

Fechin

The Urth list — 5 messages, 4 voices, 15 Oct 1998

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Robert Borski — 15 Oct 1998, 14:37

Is anybody beside me disturbed by how often Fechin's name is mentioned in the Book of the New Sun? He seems to be extraordinarily well known for an artist, given the nature of the Commonwealth and its citizenry, in an age where there seems to be little in the way of media dissemination. Yes, it's expected the upper classes might be familiar with his work, but he seems almost to have cult status. I also find it odd that two of the characters we meet--Rudeskind, who claims Fechin sketched him as a youth; and old Becan's father, high in the faraway mountains, who claims to have been a childhood friend--both assert personal knowledge of him.

On the other hand, what I find interesting is how many people are soon claiming they know Severian once he's become Autarch. Rudeskind, oddly enough of all people, is the first to point this out, observing, in a long, long series of examples, "Been a while now since I met a woman didn't kiss you and sew up a hole in your pants...You're every boy that's ever been here, and I've heard stories put on you that belong to men that was old when I was just a boy, and I've heard about things I did myself, seventy years ago."

Severian also lists "artisan" when he talks about the commonality of most of the previous autarchs.

Just a thought, but is it possible Fechin was an autarch who was once a painter?

Robert Borski

m.driussi — 17 Oct 1998, 16:10 · follows Robert Borski

Robert Borski,

That Fechin may have been autarch would appear to be quite difficult to prove in the text, but it doesn't seem impossible.

I share your interest in Fechin as a mysterious, invisible thread that connects elements otherwise impossibly removed (the Old Man of Becan's house and Rudesind of Nessus). But my inspiration is that this odd "coincidence," whatever the semantic/thematic significance of the touchstone actually is and/or might be, this echo, as I say, signals what I am henchforth beginning to publically call a "station of the sundial."

There, I've probably blown most of the thunder potential for an essay. So I might as well muddle through a bit more.

There are scenes in Severian's narrative that are clear and obvious echoes to other scenes contained within the text. Rudesind himself is an obvious example: the second time we see him, we wonder along with Severian. Is the whole second Rudesind scene just to put extra push to the "corridors of the Library stretch far beyond Nessus" metaphor? No, of course not--but it sure

seems like it at very first, because the effect includes "reality confusion" in reader and Severian.

(In addition to anything else, the thread between Old Man and Rudesind, between wilderness hut and vast cosmopolitan city, serves to deflate Severian of any sense he may have of "escape," "isolation," "progress," etc. It is as if he is still in the Old Citadel he was born and raised in.)

Another very clear case is when scenes from "Eschatology & Genesis" are echoed or prefigured. This happens in at least three obvious places--Severian's experience in the Botanic Gardens (long before he is exposed to the play itself) is close to Scene I; Valeria (who has never been exposed to the play) on the throne as the deluge comes enacts Scene III; and everybody's favorite mysterious Contessa (V, ch. 41) from Scene IV.

What I am saying is that these echoes amount to the hands of a clock returning to a position on the clockface, or, to keep with the solar images, the shadow of the gnomon returning to an hour on the sundial.

If I remember correctly, a similar echo went on with the Green man hero of THERE ARE DOORS--stepping between realities and/or "billypilgriming," to use that wonderful term, and yet often winding up back at the play or the boxing match or another tableau.

(In fact Billy Pilgrim has this exact same thing: he tends to go back to select moments of his life, the most visited being the nadir of Dresden. Billy Pilgrim never blips to one of the mundane moments of everyday life that knit together the touchstones that form his "stations"; Billy never lives real time in real time. But now I =am= wandering away . . . Billy's story is more one of a life's trials and a few joys revisited from near the end of life as if in memory, yet made concrete. The Wolfe stories are more of one's present tense life being shaped by unseen forces and patterns.)

=mantis=

Kieran Cleary — 07 Dec 1998, 15:42 · follows m.driussi

mantis,

I don't have Lexicon Urthus to hand, so you probably already have this, but seeing as St. Fechin's 7th century church is in my locale, I should report that:

"Legend tells us that St. Fechin was of the royal blood of Ireland, a descendent of Fionn Fuathart, brother to Conn of the Hundred Battles, and of the same race as St. Bridget. St. Nathy of Achonry supposedly educated St. Fechin. The Annals tell us that St. Fechin was also abbot at Cong in County Mayo and at Fore in Westmeath. He died in 664 AD.", Archaeology in County Sligo, Highwood Community Resource Centre, 1998

FWIW.

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m.driussi — 07 Dec 1998, 18:28 · follows Kieran Cleary

Hello Sligo (and hello Kieran Cleary)!

Well we do have some info on Fechin via THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS (which mentions the Co. Sligo), but the stingy Lexicon only says "Saint Fechin died 665" (date from Oxford book, at odds with your date) because I couldn't find any hint leading to "artist," "portraits," or even "painting" or "art" (i.e., threads leading to Fechin of Urth) connected with this saint.

According to the Old Man in Casdow's house, Fechin of Urth had red hair on his head and arms (III, ch. 15). So that's an easy association with "Irish" right there (it also links back to journeyman Roche's red hair, which prompted the autarch-as-procurer to speak about how "Far to the south, in the narrow lands, the savages paint a fire spirit much like you" [I, ch. 9] . . .), but it isn't much to go on.

According to the Oxford, Fechin is also known as Vigean, which "corrupted to Virgin" (I like that!). Fechin had a cult in Scotland.

Trying to deduce the name of the Old Man in Casdow's house by triangulating "Rudesind" with "Fechin," in the hope that these two saints might have a saintly friend in common (ooh, clever!), makes the "crash and burn at the starting gate" as Rudesind is a 10th century fellow!

Maybe somebody can find the root meaning (onomastic) of Fechin (it ain't in any of my books), and maybe this has some connection to Fechin of Urth.

=mantis=

Derek Bell — 14 Dec 1998, 20:05 · follows m.driussi

In message <199812071836.KAA08451 at lists1.best.com>, m.driussi at genie.com writes:

According to the Old Man in Casdow's house, Fechin of Urth had red hair on his head and arms (III, ch. 15). So that's an easy association with "Irish" right there (it also links back to journeyman Roche's red hair, which prompted the autarch-as-procurer to speak about how "Far to the south, in the narrow lands, the savages paint a fire spirit much like you" [I, ch. 9] . . .), but it isn't much to go on.

Just to note that Irish people aren't really that more redhaired than most other European peoples. Unfortunately, I don't have figures to back that up, but I haven't noticed any visible difference.

According to the Oxford, Fechin is also known as Vigean, which "corrupted to Virgin" (I like that!). Fechin had a cult in Scotland.

I wouldn't be surprised if Fechin or some of his monks founded a church or even monastery in Scotland - it's not too far from Sligo to Scotland.

Derek