

PEACE: Smart's relatives

The Urth list — 6 messages, 5 voices, 18 Oct 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 18 Oct 2002, 22:42

I'm re-reading PEACE now, taking a section per day in a Weer-ish sort of way. What a neat book!

Anyway, the question of Smart having closer relatives than Weer. Yes, Smart does talk about the help he had from relatives, but that was when he was 20-something, and it is not likely that those relatives were younger -- rather, that they were older.

Let's say Smart was born in 1900, when life expectancy for a man was around 48 (iirc), and died in 1963 at age 63. Any relative who was old enough to help him when he was 20-something would be 70 or 80-something after he died!

Smart seems like a self-made man (many ways similar to Baldanders). If any of those relatives had managed to put him onto a job, he probably would have maintained ties to those relatives; but since they didn't, he doesn't. He found Mr. Tilly on his own, after riding milk trains; he found Olivia on his own, with some debt to Professor Peacock who knew her/courted her first. From my figuring above there could be three generations of relatives that he knows nothing about, and likewise, those myriads of Smarties don't know a fraction about the factory that even a cold house worker knows, let alone a long-term engineer like Weer.

Smart knows that Olivia loved Weer. Smart knows that Weer is the last of the Weers. Smart knows that he couldn't have made the factory without Olivia's help. However unfriendly Smart has been toward Weer over the last 25 years of Smart's life (make that 35 years!), it seems to me that leaving the factory to Weer is in his best interests as an owner, and in his best interests as a tribute to his wife and her family (i.e., the family network that was able to further his career).

=mantis=

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Roy C. Lackey — 19 Oct 2002, 07:17 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

mantis writes:

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died!

Those "cousins" he mentioned would have been his own age.

Smart seems like a self-made man (many ways similar to Baldanders). If any of those relatives had managed to put him onto a job, he probably would have maintained ties to those relatives; but since they didn't, he doesn't. He found Mr. Tilly on his own, after riding milk trains; he found Olivia on his own, with some debt to Professor Peacock who knew her/courted her first. From my figuring above there could be three generations of relatives that he knows nothing about, and likewise, those myriads of Smarties don't know a fraction about the factory that even a cold house worker knows, let alone a long-term engineer like Weer.

We know almost nothing about Smart's life beyond the few autobiographical details he divulges in the course of telling the Tilly tale. We know from nine-year-old Den that Smart couldn't have been much more than twenty-five when he told that story. If we assume that the details are true (and if we don't, where are we?!), then somehow both of Smart's parents conspired to die in the few years since he graduated from college (and I've brought this up before). To me that's a red flag; too many people died too conveniently to Smart's advantage--his parents, Tilly, Olivia, and possibly Peacock.

How is it that Smart even knew Peacock? The most obvious connection is the university at which Peacock taught. Smart had likely gone to school there. The university was just thirty-five miles from Cassionsville, and Smart grew up in the area. We know this because he said he didn't want to buy Tilly's drugstore because he "wanted to get back closer to the farm" (148). Assuming Smart had no siblings, his parent's death left him owning a chunk of real estate that was worth a tidy sum of money to him in the go-go 1920s. That has to be a source of his start-up money for the plant; Smart was no farmer. So those relatives were not "distant", geographically.

BTW, why would Smart have assumed that Peacock might have told Olivia that Tilly died, before Smart had even met her? (148)

More than once in the course of the Tilly tale, Smart remarks upon how handsomely Tilly had paid him. He's a liar. He knew Tilly less than a week, and I doubt that he was paid by the day, because he mentions a "salary" (151). I doubt that Smart ever collected a nickel from him.

Smart knows that Olivia loved Weer. Smart knows that Weer is the last of the Weers. Smart knows that he couldn't have made the factory without Olivia's help. However unfriendly Smart has been toward Weer over the last 25 years of Smart's life (make that 35 years!), it seems to me that leaving the factory to Weer is in his best interests as an owner, and in his best interests as a tribute to his wife and her family (i.e., the family network that was able to further his career).

I'm not so sure Olivia loved Weer. The first page of the second section doesn't read that way to me. She was stuck with him and tried to make the best of it. And I have a much darker view of Smart. He was a mercenary, cold-blooded s.o.b. who used people for his own ends. I don't think he had a philanthropic bone in his body. When he sold Olivia's house it didn't become the Olivia Weer-Smart Memorial Library. And if he thought well at all of his nephew, he would have advanced his career during all those years, grooming him as his successor.

-Roy

Roy quoted me and wrote:

Let's say Smart was born in 1900, when life expectancy for a man was around 48 (iirc), and died in 1963 at age 63. Any relative who was old enough to help him when he was 20-something would be 70 or 80-something after he died!

Those "cousins" he mentioned would have been his own age.

Yes, and if still alive they would be past their life-expectancy age of 50. As for Smart's parents sudden death, if they were in their 20s when they conceived him, then they would be in their mid-40s when he went to Florida. Rather close to the estimated lifespan.

How is it that Smart even knew Peacock? The most obvious connection is the university at which Peacock taught. Smart had likely gone to school there. The university was just thirty-five miles from Cassionsville, and Smart grew up in the area. We know this because he said he didn't want to buy Tilly's drugstore because he "wanted to get back closer to the farm" (148).

Maybe. With geography, "closer" is relative with regard to scale. He was in Florida at the time! The Smart farm could be in the New England states or in Illinois and he would still be closer to it in Ohio than he was in Florida.

Janet Turner, ala Cleo the Seal Girl, has an accent that places her in Pennsylvania or Ohio. She is from the multi-state region, maybe even from the same state of Ohio.

Assuming

Smart had no siblings, his parent's death left him owning a chunk of real estate that was worth a tidy sum of money to him in the go-go 1920s.

