

Doris

The Urth list — 7 messages, 5 voices, 01 Aug 2002

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Robert Borski — 01 Aug 2002, 19:54

Blattid having objected to my certitude about the Weer-Gold parentage of Doris:

Cool ... One thing, though ... Robert, you refer to Doris as "almost certainly" the daughter of Den Weer and Sherry Gold. Perhaps I've missed (or simply forgotten) something in the past coinscriptions on PEACE, but ... how does this, which seems to-me-here-now highly conjectural, reach the point of almost certainty?

In my original draft of "The Devil His Due" I included a lot of footnotes, but later dropped them on subsequent rewrites. It was also here that I attempted to elaborate why I thought the evidence was strong that Doris-the-carnie was Den Weer's daughter by Sherry Gold. Let me now attempt to reprise those notes for you.

I believe the best evidence that Doris is Den's daughter can be found in the letter written to Weer by Charlie Turner, *canis carnialis*.

For starters, there's Charlie's rather upfront reason for writing, which he states immediately after his odd reading predilections (Dickens, Jane Austen, Stendhal, Proust, but no Albert Payson Terhune): "The reason I am writing to you is because of some of the people we talked about that night when you had me to dinner." Though we do not know it yet, he is specifically writing to tell Weer that Doris--a homeless girl whose tale roughly reprises that of Cinderella--has died. Moreover, as we will also soon learn, Den seems to have expressed some early interest in Doris during his original get-together with Charlie. Writes the dog-boy: "You remember that when I was at your place we talked about Doris and had fun thinking about what could happen to her that could be good." But whysoever would Den be interested at all in the life of this poor girl or imagining how it could be better? This seems totally alien to the Den Weer we come to know in PEACE; if on the other hand Doris is his daughter, that would go a long way to explain his interest.

Secondarily, there is the mysterious visitation of an unidentified woman when Mrs. Mason's little tit-and-raree show hits Gladewater, Texas. Remarks Charlie: "A lady came looking for Doris there--a woman about fifty, maybe, dressed nice the way country people dress." Doris will later return "dressed nice in new clothes from Sears, some of them with their labels still on." Ethel Fishman, the snake charmer, talks to Doris and learns that her benefactress is "an old girl friend of Mr. M.'s [supposedly her father], and when he died--this is what the lady told Doris, but I don't know any reason not to think it's true--he wrote her and said how he was turning his daughter over to Mrs. M., and asked the woman to check up on her if the show ever got close to Kilgore, which was where she lived."

I would now like to suggest to you that this mysterious woman is none other than Margaret Lorn Price of the Murchison clan. You may see this as literally or typologically so, depending on your druthers--the same way Mr. Tilly may or may not be Julius T. Smart. But for me it works either way.

Margie, an old girlfriend, would now be about fifty, and as a Christian woman might be a little more forgiving of Den's sexual escapades than others. Plus Doris might represent for her the child she and Den never had.

Just as Em Lorn, her mother, wished to sell the Chinese egg so she could buy a sewing machine and make clothes for the poor, Margie clothes poor tatterdemalion Doris.

Margie is a farm girl (Den will later describe the Murchisons--Margie's relatives on her mother's side--as "Country people"), and when Den as a boy visits the Lorn farm, he contrasts their clothes with those of his aunt "in her beautiful clothes."

At fifty, Margie's children by her husband Mr. Price may well be grown and gone from the nest. It seems likely that as an only child she would have inherited her parents' farm (if they kept it, that is, and didn't return to missionary work), but keep in mind Louis Gold's observation about how "Country families don't stay in the country these days," as well as the old potato farmer's remarks about the demise of the family farm. Is it possible that in her later years Margie Lorn (or her typological equivalent) moved on to do charitable work of her own, heading down "close to Kilgore?"

But why of all places here?

Well, considering that Texas is Gene Wolfe's native state (and I'm surprised Lone Star Roy didn't pick up on this), surely he's aware that just down the road from Kilgore (in fact they share the same latitude, being separated by only 1° of longitude) is a small town with the serendipitous name of Murchison.

