

the dog-boy of Carnies Past

The Urth list — 13 messages, 5 voices, 03 Aug 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3394>

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Aug 2002, 17:45

Roy quoted me and 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).

(Oh good, my message got through after all!)

Ugh, right -- no photo of Doris, just one of Candy (graphic description of another one of Candy), and the one with the two guys. Where Candy is supposedly the half-sister to Doris. So Weer's interest in Doris is not from his actually seeing Doris.

In dealing with the Three Visitors of President Weer, is the "A Christmas Carol" model of past, present, and future ghosts still okay? (Note the Charles Dickens link to Charlie Turner's letter, too.) Where Bill Batton is the ghost of the Present (factory, maybe "freak-factory"), Charlie Turner is the ghost of the Past (carny), and Mrs. Porter is the ghost of the Future (grave)?

Dimly I recall going over all this, but still I persist in wondering. Odd that the sepia picture has Smart on it . . . putting aside the "novelty photo" notion that the sepia is artificial, Smart is dead at the point Weer sees the picture, so it has emphasis on the Past. (It also has a weird connotation of afterlife as carny . . . would that be heaven or hell?) Assuming the sepia is natural, the photo was taken years ago when Smart was connected with the carnies . . . but the photo might suggest a stronger bond than merely the secret "freak-maker" pharmacist -- he seems like one of the "family." But maybe not.

Anyway, if Charlie Turner is the ghost of the Past, then he may have a timewarping quality around him which causes the apparant time paradoxes in much of our thinking on Doris. If Weer intuits that in talking with Charlie he is somehow seeing into the past of Julius T. Smart (as it happens rather than as completed action), then what does he see (figuratively speaking) in Doris?

And is Sherry another avatar of Olivia (a small-town Auntie Mame), or is she something different (the real Lolita)?

Uh-oh, I'm caught in an image whirlpool again . . .

=Statues and characters=

Venus of Milo and armless Cleopatra the Seal Girl (aka Janet, mother of Charlie) Marble-ized cuckolded husband in the Arabian Nights and Mr. Tilly China Napoleon and Julius Smart

Back to Janet Turner. We know a surprising amount about her family. Is Turner her married name? Her brother, with wife and farm, does he live around Cassionsville? (I know we've wondered about that one before, but if Turner is her married name, then gee, she could be related to the Lorns or the Greens. Or even somehow to the Weers?)

=mantis=

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Roy C. Lackey — 04 Aug 2002, 08:16 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis wrote:

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Ah, yes. I had forgotten that the mysterious Mr. Mason was the father of Candy and Arline, as well as Doris. That's another strike against the idea that Weer was the father of Doris. So far as we know, Weer never married at all, much less twice. It would also make him the father of Candy, which puts another ugly twist on the girlie picture Charlie sent him. But then, why does Charlie write: "Anyway, if you have any comments on the picture you would like to make, go ahead and make them to me and I will pass them along to Candy; she will be glad to hear from you."? Why should Candy be glad to hear from Weer? Who is he to her? Surely not her father!

Dimly I recall going over all this, but still I persist in wondering. Odd that the sepia picture has Smart on it . . .

I said only that it was "possibly" Smart. Against that idea is the near certainty that the tall man with thick glasses is Tom Lavine. Tom's constitution is such that, as Charlie writes, he "won't live long". If the sepia is natural, the picture taken decades ago, how likely is it that Tom would still be alive to pay court to Doris at a time when Weer was about fifty? Charlie referred to Tom as a "kid". Weer was president for only about 15 years before he died, not enough time for the photos to have faded and turned brown on the day he showed them to Miss Hadow. If the sepia was faked, the pictures still shouldn't have faded in 15 years. In other words, it would be pretty hard for Tom Lavine to have been a contemporary of both Smart and Doris.

Back to Janet Turner. We know a surprising amount about her family. Is Turner her married name? Her brother, with wife and farm, does he live around Cassionsville? (I know we've wondered about that one before, but if Turner is her married name, then gee, she could be related to the Lorns or the Greens. Or even somehow to the Weers?)

