

Short Story 13: The Changeling

The Urth list — 6 messages, 2 voices, 18 Jul 2014

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/6577>

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Robert Pirkola — 18 Jul 2014, 21:26

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First, you have the real-world interpretation that revolves around the 20 or so P.O.W.s from the Korean War that were captured by the Chinese, held in prison camps and brainwashed for three years. After this torturous ordeal, and being "convinced" by the Maoists, many decided to refuse repatriation and remain in China. Those that stayed went about setting up new lives in the People's Republic. Pete Palmer is one of these individuals. He mentions Panmunjom, the Korean town where talks were held that ultimately resulted in the release of the P.O.W.s on June 8, 1953. There is a Wikipedia entry listing all those persons who refused repatriation.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_American_and_British_defectors_in_the_Korean_War.

Interestingly, several of the persons listed have biographies that are similar to Pete Palmer's. Several of the listed individuals worked in paper mills in China before later returning to the United States. One of those individuals is listed as Sgt. Howard Adams from Corsicana, Texas not too far from Houston and thus almost certainly a person Korean War veteran Gene Wolfe would have been familiar with.

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Catholic church changing its ways from its old roots, with Papa as the Pope and Mama as the church and Maria as Mary etc. and Pete Palmer representing the turning away from the old Italian way of being Catholic". (For James Jordan's original analysis, see Urth Archives, Jim Jordan, July 16, 1997; Jim Jordan, July 22, 1997). I think James Jordan's instinct was right here in playing up the allusions to religious personages central to the Catholic faith but I think saw it as symbolic of a too recent split in the Catholic church. If one takes it back farther, to the Great Schism within the Catholic Church (c. 1054) that created the two

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The third interpretative layer is the Peter Pan allusions. At this point in the analysis it becomes obvious that Pan's refusal to grow up is meant to resonate with the entrenchment of the Catholic Church and the similar doctrinal orthodoxies adhered to by North and South Korea and on a more global level in the Cold War. The frustration of Pete Palmer (when he ultimately goes mad and sets the skiff drift away from the island) and the error of Papa Palmieri is the fact that history repeats itself and even though we all know the adage, we are still all doomed to repeat it. Pete Palmer thinks that he can change and still return to the place of his childhood and be accepted but he is not. People don't want change, which is why the whole town is perfectly happy to go along with calling Peter, though unchanging, something new every few years. Pete realizes that "Peter still has the same last name as always and I guess now he always will, but the boys don't call him by it much." Peter, like the ideological splits of the past that are certain to recur in the future, are fundamentally the same, but human societies don't recognize them as proceeding from the same source very often. Papa (the Pope) is wrong that eventually Peter (the conservative Catholic Church) will not be able to pass himself logically as a member of the family any longer (refuse rapprochement with the Eastern Church). Peter manages to continue doing so and the Schism still exists. Pope Paul VI attempted reconciliation to a certain degree in 1965 by nullifying one of the major acts that led to the Great Schism in 1054, but the Schism went right on persisting and probably always will. Perhaps it is pessimistic but in 1968 it seems Gene Wolfe thought it was equally likely that we were witnessing a rift in humanity that might persist for a millennium.

Marc Aramini — 19 Jul 2014, 00:07 · in reply to Robert Pirkola

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Robert Pirkola — 21 Jul 2014, 15:52 · follows Marc Aramini

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that Pete Palmer was held back a number of years in school so that he was in 4th grade in 1944 AND born in 1931? That non-magical explanation aside, I have a hard time disagreeing with your timeline. The purpose of my post was that I had just noticed while reading the various interpretations that have been used over the years for "The Changeling" that they were rarely, if ever, discussed all together so I tried my hand at doing so, adding in some details I had found and thought informative.

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Does anyone have the Best-Of Orbit collection with the Damon Knight preface that they can consult to clear this up?

Date: Fri, 18 Jul 2014 17:07:29 -0700

From: Marc Aramini <marcaramini at gmail.com>

Subject: Re: (urth) Short Story 13: The Changeling

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(not Jesus') (ie the changeling shows up when Maria is young).

The old man being dead could either mean the island of never land is the isle of death (closer than when Pete was young but farther from the shores of the real world than it is when he is on it compared to the other children) or that the father who takes Pete Palmer has passed on, his powerful evil might to bend nails broken.

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