

# PEACE: Fool's Gold?

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 09 Jul 2001

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Adam Stephanides — 09 Jul 2001, 16:19

I was rereading the "Gold" chapter of PEACE, and in the light of the recent discussion of RttW, a disturbing suspicion came to me. Briefly, I suspect that the conversations between Gold and Weer, or at least the second one, never happened, but were invented by Weer.

While this may seem a completely off-the-wall idea, there are a number of indicators pointing in this direction:

- 1) Is it really likely that a world-class forger would be living in Cassionsville, and then boast of his exploits to a man who has tried to expose him?
- 2) The unreliability of ostensibly factual accounts is a major theme of the chapter: there's the diary itself; the account of the encounter between Mrs. Doherty and Quantrill's gang (209, Harper hc), which seems to be an objective third-person account, but turns out to be either an excerpt from the diary or, more likely, Weer's improvisation on the passages read to him by Lois; Blaine's memories, which contradict Weer's; and Gold's claim that many old books are actually forgeries (226).
- 3) Gold refers to himself as "an artist, shaping the past instead of the future," (231) which could apply equally well to Weer.
- 4) The main plot of the chapter is a search for gold which turns out not to exist.
- 5) Gold lives on Mulberry St. If you've read your Dr. Seuss, you'll remember that the narrator of AND TO THINK THAT I SAW IT ON MULBERRY STREET elaborated progressively more fantastic accounts of what he'd seen on that street.

So I suspect that the second conversation between Gold and Weer, and possibly the first one as well, was invented by Weer as an apologia for his own methodology in writing the manuscript of PEACE (which implies that he's lied elsewhere as well).

For that matter, the treasure hunt plot is itself implausible when you think about it, not to say melodramatic: Lois pulls a gun on Weer, when nothing in her earlier behavior suggests she is likely to do this. Weer spots the gun ("in a spot of moonlight" (218), takes it from her, and sleeps with it under his pillow, presumably in case she should return at night to take vengeance. When Sherry asks him about the gun, he tells her only that he's had it for a couple of weeks and will get rid of it tomorrow, and this non-explanation seems to satisfy her. Moreover, the whole chapter draws heavily on the hardboiled detective genre, as I wrote earlier. To be sure, Smart's story in "The Alchemist" is equally melodramatic and implausible, and dependent upon literary/cinematic models, but that is presented as a story, while the treasure hunt is presented as something that happened to Weer (the Doris story is also told by someone else, and there is a hint that it's fictional).

Make no mistake: I'm a believer in Dan's principle that a narrator should be assumed to be reliable unless there's good reason to believe otherwise. But in this case I think there are too many clues pointing in the opposite direction.

--Adam

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 09 Jul 2001, 21:18 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam wrote:

I was rereading the "Gold" chapter of PEACE, and in the light of the recent discussion of RttW, a disturbing suspicion came to me. Briefly, I suspect that the conversations between Gold and Weer, or at least the second one, never happened, but were invented by Weer.

I would've sworn we kicked this one around, alot! But maybe it was just in private email with Roy.

My main question would be: why is Weer fabricating? What is the "this really happened" that Weer is making more comfortable by fictionalizing? Or what is the necessary thing that didn't happen in real life that should have happened (i.e., if this is wish fulfillment, then what specifically is the wish and how does it heal the wisher)?

For examples: it might be that the main point is to have Gold make his "you are an unquiet spirit" speech. The gold hunt has so much of the Olivia spirit in it, it might be a continuation of her story . . . it certainly allows Weer to have incest-free relations with a woman rather like Olivia!

While this may seem a completely off-the-wall idea, there are a number of indicators pointing in this direction:

1) Is it really likely that a world-class forger would be living in Cassionsville, and then boast of his exploits to a man who has tried to expose him?

Well, except that both are conventions, too! And Gold probably thinks he has blackmail material on Weer.

