

Fechin

The Urth list — 8 messages, 4 voices, 30 May 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4636>

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b sharp — 30 May 2006, 08:17

In a previous post I noted some interesting (largely monkey based) connections between Father Inire, Rudesind and Dorcas' husband. I was hoping someone would fill in the blank space since I had mentioned him in my list of red headed characters. Roy came through with Fechin.

You know, for all his babble about Fechin, Rudesind only mentions one painting by him; three girls dressing each other with flowers. To find out more about his artwork we have to go to the old person in Casdoe's house. In that person's long story we find that Fechin seems to only have two things he likes to draw: young women (spoiler) and himself. Naturally this calls to mind our old Lewis Carrollian friend Father Inire. But it also suggests someone else.

I think only once in this, or maybe it was some other archive, have I seen a suggestion that Fechin could be based on artist Nicolai Fechin. Russian-born he immigrated to the US and settled in the Southwest. In this online gallery (<http://www.erbzine.com/mag3/0349.html>) we see that two of his favorite subjects are young women and himself. I couldn't find a written physical description of him, but his Russian heritage would certainly allow for red hair. The self-portrait in the lower right, in front of the brick wall, could be showing red hair. Not only was he an artist but also....an architect! I would like to know if the Wolfes ever made a trip to the Fechin House in Taos, New Mexico. I bet it has its Secrets (let's hope not an antechamber or white wolves).

-bsharp

Andrew Taumoefolau — 30 May 2006, 11:59 · follows b sharp

Hi there,

You know, for all his babble about Fechin, Rudesind only mentions one painting by him; three girls dressing each other with flowers. To find out more about his artwork we have to go to the old person in Casdoe's house. In that person's long story we find that Fechin seems to only have two things he likes to draw: young women (spoiler) and himself. Naturally this calls to mind our old Lewis Carrollian friend Father Inire. But it also suggests someone else.

I'm at work and sadly didn't bring my novels with me, but off the top of my head, doesn't Rudesind also mention a Fechin painting of himself as a younger man (or boy)? I recall him going on for a bit about cleaning up an image of himself, and about how he wished somebody would clean him up in the same way.

Also, in the story the old man tells, Fechin draws two pictures, one on each side of the piece of paper the old man gave him: one of the girl that he's (presumably) just slept with, and one of the old man. Where is it mentioned in the text that Fechin has painted himself?

(I hope this goes to the right place, I haven't posted on a mailing list in years!)

(and also that I'm not completely wrong, heh!)

Cheers,

Andrew Taumoefolau
zenbot at gmail.com

b sharp — 30 May 2006, 14:17 · follows Andrew Taumoefolau

Andrew T. posts:

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Thank you Andrew! No, your memory of the story is quite perfect. I hinted at the solution to one of your objections in my last post. Actually, I thought I had already posted a follow-up which solved the rest of your objections but it appears to have gotten lost in cyberspace. I'll try to recreate my thoughts though I'm at work also and I can't quote text as I'd like (and as I did in the lost post).

I think both your legitimate objections stem from purposeful Gene Wolfe misleadings. First I must explain that I think Rudesind is Fechin. There are monkey-like similarities to the appearance of both. We know Fechin has red hair but we don't know the color of Rudesind's. The name Rudesind might be a clue.

Rudesind describes himself as being a gifted child artist. A "real" artist comes to visit him, to see the child's work. The text then implies that the visitor was Fechin and he made a drawing of the child which was sent to the House Absolute which becomes a Fechin. BUT (given my suspicion) I think it was actually a self-portrait by the child because the child is drawn with a tangerine and brushes. Both were promised to the child on completion of the portrait. But it is the artist who needs brushes near him, not the subject. Unless it is a self-portrait. And the traveller wanted to see examples of the child's work.

Moreover both Rudesind and Fechin are described as child artists who don't even have paper to draw on. A set of brushes (and a tangerine) would be a fabulous gift from the artist/art collector visiting from the House Absolute.

The next objection is the old person living in Casdow's house. There is something VERY strange about this person. Unreliable Severian refers to this old person as Casdow's father at one point and Becan's father at another. Casdow introduces her son to Severian but not the old person. Casdow says only one, unheard thing to the old person during Severian's 24 hour day with this family. I am pretty sure Wolfe is trying to hide the use of pronouns to hide the fact that Severian has mistaken an old woman for an old man. A hint to this deception might be use of the name Herais for Casdow's mother in Thrax. In early Christian legend, Herais was a woman who had changed into a man in mid-life. But perhaps the use of Herais is accidental by Wolfe (is it?).

I think this deception is used to disguise Severian's family tree, which I will get to in a later post, as well as confuse the Rudesind-Fechin issue.