We are given no hint as to who Charlie's father might be, but Turner must be Janet's maiden name; Smart notes that she wears no wedding band (142). The surviving brother inherited the family farm, but the only hint as to its location is Janet's accent (or lack of one), which Smart thinks "might be from Ohio or maybe Pennsylvania" (139).

-Roy

Michael Andre-Driussi — 04 Aug 2002, 16:25 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Roy wrote:

Ah, yes. I had forgotten that the mysterious Mr. Mason was the father of Candy and Arline, as well as Doris. That's another strike against the idea that Weer was the father of Doris. So far as we know, Weer never married at all, much less twice. It would also make him the father of Candy, which puts another ugly twist on the girlie picture Charlie sent him. But then, why does Charlie write: "Anyway, if you have any comments on the picture you would like to make, go ahead and make them to me and I will pass them along to Candy; she will be glad to hear from you."? Why should Candy be glad to hear from Weer? Who is he to her? Surely not her father!

Well right, there is the question of what Charlie's motives are and whether Charlie and Weer are on the same page, as it were. As we've discussed before, it sure seems like Charlie is setting up some sort of scam to get money out of Weer, but when Weer seems to go for it, suddenly Charlie has to fold the project up and disappear again. What spooked the scam?

"Mason" has ties to the stoney fate of Mr. Tilly, as we've said before. The story of Tilly, while Southern Gothic in tone, seems at root to be a tale from the Arabian Nights involving a cheating wife and her semi-statue husband.

Mr. Tilly + Mrs. Tilly

|

Rodney

Janet + Mr. X

|

Charlie Turner

Mr. Mason + Mrs. Mason

^

Candy Arline

Mr. Mason + other woman

|

Doris

Uh oh, style whirlpool . . .

As Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus, in PEACE do two threads resolve into two separate groups?

ARABIAN NIGHTS crops up in the "ben Yahya and the Marid" (an "in the style of" tale about Weer, Smart, Olivia, and the factory), in the Tilly story (a real one in disguise, about Tilly, Mrs. Tilly, Janet, and Charlie by Smart), in the unexpected presence of the Persian room of the mansion.

European fairy tales (specifically Grimms?) show up in "The Princess and her Three Suitors" (another "in the style of," tale about Olivia) and the fate of Doris (a disguised version of Cinderella).

The Arabian tales presented seem to involve inheritance from non-relatives.

The fairy tales here (and maybe the others in PEACE, I don't know) involve courtship.

Things get very murky with Tilly and the carnies. Surely we have discussed in the past the possibility that Charlie is the son of Tilly and Janet? He may be "Rodney" (i.e., there is no other son, it is a lie that the son died), he may be Rodney's half-brother.

Then the rather intense way that, the night after telling Margaret Lorn the story of Tilly on their fateful picnic, Weer dreams of the story, and sees walking statues, and deals with the dog-boy . . . who comes between Weer and Margaret (146).

The linkage of Weer to Charlie Turner might only be a product of the fact that Weer inherited from Smart who inherited from Tilly, and Tilly created freaks for the carnies. Or there might be buried bloodlines involved.

Dimly I recall going over all this, but still I persist in wondering. Odd that the sepia picture has Smart on it . . .

I said only that it was "possibly" Smart. Against that idea is the near certainty that the tall man with thick glasses is Tom Lavine. Tom's constitution is such that, as Charlie writes, he "won't live long". If the sepia is natural, the picture taken decades ago, how likely is it that Tom would still be alive to pay court to Doris at a time when Weer was about fifty? Charlie referred to Tom as a "kid". Weer was president for only about 15 years before he died, not enough time for the photos to have faded and turned brown on the day he showed them to Miss Hadow. If the sepia was faked, the pictures still shouldn't have faded in 15 years. In other words, it would be pretty hard for Tom Lavine to have been a contemporary of both Smart and Doris.

Right, but to resolve the time paradoxes (and also examine "Doris <> Den's daughter") I'm playing with the idea that Charlie is, in effect, a time traveller from the past, ala Ghost of Carnies Past. (The other view I'm toying with would be Smart in Carny Hell -- the photo is real time, like Pickman's model [Lovecraft story], showing Smart [hello Den, wish you were here <g>] and the devil's Candy.) Charlie time-traveler might age as he goes into his future and grow young as he returns to his past (Wolfe has played with this side-effect of time travel); if so, then items he carries may also age, thus a fresh photo becomes sepia photo (this would be exactly like Thyme in EMPIRES OF FOLIAGE AND FLOWER).

