

PEACE: green book stories and how they branch

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 03 Nov 2002

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 03 Nov 2002, 19:50

To reiterate, I think that the two stories from the green book are magical and in a separate category from the other stories. (In the larger view I think that Weer is incapable of such invention: his writing style is more a Proustian reporting, and when he dips into imaginative territory the results are passages like the "artificial hunter" and the "Ted and Lisa" sections.)

The most secure ground in dealing with these two faux-fairy tales is to note how each one relates to one, and only one, episode in Weer's life: that "The Princess and Her Suitors" is the foretelling of the courtship of Olivia, and that "The Tale of ben Yahya and the Marid" is about Weer's life between the loss of Olivia and Weer's meeting Lois. Note that in the first case we have a good amount of Olivia's adventures with two of her four suitors (the tale maps a region developed by the text), whereas the second case more or less fills in a lacuna (the text is relatively quiet in reporting on this period in Weer's life) and sets the stage for the "Gold Hunt" adventure. The correspondences between tales and text, especially with regard to encrypted names of characters, is so tight as to dispell all disbelief.

The Princess and Her Suitors = main action of "Olivia" section

Tale of ben Yahya and the Marid = prelude to main action of "Gold" section

However, as we venture outward from this solid footing with ropes (having fallen before), we come to notice some odd branching which might be dismissed as being a mirage except for the fact that both stories seem to do it in the same place: there is a symmetry.

That is: in the Princess story, the early part sets the scene and only does that, since we know nothing about Olivia's childhood. It is only the beginning of the courtship, the meat of the tale, that engages the gears and shows us Olivia's adventure. The beginning is just a sort of filler, a necessary stage of transition and scene building. It is hard to imagine how a "wizard in wolfskins" could have appeared in town at the time of Olivia's birth to foretell her future.

Ah, but as we have long known, this is a role taken up by Charlie Turner (the dog man) in the Doris episode: the man in wolfskins appears at the Tang plant and tells Weer of a new arrival in the kingdom of the carnies. Which led us to all sorts of wondering. Since the Doris story is very clearly Cinderella, it is not immediately apparent how Cinderella/Doris fits into a Princess/Olivia story.

In a similar manner, the early part of the ben Yahya story involves the protagonist causing an accident with some sherbet . . . which has an unmistakable bond to the coldhouse prank, with the further implication that Weer was the prankster.

The Princess and Her Suitors

prologue = Charlie Turner and Doris

main story (3/4 suitors) = courtship of Olivia "Olivia" section (2/4 suitors)

Tale of ben Yahya and the Marid

prologue = the coldhouse prank

main story = Weer's missing years, prelude to main action of "Gold" section

This shows that both tales contain references to anonymous people whose young lives were cut short: the 18 year-old coldhouse worker in 1938 and teenage Doris in 1963. If we accept the proposal that Weer was the prankster, then he was responsible for the worker's death by either setting up the prank or by not letting him out of the coldhouse (more than one person involved). As for Doris, I have been recently arguing that it was Weer's inability to give the freak-making formula that may make him feel responsible for her death.

The intrusion of Cinderella into the Princess story causes thematic stresses and timeframe stresses. The inclusion of coldhouse prank into ben Yahya's tale causes no such stresses, but it does add the burden of another manslaughter to Weer's record (and leads toward that slippery slope of possible murders: Lois Arbuthnot and John Weer being at the top of the list).

Both of the green book tales remain unfinished because Weer fell asleep while reading them, so we don't know how they end. Yet the text continues on where the tales leave off, and we are tantalized with visions of which conclusions would best fit each tale. The fact that Smart's tale of Mr. Tilly, which is unfinished in "The Alchemist" (section 3), is given a conclusion by Blaine in "Gold" (section 4), adds fuel to the fire, further encouraging the reader to engage with the text.

However much Cinderella differs from the Princess story, the fate of Doris as heralded by dogman and consumed by fire provides an uncomfortable match. (Are the wicked stepmother and her two daughters somehow transformations of the Princess's first three suitors? Does not seem like an immediate "Ah HA!") Because with the Princess story we are given the whole in a nutshell at the beginning.

Putting this tangle aside, what would be the conclusion to the coldhouse ghost story? It would probably be the confrontation between the ghost and the prankster who killed him. Which would explain Weer's sudden fear of that ghost, his fear of somebody else being in the memory mansion, his aside that middle management didn't like employees with a sense of humor.

Having wandered this far afield, I cannot resist mentioning my new interpretation of Kate's banshee story: if the Quantrill/Kate Boyne tryst is true, I wonder if this is somehow reflected in the banshee story (both have climaxes in a barn). At the very least, I suspect that the "barren couple" at the end of the banshee story might really mask the cuckholdry of Sean by Quantrill, and a possible together-but-separate nature of the couple ever after.

=mantis=