Could it be here--home in a sense--that Den's long lost love at last finds peace?

Robert Borski

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 01 Aug 2002, 21:33 · follows Robert Borski

Blattid having objected to my certitude about the Weer-Gold parentage of Doris:

Whoa. I didn't object, I questioned, and was very careful to qualify my statement as "to-me-here-now":

Perhaps I've missed (or simply forgotten) something in the past coinscriptions on PEACE, but ... how does this, which seems to-me-here-now highly conjectural, reach the point of almost certainty?

This isn't saying "you shouldn't be so certain" -- it's asking "how did you become so certain?"

Which you've explained. It still seems like a lot of conjecture to-me-here-now, but I'll keep it in mind nexttime I reread PEACE, because if it's true it might explain a great deal. What you've done (for me) is to make this conjecture plausible, but I'll be looking for something concrete, some kind of, well, smoking gun.

At any rate, it's certainly a well-woven web. Me 'at's off.

overture, hit the lights

Roy C. Lackey — 02 Aug 2002, 16:02 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Robert wrote:

In my original draft of "The Devil His Due" I included a lot of footnotes, but later dropped them on subsequent rewrites. It was also here that I attempted to elaborate why I thought the evidence was strong that Doris-the-carnie was Den Weer's daughter by Sherry Gold.

I know I've refuted this idea before, but maybe it was just to mantis.

Den was five years old when the fake deerskin was painted, nine during the Year of the Egg Hunt. He met both Lois and Sherry during the Gold Hunt year. Sherry was sixteen when he met her. He was rich at fifty, poor at forty. The years these events took place in can be disputed, but not the core "facts".

Lois stated that the fake deerskin treaty had been painted "about" forty years before she met Weer, and he concurred. That makes him about forty-five at the time of the Gold Hunt, when Sherry was sixteen. Den, while president, started to tell the Tilly tale to Bill Batton "thirty-five or forty years" after the YEH, which would make him age 44-49. Taken together, those two statements make it clear that Den became president when aged 45-49.

Weer's dialogue with Batton, therefore, took place early in his presidency. The visits of Bill Batton, Charlie Turner, and Eleanor Bold Porter all happened on the same day. The first line of Charlie's letter to Weer indicates that it was written as a "thank you" for his recent visit with Weer, at which time they discussed Doris over dinner. Internal evidence indicates that the events described in the letter took place not too long after Charlie's visit, including the death of Doris. Doris was a minor, but past the age of puberty. I would guess her age to be about 15-16.

If Weer met the 3 visitors mentioned above within a few years of meeting Sherry, then any hypothetical child he might have fathered on her couldn't be much more than four years old. Doris cannot possibly be the child of Weer and Sherry.

If Weer fathered Doris, then he would have to have done so when he was in his mid thirties, a decade of his life we know nothing about. And Doris died while Weer was president, yet he was still poor at forty. So, if Weer fathered Doris, Sherry can't be the mother.

-Roy

Adam Stephanides — 02 Aug 2002, 19:01 · follows Roy C. Lackey

on 8/1/02 2:54 PM, Robert Borski at rborski at charter.net wrote:

Blattid says that your explanation makes the Doris-is-Weer's-daughter theory plausible to him, but it doesn't to me. Your major evidence is Weer's interest in Doris.

Writes the dog-boy: "You remember that when I was at your place we talked about Doris and had fun thinking about what could happen to her that could be good." But whysoever would Den be interested at all in the life of this poor girl or imagining how it could be better? This seems totally alien to the Den Weer we come to know in PEACE; if on the other hand Doris is his daughter, that would go a long way to explain his interest.

On the contrary, it would make his behavior incomprehensible. According to your theory, he learned, at dinner with Charlie, that his daughter was being horribly abused, and did nothing except make up fairy-tale endings for her; and this was apparently "fun." He can't have shown much concern for Doris, in any case, or Charlie wouldn't have broken the news of Doris's death

the way he does; for one thing, Charlie gives no indication of thinking that Weer might be sad over her death. And indeed, Weer shows no sign of being sad over the "news." (Of course, since this is something he's reconstructing in his mind, he already knows Doris is dead, but still there should be some sign of emotion.) If Doris really was Weer's daughter, then Weer is incredibly cold-hearted, and his interest in Doris is more likely to stem from sadism than concern, something which doesn't fit how Weer is portrayed.

