

PEACE: the tale of the banshee

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 25 Aug 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/3423>

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StoneOx17 — 25 Aug 2002, 13:52

Hello,

Despite all the effort spent analyzing many of the embedded stories in Peace, there seems to have been relatively little written in this forum about the banshee story. I think that the participants in this story can be identified with some of the main characters in Peace, and that this story answers the question of "what went wrong?" with Wolfe's relationship to Margaret. Roy Lackey gave much of the same answer to this question already, without relying on the hints hidden in the banshee tale, in <http://www.urth.net/urth/archives/v0030/0104.html> but the banshee story fills in a few more of the details.

My identification in the story is:

Den Weer is Jack,
Margaret Lorn is Molly,
Carl Lorn is Molly's father,
Julian Smart is the banshee.

Let's review the banshee story.

Molly's father owns a big farm and Molly is his only child, so whoever marries her inherits the farm. Jack and Molly are in love, but Molly's father doesn't want Molly to marry Jack, "because Jack had nothing to bring to the wedding but his own two hands and a smile."

In the "what went wrong?" speech, Weer says "I was intelligent and industrious; Margaret and I loved one another deeply." But when he comes back from college, the Depression has wiped out all of his fortune and made jobs very hard to find. How is he to make a living?

One possibility would be for Weer to marry Margaret and move to the Lorn's farm. The Lorns likely still have their farm, since they wouldn't have had large bank loans, because the farm has been in their family for years and Carl Lorn is naturally frugal. Even though the income from the farm has been greatly reduced, they can at least grow enough food to feed themselves. It would be reasonable for Weer to help on the farm if he is to marry Margaret; she is the Lorn's only child, and so will inherit the farm. Later in the book, the farmer delivering potatoes to the factory says "When I was a boy, there wasn't anything anybody could have that was better'n a farm. If a doctor or a banker could marry a widow that had a good one, they'd stop what they was doing and work it." This farmer is ten or twenty years older than Weer, but taking this and the banshee story together, I conclude that when Weer was about to graduate, he and Margaret proposed that they get married and that Den move out to the farm and help work it.

From the banshee story, we see that Carl Lorn didn't want Weer to marry Margaret. He disapproved of selling the egg, and he's tight with money ("only Daddy never gets nothing at the store if he can find something else that'll do") so Weer has two strikes against him, being Olivia's nephew and being penniless. In the banshee story, Molly's father tells Jack he'd have to

spend the whole night in the barn haunted by the banshee and not be thrown out; in Weer's real life, Carl probably told Weer that he wouldn't let Margaret marry him unless he could support her. So Weer has to take the job at the factory (the real-life parallel of the barn); unfortunately, the coldhouse prank kills somebody, and Julius blackmails him into staying at the factory until Julius dies. In this scenario, it doesn't even matter whether Margaret knows about the coldhouse prank. Weer can't marry her unless he finds another job which pays better, and he can't leave this job because of Julius' blackmail. Eventually, Margaret gets fed up with Weer's inaction and marries Mr. Price (whom we suspect, from his surname, has sufficient money).

There are some interesting differences between the banshees in Peace and the banshees in Irish folklore. Looking on the web, it seems that in Irish folklore, the banshee is a woman *sidhe* who wails before somebody is going to die (and most important families have an associated banshee that predicts deaths in that family). In some versions of the legend, if you catch the banshee, she has to tell you who is going to die. However, she only foretells deaths, unlike Wolfe's banshee, who causes them. Note that Wolfe is playing off the folklore banshee: when his banshee is caught, she does tell Jack "who's to be born," although one might suspect that she's lying out of spite.

Wolfe's banshees are ghosts (quite fittingly for Peace) who are "the spirits of midwives that have killed the baby because someone gave gold to them to do it that it might not inherit." This gives grounds for identifying the banshee as Julius: in <http://urth.net/urth/archives/v0205/1043.txt.shtml>, I speculated that Julius may have killed Mr. Tilly so as to inherit the carny business, which, while not an exact parallel, is certainly similar.

Jack stays in the barn haunted by the banshee three nights. The first two times, the banshee forces him to speak the name of someone whom she later kills, first "the meanest man [Jack] can think of, a man that robbed everybody and never gave poor folk a penny," and second, "a real old lady that was goin' to die anyway." The third time, he defeats the banshee. If we identify the banshee with Julius, this is reminiscent of Weer's comment that he recalls uncle Julius clearly "only at three stages of his life." The first stage is when Julius tells the story of Mr. Tilly. The second stage is at aunt Olivia's funeral. And the last is when Julius is an old man and the president. This seems a little strange, because Den lived with Julius for quite a while, and this period doesn't seem included in either of these stages. However, if we take these three stages as corresponding to the three nights in the banshee story, then we are led to suspect that Julius killed both Mr. Tilly and Olivia for their inheritances. We know (since Wolfe has confirmed it) that it was Peacock who actually ran Olivia over in his car, but there are at least two reasons to suspect that Peacock might have conspired with Julius: first, Julius Smart and Professor Peacock were good friends, and second, there's the mysterious letter from Peacock to Julius that Weer is unable to read.

Is there any more evidence for this correspondence between the banshee story and Weer's life? In the other stories in Peace that we know have parallels (the princess and her suitors, and the marid), there is a correspondence hidden in the characters' names. The link from Molly to Mary to Margaret seems obvious, but I don't see how to get from Jack to Den. Any ideas?

- Stone Ox