

Thoughts on the ending of Peace

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 07 Sep 2001

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StoneOx17 — 07 Sep 2001, 10:43

Hi,

I've been lurking for a while, and I think it's time I contributed something. I have a theory about the ending of Peace that I'll be describing later in this post, but before I get to it, I want to make a few related observations which should be less controversial.

First, Olivia is convinced that the egg is one of a pair, where hers shows the Resurrection, and the missing one shows the Ascension (page 76, Orb edition).

This can be taken metaphorically, reflecting Weer's situation in the book: he has achieved some sort of resurrection as a ghost, but has failed to attain ascension.

Second (page 201) when Weer goes with Lois Arbuthnot to pick up Kate Boyne's diary, he notices a memoir of a local missionary named Murchinson (possibly the same one who brought back the egg) describing his mission to Tartary. It's ironic that the library chooses to buy the fake diary, while ignoring the genuine memoirs. As one might expect from Wolfe, the true artifact is spiritual, while the false one, containing clues to buried treasure, is worldly.

Now, we get to the first piece of key supporting evidence for my theory. On pages 29 and 30, Weer writes "It is too late for it now, but it sometimes seems to me that we ought to have kept records, by the new generations, of our remoteness from events of high significance. When the last man to have seen some occurrence or personality of importance died; and then when the last person who know him died; and so on. But first we would have the first man describe this event, this thing that he had seen, and when each of them was gone we would read the description publicly to see if it still meant anything to us - and if it did not, the series, the chain of linked lives, would be at an end."

I think this describes the rules governing ghosts - I think Sherry Gold was the last person remaining alive who knew Weer; and when she dies, Weer has his (IMO, posthumous) stroke. Later in the book, Weer gets progressively sicker and sicker, as he becomes more and more generations removed from the living. Finally, we reach Dan French's story of the geese, which parallels Weer's own situation, as illustrated below.

One of the sidhe turns his children into a flock of geese, so that they might live forever; though the individual geese might die, the flock would remain. However, he's not completely successful:

"In this way, in time, the flock ... dwindled until at last only a single goose remained."

Only one person alive remembers Weer.

"And thinking these thoughts, she [the goose] flew over Ireland from Inishtrahull to

Ballinskelligs Bay, and from Galway Bay to Dun Laoghaire, seeking for one having the second sight who might explain the thing to her, but all such were long since gone from Ireland."

Weer tries to keep his appointment with Dr. Van Ness, but the yellow reminder is nailed to his desk.

"At last she came to the cottage of a hermit, and as he was the best she could find, she alighted there and put her question to him."

Weer can find only Dan French, who tells him the story of the geese. But both the hermit and Dan give the best advice possible:

"'Little there is I can do for you,' the hermit said. 'Why did you suppose your father, who could not save himself, could save you? The time of the sidhe is long past, and the time of geese is passing. And in time, men, too, will pass, as every man who lives long learns in his own body. But Jesus Christ saves all.'"

And this should be Weer's lesson ... that Jesus Christ saves all. But does he learn it? Besides the hope of salvation through Jesus, there's another, secular, thread, that runs through the book: the false hope of the Chinese pillow. Weer speculates that he has passed out as a child beside his chemistry set. He asks whether, if he went up and slept again in his old childhood room, the old days would come back, and whether, if Hannah had slept at Sugar Creek Farm, "Would Sugar Creek have flowed again? Olivia tells the story of the Chinese philosopher's headrest. Again, Weer has a decision between a worldly choice, the false hope of reliving his past, and a spiritual choice, of ascension through Jesus Christ (although it's not clear he realizes that there is a decision). And again, it appears that he makes the wrong choice:

"It is time, I think, that I see the enchanted headrest of the Chinese philosopher looming behind me, and I wait its coming. My aunt's voice on the intercom says, 'Den, darling, are you awake in there?'"

And these words are, from Den's childhood, the signal for him to put out the light and go to sleep, this time, it seems, forever.

John 5:25 "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen will live."

Peter Shor

Michael Straight — 10 Sep 2001, 09:30 · follows StoneOx17

On Fri, 7 Sep 2001 StoneOx17 at aol.com wrote:
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I don't have anything to add. I just thought this was an interesting interpretation. It's jarring to think of the Chinese Pillow as a bad thing since the second chance it offers is presented as a good thing in the original story. But the way you put it makes a lot of sense.

One hopes that, even if Weer is seduced by the opportunity to re-live all his memories yet again (who knows how many times he's done it already before the book opens?), he might eventually be able to break out of the cycle.

-Rostrum