Again, I'm saying that Charlie is providing a "window to the past" just like the ghost of Christmas past does for Scrooge.

Back to Janet Turner. We know a surprising amount about her family. Is Turner her married name? Her brother, with wife and farm, does he live around Cassionsville? (I know we've wondered about that one before, but if Turner is her married name, then gee, she could be related to the Lorns or the Greens. Or even somehow to the Weers?)

We are given no hint as to who Charlie's father might be, but Turner must be Janet's maiden name; Smart notes that she wears no wedding band (142). The surviving brother inherited the family farm, but the only hint as to its location is Janet's accent (or lack of one), which Smart thinks "might be from Ohio or maybe Pennsylvania" (139).

Yes, and we have reason to believe that Cassionsville is in Ohio, home state of Quantrill (194).

=mantis=

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Robert Borski — 04 Aug 2002, 17:53 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

Dog-determined Roy has written:

--Ah, yes. I had forgotten that the mysterious Mr. Mason was the father of Candy and Arline, as well as Doris. That's another strike against the idea that Weer was the father of Doris. So far as we know, Weer never married at all, much less twice. It would also make him the father of Candy, which puts another ugly twist on the girlie picture Charlie sent him. But then, why does Charlie write: "Anyway, if you have any comments on the picture you would like to make, go ahead and make them to me and I will pass them along to Candy; she will be glad to hear from you."? Why should Candy be glad to hear from Weer? Who is he to her? Surely not her father!--

But does the mysterious Mr. Mason even exist? As Charlie writes to Den "[Doris] was a kid that belonged to Mr. Mason (whoever he was--I myself never laid eyes on him and there were quite a few people around the lot that would have given you nine to five that there never was one."

This to me suggests the strong plausibility that the notion of a "Mister Mason"--at least in Doris's case--is a nom de convenience. Mrs. Mason needs to explain where Doris has come from--she may have been or is being paid to be her ward, and "Mister Mason" may have placed her in the carnival to rid himself of the illegitimate child who may be a major embarrassment for him--especially if he's on-track to be a major town figure. (There's also the potential of statutory rape charges if someone like Sherry Gold is involved.)

Charlie also notes that "Mr. M." must have been quite a ladies' man. But while lifetime bachelor Den Weer may not have bedded Margie Lorn, surely Sherry Gold and Lois Arbuthnot were not his only sexual conquests--a virgin well into his forties if indeed so.

Note too that "M" upside down is "W."

In other words I'll take that 9-to-5 bet.

Robert Borski

Roy C. Lackey — 04 Aug 2002, 21:22 · follows Robert Borski

Robert B. wrote:

But does the mysterious Mr. Mason even exist? As Charlie writes to Den "[Doris] was a kid that belonged to Mr. Mason (whoever he was--I myself never laid eyes on him and there were quite a few people around the lot that would have given you nine to five that there never was one."

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Whoever the real Mr. Mason may have been (Tilly or Smart or Weer or Other), the cover-story in Charlie's letter is that Mr. M. has just died. Even if that's a lie, and ignoring the problem of Doris being at least ten years too old to be the daughter of Den and Sherry, _where has she been for the last fifteen years or so since birth_?

Tilly had been dead for forty years before Charlie showed up at the plant. Smart had recently died (but not, I think, recently enough to have been the departed father Doris claimed), but surely he could have provided better for a child (where had he kept her all that time?), and who was the mother? The difficulties of Den being the father are even greater than for Smart. Timeline problems aside, Doris's mother is said to have been dead for some time before her father. If Sherry was that mother, then her death should have precipitated Weer's stroke. Weer had _not_ had a stroke before Charlie's visit. Besides, where had mother and child been living before Sherry's death? With Weer? I don't think so. More importantly, with whom had Doris been living during the time between her mother's death and the "death" of her "father"? Weer certainly wasn't dead. What circumstance caused him to suddenly farm out his daughter to the circus? Adam has already addressed the improbability of Weer doing such a thing.

