

PEACE: Morryster's _Marvells of Science_

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 09 Jul 2001

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Adam Stephanides — 09 Jul 2001, 20:37

I was looking over the section where this book appears (211-12, Harper hc) and I have an observation and a question.

First, the observation: the book is introduced with the sentences "There were several books on his table, and I picked one up. It was Morryster's _Marvells of Science_..." (211) Now, this way of phrasing it strongly suggests that Weer is already familiar with the author and title; otherwise, he would say something like "It was entitled _Marvells of Science_," by a man named Morryster. However, the book does not exist: it was invented by Ambrose Bierce in _The Devil's Dictionary_, and the author and title were borrowed by Lovecraft. The copy Weer picks up is one of Gold's forgeries (and since he finds it in Gold's office, we can dismiss the possibility that _Peace_ takes place in a universe in which _Marvells of Science_ does exist.)

I can think of three explanations:

- 1) Weer has encountered the title in Bierce or Lovecraft, and mistakenly believes it to be real.
- 2) Weer has encountered the title in Bierce or Lovecraft and knows it to be spurious; he uses it to tip off the knowledgeable reader early that he knows Gold is a forger.
- 3) The most interesting, if the most farfetched: even before being circulated, Gold's forgery has insinuated itself into "reality," as Gold claims his Necronomicon has done. (Or, if the hypothesis in my earlier post is correct, Weer wishes us to believe this has happened.)

And of course, there's always

- 4) It doesn't mean anything; Wolfe gave Weer that turn of phrase without intending anything by it. (I hope this isn't the answer.)

Next, my question: where does the stuff on Heaven and Hell that Weer ostensibly reads in _Marvells of Science_ come from? It doesn't sound like anything from either of the book's sources (and afaik, Lovecraft only mentions the title without describing the contents). And it doesn't sound like one of Wolfe's own inventions to me. It sounds like the sort of thing that might come from Swedenborg, though I'm no expert, and we know that Swedenborg was at least indirectly an influence on _Peace_. Can anybody verify or refute this?

(Incidentally, has anybody ever looked into the writings of 19th and early 20th century spiritualists as possible sources for _Peace_? I once did a little investigation in this line, going so far as to read the _Gates Ajar_ trilogy. I found a few suggestive details, but nothing definite enough to be worth posting.)

--Adam