

notes from abroad

The Whorl list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 12 Sep 1997

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m.driussi — 12 Sep 1997, 16:10

Reply: Item #2372125 from WHORL at LISTS.BEST.COM@INET#

(Rostrum, FWIW I'd go along with vizcacha's Cordwainer Smith reading plan, 100%.)

Hey, I've received a letter from G.E. Brain, a new correspondent in England, responding to Q&D and AE& chapbooks. Here are a couple of points:

"Aer -- also Gaelic spelling of the old Scottish town of Ayr -- where GW's mother's family came from originally."

This is surprising to me but it sounds plausible since I know Gene Wolfe's mother's name was Mary "Fannie" Olivia Ayers Wolfe (as given in LETTERS HOME). (Again: watch for characters named Olivia; like the aunt in PEACE and the sleeper in the Whorl.) I vaguely remember an interview somewhere in which Gene Wolfe talked a bit about his family (a Faulknerian Christmas scene comes to mind); I also figured that G.E. Brain got some info from CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS, but when I looked in CONTEMPORARY AUTHORS again I didn't find any real info about mother's family.

So, does anybody have any other leads on this? Granted, the name "Ayers" looks like it could come from a town in Scotland, but the surname reference book I looked into mainly dealt with this name's legendary (i.e., spurious) origins without mentioning a town at all. Maybe somebody remembers which interview it was that I referred to above?

"Cant -- early 18th century slang (no entry)
some -- Rhyming slang -- `lily' = short for `lily white' = right
cf cockney rhyming slang in London;
come from Romany;
some still in common use in UK"

What I like about this note is that I already had several pieces but I couldn't figure how "lily" could equal "true": I knew that cockney, in addition to rhyming like a catachrest with an attitude, tends to use two or more words for one ("brahms and lizt" = pissed = drunk for Americans; "trouble and strife" = wife; you can see the pattern here--the two words are a natural pair, but the first word is what we might call in armchair linguist mode the tenor clue, and the last word is likewise the rhyming clue); I could also see that "lily" could be an allusion to white; but I didn't think of it as a contraction of "lily white," nor make the decision that "lily" wasn't some Romany (aka "Gypsy") derived word; and it isn't "true," it is "right." (Probably somebody around here tried to tell me all of this before.)

Lily white means right. That's lily!

(Cordwainer Smith tidbit: my local library files THE BEST OF CORDWAINER SMITH under the

author's birth name rather than pen name "Cordwainer Smith." Okay, who is the smarty pants who did that? Do we search for "Mark Twain" under Clemens? NO! Gimme a break! "That's it--disband the guild!!" Then again, filing in a Chinese language library under the Chinese characters of his name, which he knew and used, now =that= would be kind of cool!)

=mantis=