Then there is the problem of Mrs. Mason. Why should she, ostensibly the jilted woman, feel a moral obligation (if she felt one) to finish raising another woman's daughter? What hold did Weer (if he was Mr. M.) have on her? Money? Not according to Charlie's account, and her niggardly treatment of Doris seems to affirm that. If Charlie's account of Doris's story is true, and if Weer was Mason, why had he been sending support money all those years to Mrs. M. for Candy and Arline? Was he their father, too? More to the point; why did he _stop_ sending money, as Charlie's account indicates, when he should have been sending even more money to support Doris? He was very rich and very much alive. It just doesn't add up. Weer could have quietly arranged to have any bastard child sent to a girls' school in Switzerland, or something, if her presence was inconvenient.

Also, Mrs. M.'s hostility toward Doris is too great to be accounted for just by money concerns. The mere presence of Doris seems to be a personal affront to her. Not letting her get enough to eat, even when someone else pays for it, and tearing up her new clothes, that someone else bought, aren't about money. It seems to me that Mrs. M.'s animosity is misdirected to Doris because she can't get at Mr. M., probably because he's dead. If Weer was Mr. Mason, he was alive, and all she had to do to get even with him was threaten to expose him in his home town.

-Roy

Robert Borski — 05 Aug 2002, 19:19 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Barker Roy again, from that Texas grab-joint of his:

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the cover-story in Charlie's letter is that Mr. M. has just died. Even if
that's a lie, and ignoring the problem of Doris being at least ten years
too
old to be the daughter of Den and Sherry, _where has she been for the last
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Hattiesburg, Mississippi--or somewhere around there. At least according to Charlie that's where the carnival is playing when Doris joins the show. Perhaps she's been in an orphanage there--very often the typical repository for unwanted children--at least until she's too old to be considered adoptable, given the boot, and forced to find work. (I know you're old enough, Roy, to remember a time when children born out of wedlock were a source of great shame, embarrassment, and scandal--not like today--and when a woman began to show she was said to

have gone off visit distant relatives--frequently a euphemism for a home for unwed mothers. This, in fact, is how my father entered the world.)

Also, Mrs. M.'s hostility toward Doris is too great to be accounted for just by money concerns. The mere presence of Doris seems to be a personal affront to her. Not letting her get enough to eat, even when someone else pays for it, and tearing up her new clothes, that someone else bought, aren't about money. It seems to me that Mrs. M.'s animosity is misdirected to Doris because she can't get at Mr. M., probably because he's dead. If Weer was Mr. Mason, he was alive, and all she had to do to get even with him was threaten to expose him in his home town.

You're attempting to apply real-world logic here to what is essentially a modern retelling by Gene Wolfe of Perrault's "Cinderella." Wicked stepmothers are a staple of such tales--as is Mrs. Mason here. Wolfe cleverly adds enough details to make you wonder who "Mr. Mason" might be or whether the tale is even real or simply part of Charlie Turner's Dickensian sensibility imagination run amok--just as you wonder whether Julius T. Smart is really apothecary Tilly, and if so the horde of questions this raises. (How has young son Rodney died? Who or what moves the curtains in Tilly's house? Why does Julius never mention being married before?) Perhaps it doesn't even matter because in the tale of "The Alchemist", it's the parallels that count--Smart is an alchemist too whose hardened heart costs him a wife. Indeed, as mantis has shown in a series of posts, all of the little stories in PEACE have some further relevance to the larger account. I'm therefore curious as to what you (or Adam S.) believe the overall significance of Doris's sad history is to either the novel or the life of Den Weer. Does it have any relevance--typological, symbolic--or is it just simply tossed into the mix for sheer entertainment value, making it alone the dog-that-wagged-its-own-tale?

