it I got to the encrypted name at the end and said to myself, "Ah, so his name is Peter Pan, with Pan being a link to both the Greek god Pan (benign) and Typhon-as-Pas (malignant) in the Wolfean scheme of things." But that was last time. [Also note: Pan as rubric for "idyllic pagan times," or, to add to Nutria's religious approach, "pagan childhood (of humankind before advent of Christ)"; which works nicely with Peter Pan by itself; and by tangent the appearance of god Pan to the childish animal people of THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS, or even pre-civilized Mowgli described as Pan-like in the Jungle Books.]

This time [1995?] I made note of elements: "Alienated Guy" (tracked in Joan Gordon's work; makes strong link between "The Changeling" and "The Adopted Father," among others), "Hero in Prison," "Korean War (1950-1953)," "Hero as Criminal," "Sealed Records," and "Hidden Manuscript (in cave)."

The initially nameless hero was in Korea (before the North invaded) when his father died in Buffalo. Hero came back for funeral, then returned to Korea, became P.O.W. Refusing repatriation in 1953, he went to China for a few years, then changed his mind again ("changeling") and returned to USA where he faced court martial in 1959 and prison time. (Question: as is often the case, "What year is the story set in?")

His memories of the town are up through fourth grade, the children he played with and things of that nature. His family left before he started fifth grade.

The story and his memory center on the Palmieri family: Mama, Papa, Maria, Paul, and Peter. There is some word magic going on here: Peter, Paul, and Mary are fused into "Peter Palmieri" (which is later truncated into "Pete Palmer"). (And their motel is out by the fair grounds--yikes! Can the dogboy be far off?) Papa Palmieri tells of their move to Cassonville from Chicago when Maria was a baby; the overnight arrival of strange little Peter, the ageless fairy child, locked at age eight.

(The scene wherein narrator recalls wrestling with a same-age Peter ["That must have been twenty years ago"] echoes both Weer wrestling with Bobby Black in PEACE and Apu-Punchau/Severian wrestling with Hildegren in TBOTNS. Likewise the skiff scene reminds me of Severian on the Lake of Birds in TBOTNS.)

Anyway, it comes down to narrator "Pete" ("re-Pete") "Palmer" (pilgrim returned from the holy

land) looking for his own face in the fourth grade class photo of 1944. (Click, click: so the "now" of the story is circa 1964. Hmm, and a fire in 1945 burned all the old newspapers . . . Pete Palmer is looking for newspaper mention of his birth in Cassonsville.) But there is Peter Palmieri's face instead of his. (Timeline check-in: a fourth grader would be nine years old; in order to be in the Army in Korea before the North invaded, a fellow would have to be around 19 in 1949; it is difficult to see how a nine year old could age ten years in five calendar years, unless, of course, it involves a trip to fairyland. In which case, that "fellow" would sure be a "traveler." <g>)

Is "Pete" in PEACE, somewhere? I don't know PEACE so well. That bit about the cave reminded me of the skull in the cave in PEACE. I found that section fast enough and backtracked--no, that is set on a mountain, not an island (" . . . of Doctor Death . . ."), but bingo! In the lead-up to the cave picnic Weer does mention "there is a long, stony island which used, at about the time I imagined myself visiting Dr. Van Ness, a [sic] harbor a hermit called Crazy Pete."

Heh-heh. That picnic takes place in 1915 (according to Schuyler; those who believe Dan French [a character in PEACE who provides one of the few year date anchors] might put it at 1925), forty-nine years before our narrator Pete becomes a hermit on the island.

TIMELINE

1931 -- Maria Palmieri born in Chicago; youngest US soldiers of Korean War born.
1932 -- Palmieris move to Cassonsville, where 8 year old Peter appears and warps reality around him.
1934 -- fourth grade class of 1944 born; narrator Pete born in Cassonsville?
1939 -- Peter is Maria's twin brother.
1940 -- Paul Palmieri born in Cassonsville.
1944 -- fourth grade photo (in spring); Pete wrestles with Peter Palmieri over fate of a frog (and Pete had hit Maria with a rock); Pete and family leave Cassonsville (change names?) (in summer).
1945 -- fire burned old newspapers.
1949 -- Pete's father dies in Buffalo.
1950-53 -- Korean War.
1953 -- POW exchange, Pete refuses and goes to China where he works in a textile mill.
1959 -- Pete back in US, faces court martial.
1964 -- out of US prison, Pete (changes name?) goes to Cassonsville.

So what happened in 1944? Pete and family (at least father--had mother died already?) leave town; Peter Palmieri replaces Pete in school photo (if not elsewhere); then there is a fire at the newspaper in the next year. That wrestling scene seems to have some reality warping, so I'm thinking it is the triggering event.

It is not clear when the name changing took place.

(OED gives "casson" as "a chest"; or as a variant of "casing"; but "cassons" as "? sugar in some form.")

[Finally: in a non-fantasy reading ala Le Carre, this story is like THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE; or an Orwellian tale about a guy with no ties who goes off to war, is captured and goes over to the enemy, eventually to return to his hometown to find that the enemy's culture has begun to take root there (shades of "Paul's Treehouse"). Since "erasures" of "un-persons" is a pretty well known fact of Stalinist Russia and Communism-as-she-is-practiced. Now IF Pete were visiting during McCarthy's Fame, that would be an interesting comment on commie-like political purges, but he's not.]

[Nostalgia mode: read in non-fantasy mode, this could be another beer hall meditation on "if we hadn'ta moved, my life wouldn't have gotten so messed up and I would've turned out just like those nice kids I played with as a child."]

=mantis=