2) The unreliability of ostensibly factual accounts is a major theme of the chapter: there's the diary itself; the account of the encounter between Mrs. Doherty and Quantrill's gang (209, Harper hc), which seems to be an objective third-person account, but turns out to be either an excerpt from the diary or, more likely, Weer's improvisation on the passages read to him by Lois; Blaine's memories, which contradict Weer's; and Gold's claim that many old books are actually forgeries (226).

Yes, but when Wolfe starts to insist =this= much, I start to wonder if somehow, some magical way, more is true than we would normally believe.

So I suspect that the second conversation between Gold and Weer, and possibly the first one as well, was invented by Weer as an apologia for his own methodology in writing the manuscript of PEACE (which implies that he's lied elsewhere as well).

For that matter, the treasure hunt plot is itself implausible when you think about it, not to say melodramatic: Lois pulls a gun on Weer, when nothing in her earlier behavior suggests she is likely to do this.

Weer seems surprised, too. Is that because it is not something that Olivia would do, and he has been seeing her through "Olive tinted glasses"?

Weer spots the gun

("in a spot of moonlight" (218), takes it from her, and sleeps with it under his pillow, presumably in case she should return at night to take vengeance.

Take vengeance for what? <g> And if that unspoken crime, whatever it was, didn't happen in the real world, then what is being covered by this action?

That is to say: we approach the episode as a dream, a dream in which the dreamer (Weer) is "fixing" things that happened in the real world to better suit his own desires. The section is a Treasure Hunt: Lois is looking for gold (following a counterfeit map), Weer is looking for love (following a counterfeit Olivia; bedding a counterfeit Lolita).

When Sherry asks him about the gun, he tells her only that he's had it for a couple of weeks and will get rid of it tomorrow, and this non-explanation seems to satisfy her. Moreover, the whole chapter draws heavily on the hardboiled detective genre, as I wrote earlier. To be sure, Smart's story in "The Alchemist" is equally melodramatic and implausible, and dependent upon literary/cinematic models, but that is presented as a story, while the treasure hunt is presented as something that happened to Weer (the Doris story is also told by someone else, and there is a hint that it's fictional).

Right, and the Doris story is the biggest head-scratcher of the novel, since it is very difficult to see how it connects in any way, shape, or form, to Weer's life and/or the lie of Weer's life.

Make no mistake: I'm a believer in Dan'l's principle that a narrator should be assumed to be reliable unless there's good reason to believe otherwise. But in this case I think there are too many clues pointing in the opposite direction.

Well yes, but it seems to me that your next stage, if you can accept that it is a lie, is to start looking for motive beyond the simple "learning that he is dead" (or not: maybe that really is the answer to all questions about PEACE).

Here's another quick one: FEAR and LOVE. It may be that the whole point of the cold house prank is to show how Weer is in fear of the other person (a vengeful ghost) who seems to be inside the empty house with him in the frametale. In the final page, in one reading at least, the other person is revealed to be Olivia, the loved one (whose death was so crushing to him). (Thus: Weer is dead; yet death is an illusion.)

In fact, wait a minute: it is "simple," but it is obviously very central, very important, both that Weer is dead and is resisting this knowledge (for a number of reasons--because it is a difficult thing to accept under any condition <g>, and it doesn't seem to be whatever it was he was expecting, or as we were saying before, "If this is =dead=, then what is death?").

So the meta-answer is something like "Weer is getting used to being dead and the fact that death, as he envisioned it throughout his life, does not really exist, because in this state he finds he does not have a cessation of being, only a partial freedom from physical existence."

The next meta-answer, also simple but I think also important, is something like "Weer spent perhaps too much of his life reading books rather than living life directly, and as a result his afterlife experience is a journey like that of Don Quixote/Walter Mitty/Gumby; as he experiences his own AMERICAN BOOK OF THE DEAD he cobbles together a text from the various texts he read and loved throughout his life, texts which, ultimately, might have little or no relation to "real" history, but intimate relation to the essential dream history (his psyche, his spirit, his whatchamacallit); his is an apology (or a working out, or a therapy, or a regurgitation) for having read too much."

=mantis=

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