Ah, but he must have had siblings, no? He mentions "in-laws," after all, among those relatives trying to help him get started.

That

has to be a source of his start-up money for the plant; Smart was no farmer.

I thought we were agreed that Smart could not have started up the factory without Olivia: "her" money, her brother's money, her family's influence in the town.

BTW, why would Smart have assumed that Peacock might have told Olivia that Tilly died, before Smart had even met her? (148)

Because Tilly's death is the circumstance that brings Smart, out of a job, all the way from Florida to Ohio. Smart has just arrived in town; he is wearing a suit and shirt that he just bought at Macafee's department store. He is friends with Peacock (just as he wrote letters to his professors looking for a job, he wrote to Peacock, whether Peacock was his professor or just a friend at college -- and Peacock probably mentioned Bledsoe's drugstore), he knows that Peacock is courting Olivia, he knows that Olivia has invited Smart to the birthday party (of Macafee at Olivia's house -- very Auntie Mame!) at Peacock's request. Thus, he knows that Peacock has spoken of him to Olivia, and supposes that Peacock might have mentioned this detail.

Smart knows that Olivia loved Weer. Smart knows that Weer is the last of the Weers. Smart knows that he couldn't have made the factory without Olivia's help. However unfriendly Smart has been toward Weer over the last 25 years of Smart's life (make that 35 years!), it seems to me that leaving the factory to Weer is in his best interests as an owner, and in his best interests as a tribute to his wife and her family (i.e., the family network that was able to further his career).

I'm not so sure Olivia loved Weer. The first page of the second section doesn't read that way to me. She was stuck with him and tried to make the best of it.

While I agree she was stuck with him and tried to make the best of it, I do not think this cancels out any familial love, or the possibility of the same.

=mantis=

Andy Robertson — 19 Oct 2002, 15:46 · follows Michael Andre-Driussi

I have been kind of out of things for the past few weeks, but I will just drop a note about life expectancy:

It has ****always**** been the case that someone who reaches 20 can expect to get to 60. This is so now in very poor countries. Life expectancies are averages, not limits.

What has changed is the proportion of people who get to puberty. There used to be a ***lot*** of children dying before reproductive age. Fewer now.

hartshorn

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

From: "Michael Andre-Driussi" <mantis at siriusfiction.com>

To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Saturday, October 19, 2002 4:18 PM

Subject: Re: (urth) PEACE: Smart's relatives

Roy quoted me and wrote:

Let's say Smart was born in 1900, when life expectancy for a man was around

48 (iirc), and died in 1963 at age 63. Any relative who was old enough to

help him when he was 20-something would be 70 or 80-something after he died!

StoneOx17 — 19 Oct 2002, 17:37 · follows Andy Robertson

Roy C. Lackey writes:

More than once in the course of the Tilly tale, Smart remarks upon how handsomely Tilly had paid him. He's a liar. He knew Tilly less than a week, and I doubt that he was paid by the day, because he mentions a "salary" (151). I doubt that Smart ever collected a nickel from him.

I agree he's a liar, but I think that's not all he's lying about. I think Smart lived with Tilly for at least six months. Correct me if I'm wrong about either Gulf coast weather or seasonal fruit, but in the Tilly tale, oranges are locally in season (and thus it's winter) and it's 90 degrees after midnight (and thus it's summer). Wolfe certainly knows about orange season (recall oranges in Den's Christmas stocking) and also about Gulf coast weather (Wolfe went to college in Texas). I don't think this is an oversight ... I think it's a deliberate clue, as was Hannah's supposed trip to Boston in the diary written by Gold. Tilly died at least six months after Smart arrived, this makes Smart the chief suspect in Tilly's poisoning.

Of course, Smart is likely lying about the handsome salary as well, to explain where all the money he got from taking over Mr. Tilly's carney medicine business came from. After all, even if he kept the books in the pharmacy's regular business honestly, I don't see why he would have kept records of having prescribed illegal medicines.

- Stone Ox

Adam Stephanides — 20 Oct 2002, 13:48 · follows StoneOx17

on 10/19/02 2:17 AM, Roy C. Lackey at rclackey at stic.net wrote:
To me that's a red flag; too many people died too conveniently
to Smart's advantage--his parents, Tilly, Olivia, and possibly Peacock.

For his parents, see below. As for Tilly, Smart couldn't have known that Tilly's relatives would keep him on at the store; he'd have had greater reason to think Tilly's death would leave him jobless again.

Smart grew
up in the area. We know this because he said he didn't want to buy Tilly's
drugstore because he "wanted to get back closer to the farm" (148).

"Get back closer to the farm" is an ambiguous phrase; it could simply mean that he wanted to live in a more rural area. If he were specifically talking about his parents' farm, he'd be more likely to say something like "wanted to go home," imo.

Assuming
Smart had no siblings, his parent's death left him owning a chunk of real
estate that was worth a tidy sum of money to him in the go-go 1920s.

Even if Smart's parents did own a farm, there's no reason to think Smart would have gotten rich by inheriting it; the 1920s were not "go-go" years for agriculture.

So those relatives were not "distant", geographically.

Even if his parents did live in the area, his surviving relatives at the time of his death need not have.

A couple of minor points in response to mantis:

Ah, but he must have had siblings, no? He mentions "in-laws," after all,
among those relatives trying to help him get started.

Or could that refer to his parents' brothers- and sisters-in-law?

Because Tilly's death is the circumstance that brings Smart, out of a job,
all the way from Florida to Ohio. Smart has just arrived in town; he is

Um, no; as mentioned above, Smart took over the pharmacy after Tilly died; and has seemingly been doing so for some time (158-9, Harper & Row hc).

--Adam