Robert Borski

Adam Stephanides — 06 Aug 2002, 02:32 · follows Robert Borski

on 8/4/02 3:16 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:
I said only that it was "possibly" Smart. Against that idea is the near certainty that the tall man with thick glasses is Tom Lavine. Tom's constitution is such that, as Charlie writes, he "won't live long". If the sepia is natural, the picture taken decades ago, how likely is it that Tom would still be alive to pay court to Doris at a time when Weer was about fifty? Charlie referred to Tom as a "kid". Weer was president for only about 15 years before he died, not enough time for the photos to have faded and turned brown on the day he showed them to Miss Hadow. If the sepia was faked, the pictures still shouldn't have faded in 15 years. In other words, it would be pretty hard for Tom Lavine to have been a contemporary of both Smart and Doris.

In fact, Charlie says that Tom is eighteen. So if the letter is factual, and the picture is indeed of Tom, it must have been taken around the time the letter was written, which is inconsistent with the "faded sepia" color, as you argue. So either the letter is a fiction, or the picture is not of Tom, or some sort of weird time-slippage thing is going on, as mantis suggests. And why does Charlie not mention the second picture in his letter?

--Adam

Robert Borski — 07 Aug 2002, 06:25 · follows Adam Stephanides

Adam S. pondering:

"And why does Charlie not mention the second picture in his letter?"

Not sure if you think we don't know what is in the second photo, Adam, or simply that Charlie Turner never mentions its contents.

The first one, obviously, is of stripper Candy. Says Charlie: "The other girls in the show all consider this a pretty modest picture because as you have probably already seen, she is wearing a G-string and pasties, which is as far as they are allowed to strip in Sunday School towns where our patch can't fix the cops much."

Secretary Hadow looks at the photo and says, "Well, the woman is an obvious tramp, though I must say her face reminds me of Carole Lombard's--do you remember her?" [The heyday of Lombard's film career was from 1934-1942; she died in a 1942 air crash.]

Then, though neither she, Den, nor Wolfe say anything, she looks at the second photo, saying, "The tall man--well, what can you say about him? He's terribly tall. I don't think that other man with him is really very tall, but still that other man must be--oh, I don't know. Six foot ten? Perhaps more."

(Why would Candy, attired so scantily, have a picture taken with the two men, anyway? As Charlie notes, "Candy had pictures of herself taken" and they appear to be self-promotional glossies or souvenirs--possibly for sale to lonely horny men.)

Den asks Miss H. if she believes the pictures are of living people and she uses the plural in refuting this idea: "Well, for one thing, the pictures just look old." She then first describes the clothes of the two men since they are in the uppermost picture, the one she has just looked at; then she shuffles the pictures (again, without comment) so that Candy's is again on top and describes her as having "an old-fashioned kind of hairdo."

The dated aspect of clothing and hairdo, plus the sepia tone of the pictures, suggests to me that both pictures are from a much earlier time--and clearly predate the Golden Year, when supposedly the encounter with Charlie Turner takes place. Moreover, the second male figure in the photo is described as being not "really very tall," implying rather he is simply tall. Roy has suggested that this mystery figure may be Julius Smart, but Julius Smart is so small he has to buy boy's shoes for his tiny feet, whereas Den, as we know from his medical checkup, is 6 feet tall. (President Smart is also described as wearing old-fashioned clothes: "He wore a vest, and a gold chain across the front of it during that period when it seemed the vest had vanished never to return." Compare this to what the tall man--Tom Lavine--in the sepia-tinged photo is wearing: "He's even wearing a vest with a watch chain across the front." But are his clothes contemporary or hand-me-downs from a long-ago era?) The fact that Miss Hadow does not recognize photo-bound Den further indicates some passage of time--as anyone who's been to a high school reunion or two knows, some people look exactly the same as they did when they were younger, while others morph into something else altogether. Den lies when he says he's never met either figure in the photographs--i.e., Candy and Tom--perhaps not wishing to be tainted by association with "the obvious tramp." But he's also never met the third figure in the photographs--since it's impossible to meet yourself. And if the second picture is a snapshot of Tom and Den--taken after the latter possibly checks out the carnival as potential home for his illegitimate child, or after having trysted with part-time hooker Candy--this might explain why Charlie sent it to him.

Robert Borski

Roy C. Lackey — 07 Aug 2002, 16:58 · follows Robert Borski

Robert B. writes:

The dated aspect of clothing and hairdo, plus the sepia tone of the pictures, suggests to me that both pictures are from a much earlier time--and clearly predate the Golden Year, when supposedly the encounter with Charlie Turner takes place.