One could argue that Weer pretended unconcern before Charlie to hide the fact that Doris was his daughter, and secretly arranged for the woman from Kilgore to help her. But this isn't plausible, either. Why channel help through the woman from Kilgore, who might never find Doris, and not through Charlie who sees her every day? He wouldn't have to tell him she was his daughter. And after what Charlie told him at dinner, buying new clothes for Doris is a pathetically inadequate gesture. If Weer were really concerned, he could and would have done much more.

(Of course, if Weer really is the devil, then that would explain everything; but I don't believe that either.)

As for the assertion that the mysterious woman who buys Doris clothes is "literally or typologically" Margaret Lorn Price, the only shred of "evidence" for her being literally Margaret is her living near a town with the same name as Margaret's great-grandmother. And her being "typologically" Margaret would do nothing to show that Doris was Weer's daughter.

Why, then, does Weer take an interest in Doris? I suggest that Doris doesn't exist. Charlie made up her sad tale to entertain Weer (he seems to have ambitions of being a writer; at least he compares himself to Dickens). Doris is too put-upon, and her story parallels Cinderella's too closely, to be believable.

--Adam

Michael Andre-Driussi — 02 Aug 2002, 19:20 · follows Adam Stephanides

Roy wrote against the notion of Doris-as-daughter-of-Sherry-Gold.

So Roy, remind me: is it still possible that Doris is Sherry Gold herself? Whoops, no -- I guess not, since you are taking the Doris story as being both real and in real time.

In addition there is the complicated linkage of Sherry's death and Weer's stroke. If Doris = Sherry, then the stroke would have been before Weer heard the story about Doris's death from Charlie Turner, and this seems quite early on in Den's presidency (whereas evidence of the stroke's aftermath suggests it was later in the presidency).

Okay, new approach: Doris attracts Weer because he sees in her the same thing he saw in Lois, i.e., Olivia. She is not his daughter, she is not related to him by blood, it is that Wolfe "reincarnation" buzz thing.

If this holds up, we might expect Doris's story to match up with the Olivia/Lois pattern (aside from just the fairy tale aspects of both Olivia's "Suitors" and Doris's "Cinder-ella"). How do the years hold up? Well, Olivia died after Lois was born, right? (25 years ago, and we think Lois is 35?) So if we can accept the "Olivia" in Lois, we can go along with the same in Doris.

This might be something, because it would mean that Weer loses Olivia, chases after Lois-as-Olivia, sees the photo of Doris-as-Olivia, and then, in the end of the book, finally hears Olivia's voice again (bringing closure to this thread).

=mantis=

Robert Borski — 03 Aug 2002, 00:34 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Deep in the heart of Texas, with his calendar and stopwatch in hand, Roy L. has written:

The visits of Bill Batton, Charlie Turner, and Eleanor Bold Porter all happened on the same day.

I don't agree with this. They may seem to take place on the same day, but also on that same day we see Den's secretary, Miss Birkhead, being healthy enough to report to work at one stage, sick enough a short time later so she has to leave and be replaced by Miss Hadow (neither secretary apparently communicating this to the man they work for), then still later on the same day a notice is posted that Helen Birkhead Tyler has died and we learn that she is neither single nor childless, and moreover that she has been A. D. Weer's "long-time secretary." According to information presented in the Peace Indexicon, however, Miss Birkhead was originally Julius Smart's secretary, and old uncle Julius has only recently died, leaving the factory to his nephew--yet Miss Birkhead is Den's "long-time" secretary? I find it much more likely to assume that he inherited her with the president position rather than think Julius Smart shuffled her off to him much earlier. (Do we know at what previous stage in his career Den was assigned to a position where he would even need a secretary?) Others have offered their interpretations of the Birkhead anomaly, but I believe it represents a conflation of events over years, seen over the trajectory of Miss Birkhead's life: single at one stage, married and twice bearing children (surely, she would have required maternity leave), and finally dying. As others have noticed, this merging of different temporal strata takes place throughout PEACE (another good example of this is when Den first meets Sherry Gold and asks to be excused for not rising because he suffers from stroke-induced partial paralysis--yet the cerebrovascular event in question is some 15 years or so in the future) and probably represents the workings of a disordered mind. Therefore attempting to wrest a tried-and-true chronology from such flawed data is not only extremely precarious in my opinion, but subject to extreme individual interpretation.

