

Sherry Gold's death

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 29 May 2002

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StoneOx17 — 29 May 2002, 10:56

In response to my post about Mr. Tilly's death, mantis comments

About Sherry Gold, Stone Ox wrote:

I would counter that the most mysterious thing about Doris's death is why she is in the book in the first place, and that Sherry's death occurred long after Weer's.

No, my understanding is that Sherry died and then Weer had a stroke the day after. This stroke may or may not have been fatal.

I'm not convinced. I see Sherry's death as being one instance of the "everybody is dead" theme, and Weer's stroke as being the first of his ailments in the afterlife (although it may be a reflection of a real stroke that killed him) as in "... I am very ill. Sicker, I think, than I have ever been before--sicker, even, than I was this winter, before Eleanor Bold's tree fell." In fact, I think Weer had his posthumous stroke _because_ Sherry Gold died, and that she was the last person alive who remembered him well.

The key is the following passage (p. 29 of the Orb edition)

"Now ... I feel that she [Weer's mother] lived on and on through whole ages of the world, as though she might have lived on forever. (As perhaps elsewhere she has.) It is too late for it now, but it 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 knew him died, and so on. But first, we would have the first man describe this event, this thing 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."

This view ties in very well with my interpretation of the story of the geese of Lough Conn (is Lough Conn really the Kanakessee?) and the ending of Peace, where, when the last person to have heard of Weer dies, Weer's ghost reaches the end of his time and, not realizing that all he has to do to reach Heaven is repent of his sins and ask Jesus for admission, goes back in time to relive his afterlife. The geese of Lough Conn are the memories of Weer held by the living, and the hermit who baptizes the goose is Dan French, who Weer finds instead of the doctors he is looking, for, but who nevertheless gives him the best advice possible.

I set forth this interpretation in more detail in my post of September 7, 2001, which, either because of its timing or its content, seems to have been largely ignored. And thanks to Michael Straight for his suggestion, obvious once it's been made, that the Chinese philosopher's headrest at the end means that Weer will be reliving his afterlife (and not necessarily for the first time).

Stone Ox

Michael Andre-Driussi — 29 May 2002, 21:41 · follows StoneOx17

Stone Ox wrote

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Oh, okay. Just be sure to mention your variant reading upfront so we can avoid unnecessary tail-chasing.

So Sherry's death triggers Weer's wandering? No, just a posthumous stroke, a turning over in the grave--the wandering is still triggered by the fall of the elm (hundreds of years after Sherry's death)?

If =this= is true, then any post-stroke memories (in the factory, limping; the illness and death of the secretary; the letter from Peacock to Smart on the desktop [?]) are all of the more spacey "corridors of time" category, like the visits to Dr. Black (did it ever really happen?) and Dr. Van Ness (compilation of many visits boiled down, with bad splices), rather than the "realistic" category of nearly everything else.

Still, that would be pretty funny: "Doctor, I've had a stroke!" "What, and after you've already died?" (This humor remains whether the stroke was posthumous or not.)

Stone Ox also wrote

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I don't know if you have addressed this or not, so I'll just go ahead: One problem with the "recurring loop" reading of PEACE is that there are clear ways to signal such a thing: FINNEGANS WAKE (and in genre, DHALGREN) uses a split sentence, the opening fragment then lining up perfectly with the ending fragment many hundreds of pages later. The text is a circle, no question about it.

The framing structure of PEACE does not really allow such a thing: it is quite linear. A. D. Weer starts writing in a notebook (the beginning) and then he stops writing (the end). It would not have been too hard at all for an ending fragment to match up to a beginning fragment, but it did not happen. Nor would it have been difficult if Weer had a notion to express himself in non-writing, through song or sculpture, for example (change of media, but the same story), but that did not happen, either.

I am not denying that there is a strong sense of recurrence in PEACE, I'm just pointing out a potential problem in taking such a recurrence in a literal way as meaning that Weer will do the same thing again, without writing it down.

Speaking of which, I'm hoping I can get Gene Wolfe to go to the Winchester House in San Jose, or tag along if he is already going!

Oo, even better: get some friends to go dressed up as characters from PEACE. Have Sherry Gold wandering around inside Winchester House, bobby socks and all.

=mantis=

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StoneOx17 — 30 May 2002, 11:40 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

In reply to my statement that I thought Sherry died after Weer,

mantis wrote

Stone Ox wrote

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The wandering is still triggered by the fall of the elm ... showing real-life posthumous events can have an effect on Weer's spirit. Why not Sherry's death as well?

If =this= is true, then any post-stroke memories (in the factory, limping; the illness and death of the secretary; the letter from Peacock to Smart on the desktop [?]) are all of the more spacey "corridors of time" category, like the visits to Dr. Black (did it ever really happen?) and Dr. Van Ness (compilation of many visits boiled down, with bad splices), rather than the "realistic" category of nearly everything else.

No, I'd say rather that the stroke is filtering back into his recollections and coloring them. You have to admit =something= funny is going on with the stroke. In real life, when Weer slept with Sherry, he could hardly have apologized to her for a stroke he had after she died.

I wrote

And thanks to Michael Straight for his suggestion, obvious once it's been made, that the Chinese philosopher's headrest at the end means that Weer will be reliving his afterlife (and not necessarily for the first time).

mantis replied

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I have to admit I'm not so sure about the circularity. You could also take the hope of resurrection from the Chinese philosopher's pillow as a warning against belief in reincarnation, and not as a sign that Weer's ghost will relive his afterlife. Given how little I know about Purgatory, I can't even say which interpretation is more in line with Catholic thought.

Speaking of which, I'm hoping I can get Gene Wolfe to go to the Winchester House in San Jose, or tag along if he is already going!

Oo, even better: get some friends to go dressed up as characters from PEACE. Have Sherry Gold wandering around inside Winchester House, bobby socks and all.

Good luck ... that sounds like great fun!

Stone Ox

Andy Robertson — 30 May 2002, 11:54 · follows StoneOx17

----- Original Message -----

Speaking of which, I'm hoping I can get Gene Wolfe to go to the Winchester House in San Jose, or tag along if he is already going!

Oo, even better: get some friends to go dressed up as characters from PEACE. Have Sherry Gold wandering around inside Winchester House, bobby socks and all.

Ohhhhhh to be there!!!!!!

hartshorn