A quibble: the Golden Year is the year Den met Lois and Sherry, when he was about 45, and before he became president. His meeting with Charlie took place a few years later, after he was president.

Moreover, the second male figure in the photo is described as being not "really very tall," implying rather he is simply tall. Roy has suggested that this mystery figure may be Julius Smart, but Julius Smart is so small he has to buy boy's shoes for his tiny feet, whereas Den, as we know from his medical checkup, is 6 feet tall.

Smart isn't all that small; he's "just under average height" (114). Miss Hadow underestimates Tom's true height (7' 6") by eight inches, mostly because the other man is so much shorter--two feet shorter, if he's Smart; she's not used to seeing such relative disparity. Another possibility, if Smart is the shorter man, is that the photo is a few years older than the one of Candy, and that Tom hadn't reached his full height yet.

[snip]

And if the second picture is a snapshot of Tom and Den--taken after the latter possibly checks out the carnival as potential home for his illegitimate child, or after having trysted with part-time hooker Candy--this might explain why Charlie sent it to him.

Either I'm seriously misreading you, or this last sentence of this paragraph contradicts the first (quoted above). If "both pictures are from a much earlier time--and clearly predate the Golden Year", and if the two men are Tom and Den, then you have Den looking for a home for a teenage daughter he begot on a 16 year old Sherry he hasn't even met yet!

-Roy

StoneOx17 — 08 Aug 2002, 11:41 · follows Roy C. Lackey

In a message dated 8/4/2002 7:58:02 PM Eastern Daylight Time, mantis writes:

"Mason" has ties to the stoney fate of Mr. Tilly, as we've said before. The story of Tilly, while Southern Gothic in tone, seems at root to be a tale from the Arabian Nights involving a cheating wife and her semi-statue husband.

There's another connection nobody seems to have mentioned yet. In the Arabian Nights story, the marid Naranj (corresponding to Julius) earned his living not only by turning roots into sherbet, but also by turning stones into kine, and making Ben Yahya (corresponding to Den) slaughter and sell them. While Julius probably isn't able to turn stones into kine, Mr. Tilly (and Julius if, as I now believe, he took over the carnie practice) certainly could have turned kine to stone.

- Stone Ox

Adam Stephanides — 08 Aug 2002, 13:38 · follows StoneOx17

on 8/7/02 1:25 AM, Robert Borski at rborski at charter.net wrote:
Adam S. pondering:

"And why does Charlie not mention the second picture in his letter?"

Not sure if you think we don't know what is in the second photo, Adam, or simply that Charlie Turner never mentions its contents.

[snip]

No, it is clear that there are two photos. I am just questioning why Charlie only mentions sending one photo.

The dated aspect of clothing and hairdo, plus the sepia tone of the pictures, suggests to me that both pictures are from a much earlier time

Indeed; but then, as I asked in an earlier post, how can the tall man in the photo be Tom?

And
if the second picture is a snapshot of Tom and Den--taken after the latter possibly checks out the carnival as potential home for his illegitimate child, or after having trysted with part-time hooker Candy--this might explain why Charlie sent it to him.

Since there is *no* evidence for the second man in the photo being Den, I'll just say that the idea of Den caring enough about his supposed daughter to "check out" the carnival, and then deciding that the carnival is a suitable place for her, is even more implausible than the rest of your theory. And if the picture is of Tom, that would itself explain Charlie sending it; but neither would explain Charlie not mentioning having sent it.

--Adam

Robert Borski — 08 Aug 2002, 18:32 · follows Adam Stephanides

Roy responding to me again:

A quibble: the Golden Year is the year Den met Lois and Sherry, when he was about 45, and before he became president. His meeting with Charlie took place a few years later, after he was president.

I was going by the timeline in the Peace Indexicon, where under the Golden Year, six events are listed, including the following: "Charlie Turner, the dog man, arrives unexpectedly."

And if the second picture is a snapshot of Tom and Den--taken after the latter possibly checks out the carnival as potential home for his illegitimate child, or after having trysted with part-time hooker Candy--this might explain why Charlie sent it to him.