If Charlie Turner's visit and letter reception take place close to the day on which long-time secretary Helen Birkhead Tyler actually dies, this might well be later in A. D. Weer's presidency--perhaps even as late as a decade and a half after he couples with Sherry Gold, which would then allow him to have a teenage daughter.

Robert Borski

Roy C. Lackey — 03 Aug 2002, 08:46 · follows Robert Borski

mantis wrote:

This might be something, because it would mean that Weer loses Olivia, chases after Lois-as-Olivia, sees the photo of Doris-as-Olivia, and then, in the end of the book, finally hears Olivia's voice again (bringing closure to this thread).

Not to nit-pick, and I know we covered this before, but there was no photo of Doris. As I read it, the two sepia photos depict a total of three people. One is the girlie picture of Candy, alone, that Charlie mentioned in the letter. She is the "tramp" Miss Hadow refers to, who looks like Carole Lombard and has an old-fashioned hairdo. The other photo is of two men; one of them very tall (who is probably Tom Lavine), and a much shorter man (possibly J. T. Smart).

Robert B. quoted me and wrote:

The visits of Bill Batton, Charlie Turner, and Eleanor Bold Porter all

happened on the same day.

I don't agree with this. They may seem to take place on the same day, but also on that same day we see Den's secretary, Miss Birkhead, being healthy enough to report to work at one stage, sick enough a short time later so she has to leave and be replaced by Miss Hadow (neither secretary apparently communicating this to the man they work for), then still later on the same day a notice is posted that Helen Birkhead Tyler has died

The day of the three visitors and the day Miss Birkhead died are two different days at least ten years apart. As I noted before, the visit by Bill Batton occurred early in Weer's presidency. Various comments he made indicate that it was his first visit to the plant: "Nice office you have here." (135); "'That's your founder, isn't it?' Batton was looking at the picture above the bar at one side of the room. 'Formulated the original product and thought up the name? Good Brand name, by the way.'" (136); "'Call me Bill. You know I'd expected I'd be drinking your juice when I was at your plant.'" (168).

Miss Birkhead brought in coffee for both Weer and Batton, at which point she also informed Weer that the hairy man was waiting to see him (168). It is Batton who ties the other two visitors to them all being present in Weer's office on that particular day. "Bill Batton has been scratching his head, crossing and uncrossing his legs as he sits on the red leather couch beside the bar in my office. 'What was that all about?' 'Mrs. Porter? You heard her--she wants to plant a tree on my grave when I'm gone.' [. . .] 'And you're going to have dinner with the hairy man?'" (193). Weer is close to fifty years old at this time. (Margaret is also about fifty, as you pointed out, and she and Weer are the same age.)

Miss Birkhead died on the same day that Dan French took the reporter on a tour of the plant, the same day he told Weer the Sidhe story (243). Weer was over sixty years old on that day, as he told Dan French: "'Haven't you ever noticed how many corporate presidents are in their sixties and seventies?' He nodded. 'Those are men who couldn't possibly continue to work at any job requiring concentration or endurance. I should know--I'm one of them myself.'" (233) (Page numbers are for the Berkley paperback.)

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Weer's "long-time secretary." According to information presented in the
Peace Indexicon, however, Miss Birkhead was originally Julius Smart's
secretary,

Correct. She had been Weer's secretary from the time he took over the plant to the day she died, something in excess of ten years.

In my reading, it just isn't possible for Doris to be the child of Weer and Sherry; neither, to answer mantis's question, do I think Sherry = Doris. I'm inclined to agree with Adam that Doris doesn't exist.

-Roy