

Peace: St. Brandon

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Sep 2007

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stoneox17 at aol.com — 12 Sep 2007, 22:41

I have been trying to construct the wiki pages for *Peace*, and upon rereading it while preparing for this task, I discovered some twists on the interpretation of the tale of St. Brandon that haven't been discussed on this mailing list. I thought people might be interested in seeing them. So without further ado, here is the "Interpretation" section for the tale of St. Brandon that I wrote for the wiki. In the wiki, I also wrote a summary of the story which, if you haven't read *Peace* recently, may be useful for understanding my interpretation (and if you haven't read *Peace* at all, please go read it before reading any further).

Stone Ox (Peter S.)

Warning: spoilers for *Peace* ahead.

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Interpretation:

In the story, there is some discussion as to whether St. Brandon's ship is made of wood or stone. The final word is had by Brandon, who says that it is stone, in places. Which parts are stone may be answered by a passage a few pages later in *Peace*, where Den describes a cloud tower: "To me it was Brandon's mast and at the same time the princess's tower rising from the sea, so that the Irish holy man captained a wicker vessel with sails the size of continents bent to that enchanted edifice of stone." So the boat is wood with a mast of stone. This is visually reminiscent of a grave, with the wooden hull being the coffin and the mast the tombstone (rising through the earth's surface).

With this key, the symbolism of the story is easy to figure out.

- * The High King at Tara is God,
- * Finn M'Cool is an angel - or somebody,
- * Brandon is Den (there is even a phonetic correspondence),
- * the ship's sinking is the burial of the coffin,
- * they are headed not for the Earthly Paradise, but Heaven,
- * the twenty thousand years between two and five am are spent in

Purgatory,

* the rat is Den's wickedness,

* the cat may be Den's heathenism.

This interpretation is supported by another mention of St. Brandon in

Peace. In the banshee story, Kate says that Jack and the banshee fought "like Kilkenny cats, I was about to say, but it was really more like St. Brandon and the Devil." So maybe in the archetypical version, St. Brandon and the king of the rats (alike as two peas in a pod, remember?) fight. This is reminiscent of the purported objective of Purgatory: to purge the wickedness from one's soul. In Doherty's version, wickedness and the fairy cat fight, but nobody wins; they tear each other into pieces and the pieces run off into the woods. Whatever is going on here, it's not the original program.

Unresolved questions

What is the significance of the pieces running off into the woods? This is vaguely similar to the sidhe story in *Peace,* where the three children of the sidhe are turned into a flock of geese. It is also vaguely reminiscent of the story of the Kilkenny cats.