

Tang and Napoleon

The Urth list — 7 messages, 5 voices, 29 Jun 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5460>

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Stephen Hoy — 29 Jun 2009, 16:23

I recently picked up Peace for the first time, and now that I've completed a first read of this delightfully complex horror story. I'm mulling it over a thing or two. One thing we know about Peace, which we can learn either from the evidence in the novel or from urth-l archives, that Julius Smart's Cassionsville factory produces an acrid golden nectar marketed under the name of Tang. As I was reading, I noticed how frequently we run into 'tang' throughout Peace.

- the blade of a Boy Scout knife
- the sound of a bell at the bottom of the ocean (twice 'tang')
- china left by Olivia in the cave with the skull
- Olivia breeding a Pekinese to restore the lion-dogs of the Tang dynasty
- the porcelain pillow aka the Golden Millet Dream (written in the Tang dynasty)

I'm sure I'm missing quite a few others. One additional tang I found with a dictionary search,

- the title PEACE = tang in Welsh.

One other reminder...Olivia, Peacock, and Weer finding a skull in a mid-cliff cave:

She squeezed my hand, and after a moment whispered in my ear that she had left her little dish with the hen on top in the cave. "For me. Because I had olives in it--do you see, Den? And besides, it's china."

I pointed out that it was milk glass.

"The bottom," she said firmly as Professor Peacock took his seat, "was china."

- Peace p 59

I can't figure out whose skull lies inside the cave, but Olivia's words alerted me that something from the Golden Age of China lies at the bottom of Peace. The novel turns on the Golden Millet Dream, and that's more than sufficient reason for an author to offer variations on the Tang theme throughout the novel. Perhaps that's all there is to it.

On another topic, in speaking of the Dresden figure of Napoleon, Weer cites Ludwig's 1924 bio as a source for his understanding of the pose. Nowhere in Ludwig will you find a direct discussion of portraiture, nor is there a copy of David's Napoleon in His Study, the likely model for the Dresden figurine. However, Ludwig quotes a verbal portrait given by Madame de Stael, in which she states that Napoleon is at his best when he adopts a contemptuous air. Ludwig later elaborates this view of Napoleon, citing "the three fountains of his soul: contempt for mankind, understanding of the masses, and the critical aloofness of the foreigner who has chosen a new fatherland." Reminds me of Julius T. Smart.

Christopher Keiser — 29 Jun 2009, 17:58 · in reply to Stephen Hoy

Ahh .. I see someone else is having as much fun with PEACE as I am.

This is brilliant, I never thought to search the roots of the story in Chinese history. My reading list has now doubled. Maybe the story, the crimes and the missing pieces can be found in a retelling of a story from the Tang Dynasty.

One thing I noted previously while reading the history of the Tang Dynasty was that the capital of the Tang Dynasty was Chang'an, literally translated as "Perpetual Peace". After the fall of the Tang Dynasty, the city was renamed Xi'an, "Western Peace."

Also, something not mentioned before was that Macafee's name means "Black Peace."

Another new (I believe) etymology: Margaret = pearl; Lorn = lost. Lost Pearl. Much more to be said about that.

I read through Ludwig's Napoleon biography also, and agree that there is nothing there about the 'hand in the coat.' A story recounted by the author, however, tells of Napoleon wooing Marie by stating that he will put his hand under his coat and over his heart as a message of love. Not sure if that means anything.

In the end I went with the theory that this is a Borges-like technique. Wolfe lists the sources, but takes from them as he will. I believe the offensive aspect of Den's Napoleon factoid is hidden in PEACE, not Ludwig.

Also, I am of two minds about my research regarding the quote from the false Necronomicon wherein the writer's spirit guide leans in between the moon and the dog star. I took it as an astronomical question at first, but, due to the physics of it, many stars can appear between the Moon and the dog star (one of which is Canus Minor .. maybe?).

After thinking about it, could this be a pun? One who leans in between the moon and the dog star? A name for the dog star is Sirius.

Someone between seriousness (sirius-ness) and lunacy? The author himself? Maybe not ;-)

Thanks,

On Mon, Jun 29, 2009 at 12:23 PM, Stephen Hoy<stephenhoy at yahoo.com> wrote:

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aaron — 30 Jun 2009, 01:37 · in reply to Christopher Keiser

For some reason, I recall reading that the reason for the hand under the coat was to soothe gas pains... Perhaps I misremember.

Aaron Singleton

Christopher Keiser — 30 Jun 2009, 15:13 · in reply to aaron

Well there are lots of theories, I remember something about Napoleon having Klinefelter's syndrome and increased breast development was causing his nipples to run against his coat. However, the truth of the matter is less interesting:

http://www.napoleon-series.org/faq/c_hand.html

The hand in coat pose was just an artistic trope of the day.

But the question is: how is Wolfe using it? Several people, including me, have read through Ludwig, and find nothing about the pose, or, truly anything that would "invariably offend."

This could point to several uses.

1. Wolfe misread (or didn't read) Ludwig, and just cited the biography due to its popularity in that time period. If so, the reader would have to read Wolfe's mind to see which popular 'hand in coat pose' theory he was using in the novel.

2. The discussion of the Dresden Napoleon figure is a red-herring. The importance lies not in

Napoleon's pose, but, describes the reason Den never tells the whole truth, as he has learned that the whole truth "invariably offends."

3. Most of us agree that the figure represents Smart. Maybe Den is pulling a Borges, and citing a source, but making up his own story. If so, I think the reason for the pose is hidden in the story itself.

Or, all the above, or, none ;-)

On Mon, Jun 29, 2009 at 9:37 PM, aaron<aaronsingleton at gmail.com> wrote:
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Aaron Singleton

Stephen Hoy — 30 Jun 2009, 19:25 · in reply to Christopher Keiser

Another word or two about porcelain. It's formed from a hard clay paste heated to an extreme temperature.

Dresden china lays claim to being the first European hard paste porcelain. The story goes that an apothecary and his alchemist assistant reverse engineered the secret of hard paste porcelain, a secret which had been the exclusive province of the Middle Kingdom since the Tang dynasty. The apothecary died before the Meissen factory went into production, so the apothecary wound up with most of the personal profits. Wolfe doesn't mention this factoid in Peace, but it's a curious background item not much different from the Tilly/Smart partnership.

Dave Lebling — 30 Jun 2009, 23:09 · in reply to Christopher Keiser

I posted about Ludwig's book years ago when this came up. The theory that I like best is that the hand-in-coat pose was actually a common artistic convention in Napoleon's era, particularly in France. Today few have heard of it and so it seems strange and bizarre.

My take on Weer's story is that he was doing what many highly intelligent but socially awkward types do in conversation (at MIT we called it "nerdulating"), which is to claim more authoritative knowledge than he had.

-- Dave Lebling, aka vizcacha

Jeff Wilson — 03 Jul 2009, 02:13 · in reply to Stephen Hoy

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Janet Gleeson's _The Arcanum_ has the latest, greatest historical details of the story., with a summary on the page below

<http://www.amazon.com/Arcanum-Extraordinary-True-Story/dp/0446674842>

Bottger the alchemist died from inhaling too many fumes in the few short years of his employ/captivity by the Augustus the Strong, but due to lots of graft and corruption, lack of limited liability entities, and the preindustrial counterpart to industrial espionage, nobody really made a fortune on it other than Augustus, who did merely okay considering he was a king to start with and lost half his domain partway through the affair.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
< <http://www.io.com/~jwilson> >