Anyway, the old woman, as I'd like to call her now, talks about Fechin more the way a woman would. She admits he looks like a monkey but is so tall and "the handsomest boy around". He could make any girl do anything for him. Even share sex partners I think, though of course the old woman doesn't admit that part. Fechin sleeps with another girl (a beautiful, blonde I suspect) while (the future) old woman waits downstairs. The beautiful woman has been waiting and watching for Fechin in the upstairs window. There is another BotNS character whose first memory is sitting in a window, with pretty things, trays and a rood.

(BTW, there is another saint who is famous for sitting in a window (to hear Paul preach). But her name is Thecla. Might be a coincidence.. or...)

Anyway Fechin draws pictures of both of girls (on a rare piece of paper she provided). And draws one of himself I think. He keeps all the pictures. The old woman also talks about Fechin stealing a copper pan. He might use it as a boat, or might use it as a mirror...presumably to make (another) self-portrait.

I hate to stretch things too far but I'll mention that Rudesind describes his own, child's eyes in the painting as brown. Throughout the text Wolfe always uses the adjective "dark" for brown eyes, except twice (that I know).

First for Rudesind and later in a dream sequence, a Father-like Bull head has the only other "brown" eye we see. This may be a connection for both Rudesind and Fechin to Father Inire. Perhaps it should be noted that Saint Rudesind was a Benedictine monk, the order founded on the edict called "The Benedictine Bull". But maybe that's....never mind.

-bsharp

Roy C. Lackey — 30 May 2006, 19:51 · follows b sharp

bsharp wrote:

[snip]

The next objection is the old person living in Casdow's house. There is something VERY strange about this person. Unreliable Severian refers to this old person as Casdow's father at one point and Becan's father at another.

Then, for the first time since I had been in the house, the old man spoke. "Becan, come over here! I want to tell you about Fechin." It was a moment before I understood that he was addressing me under the impression that I was his son-in-law. (SWORD, chap. XV)

After a time Casdow, her father, and little Severian emerged. (chap. XVII)

I reflected that the old man must be exhausted by now, that it was surprising that his daughter could still urge him on; (ibid)

[snip]

Anyway, the old woman, as I'd like to call her now, talks about Fechin more the way a woman would. She admits he looks like a monkey but is so tall and "the handsomest boy around". He could make any girl do anything for him.

"His face wasn't a monkey's face at all. Fechin was handsome the handsomest around. He could always get food or money from a woman." (chap. XV)

I had gone across the room to listen to him, partly because he spoke indistinctly and partly out of respect, for his aged face reminded me a little of Master Palaemon's, though he had his natural eyes. "I once met a man of your age who had posed for Fechin," I said. (ibid)

[snip]

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First for Rudesind and later in a dream sequence, a Father-like Bull head has the only other "brown" eye we see.

Rich brown hair spilled down her back. I think I recognized her even before she turned and I saw the high cheekbones and her long, brown eyes it was Agia. (ibid)

She shook her head; the narrow, brown eyes were dancing. (chap. XVI)

-Roy

b sharp — 31 May 2006, 00:44 · follows Roy C. Lackey

Thanks Roy, you are a great resource. How could I forget Agia's eyes! The brown eyes give me another valued piece to the puzzle I had to guess about before. Not far to go, now.

Roy C. Lackey — 31 May 2006, 04:32 · follows b sharp

bsharp wrote:

Thanks Roy, you are a great resource.

You are quite welcome. While I'm thinking about it, there is another small matter you might want to consider regarding your "Naming Rule 2a". You

wrote:

I propose that it wasn't a mistake and that these characters are important in introducing this 2a. naming rule which is- The name of a kaibit shall be a derived, diminutive name of the cell donor.

Other of the few examples which could fit this naming rule are Domnicellae

and Domnina and Pelagia and Pega.<<

"Domnicellae" isn't a name; it is a rank among the Pelerines.

-Roy

b sharp — 05 Jun 2006, 19:06 · follows Roy C. Lackey

bob writes:

Hmm. Perhaps y'all knew he was historical, but I confess my own ignorance--absolute and complete.

Bob, I found Nicolai Fechin in a web search too. I was struck also by the fact that this Fechin and Wolfe's Fechin choose young women and themselves as favorite subjects. I've been trying to find out if he had red hair as a young man.

Fechin art gallery: <http://www.erbzine.com/mag3/0349.html>

-bsharp

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 05 Jun 2006, 19:16 · in reply to b sharp

Somehow ... I've never been able to take Fechin very seriously. I suspect after all these years that his resonated in my mind with Steppin Fetchit.

--Dan'l, embarassed

I do not fear Satan half so much as I fear those who fear him.

-- St Teresa of Avila

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>