Either I'm seriously misreading you, or this last sentence of this paragraph contradicts the first (quoted above). If "both pictures are from a much earlier time--and clearly predate the Golden Year", and if the two men are Tom and Den, then you have Den looking for a home for a teenage daughter he begot on a 16 year old Sherry he hasn't even met yet!

No, you have it right exactly. Because as I've been attempting to demonstrate all along it is not possible to construct a hard and true chronological ordering of the events in PEACE. There are just too many contradictions and mutually-exclusive events.

Example 1: If the mystery man in the second photo is J. Smart as you suggest, when was it taken? At the same time as the Candy photo? (Both are sepia toned and depict old-fashioned styles of dress and coiffure.) If at differing times, why do each still depict similar antiquated fashion sensibilities--and why now, all of a sudden, has Charlie sent the much older photo of Smart and young Tom to Den? Also, if the mystery man is Smart, why does Den claim he's never met him? Similarly, why doesn't Miss Hadow recognize Smart?

Counter-example 1: If the mystery man in the second photo is D. Weer, why is the giant wearing the old-fashioned vest and watch, which dates from a much earlier time period? (Is he modeling himself on fashion guru J. Smart as a tribute to his creator? Or can he only afford rummage sale bargains, there not being a whole lot of money in being a sideshow freak?) Why doesn't Miss Hadow recognize Weer or Weer admit that he is the man in the photo and therefore knows the giant? (I've suggested one solution.)

Example 2: the Birkhead anomaly.

Example 3: Once again, I cite the scene where Den has sex with Sherry Gold. Sixteen-year old Sherry shows up at Weer's door and Den invites her in. Says Den to the girl: "Excuse me for not rising. I have suffered a stroke resulting in partial paralysis of my leg." Kind-hearted Sherry, though nervous (as Wolfe tells us), responds, "That's all right."

But how can this be? Den's stroke is years in the future--long after he has sex with Sherry Gold. It's clearly impossible--and yet there it is, right on the page before us. Possible solutions include: 1) post-stroke Den is looking back to the encounter and re-imagining it from the perspective of his current present, complete with revisionist dialogue; 2) Den, adrift in a maze of memories, is conflating events, as confused or disoriented as anyone who's suffered a stroke, or in the twilight of their life has vivid recollections of their childhood, but can't remember what they had to eat yesterday.

Unfortunately, either solution presents difficulties with placing this or any other event within a real-time continuum--thereby making all proofs requiring a strict chronology invalid.

Time, in PEACE, is a river that runs everywhere.

Robert Borski

Adam Stephanides — 08 Aug 2002, 20:22 · follows Robert Borski

on 8/5/02 2:19 PM, Robert Borski at rborski at charter.net wrote:
You're attempting to apply real-world logic here to what is essentially a modern retelling by Gene Wolfe of Perrault's "Cinderella."

I don't buy this line of reasoning. Wolfe's characters don't stop behaving realistically just because they're in retellings of older tales (as most of his characters seem to be). Either Doris's story is true, in which case the people in it must have act for plausible motives; or it is Charlie's invention, in which case there's no reason to think Doris even exists, let alone is Weer's daughter. (I'm speaking in general here, not in reference to Roy Lackey's point; there are more convincing reasons why Doris can't be Weer's daughter.)

I'm therefore curious as to what you (or Adam S.) believe the overall significance of Doris's sad history is to either the novel or the life of

Den Weer. Does it have any relevance--typological, symbolic--or is it just simply tossed into the mix for sheer entertainment value, making it alone the dog-that-wagged-its-own-tale?

Well, Doris's tale is essentially Cinderella with an unhappy ending. And Weer is himself a sort of Cinderella. Abandoned by his parents, he is taken under the wing of a "fairy godmother" (Olivia), who enables him to meet his "prince" (Smart). And whatever the relationship between Smart and Weer was, Weer does end up inheriting Smart's "kingdom." In Doris's tale, the "godmother's" well-intentioned intervention leads to disaster; Weer's life, too, has not turned out happily, and the analogy suggests that Olivia may have been, in part at least, the unintentional cause of this.

But these are just tentative ideas; I don't claim to understand the book.

--Adam