

A Fish story

The Urth list — 4 messages, 3 voices, 01 May 2002

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Matthew Davis — 01 May 2002, 22:25

"A Fish Story." Is the key to understanding this short short to be found in the name "Rob Salmon"? (Or something like that--can't find my F&SF with the story at the moment) I.e., do ghosts return to the place they're "born"

too?

I found this one pretty impenetrable myself.

My interpretation of "A Fish Story" is about the fear and denial of the truth (the opening line points this out - "I've always been embarrassed by the truth"); and that how even when you try to evade the truth it will still come to haunt you. The crux of the story is Rab's insistence that his aunt NOT tell him whether there's an afterlife. At the end of the story when his friends lie to him by telling him, still that lie turns out to be true. And if I remember correctly a fish story is normally a yarn or exaggerated lie - a false and distancing form of communication. Rab doesn't want to communicate (see the fact that he assumes that the hospital is only able to contact him because the ghostly Rab gave them his phone number). At the heart of the story lies Rab's less than sterling nature. He's constantly trying to avoid facing up to the events that have happened to him, as a child, as an adult, in his relationships with his friends and his family. At the hospital, meeting up with his aunt, there is a moment of self-recognition in how his aunt reflects all the things he's been trying to escape. Rab has shut something out of his life. The vision he has of himself unites both Rab's fear of the transcendent and also his knowledge of whatever it is that he's lacking, resulting in this ghost of his better self, the Rab that he isn't, throwing into sharp contrast the unpleasant Rab that he is.

What to make of his name "Rab Sammon"? I don't know.

Anybody want to make this out as some sort of weird religious allegory (fish in greek (ichthys) = christ), please feel free. Rab as a sort of anti-apostle, the religious revelation refused?

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 01 May 2002, 22:30 · follows Matthew Davis

What to make of his name "Rab Sammon"? I don't know.

Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is the Irish legend of the Salmon of Wisdom. Then there's always "Samhain."

But I haven't read the story...

Matthew Davis — 01 May 2002, 22:46 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

----- Original Message -----

From: "Dan'l Danehy-Oakes" <ddanehy at siebel.com>
To: <urth at urth.net>

Sent: Wednesday, May 01, 2002 11:30 PM

Subject: RE: (urth) A Fish story

What to make of his name "Rab Sammon"? I don't know.

Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is the Irish legend of the Salmon of Wisdom. Then there's always "Samhain."

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Rab as a contraction of rabbi? Contraction of Robert?

Apparently Sammon as a surname is 1. a contraction of Solomon. 2. a variant of Salmon. 3. a variant of Seaman. Also, apparently there's something called a Sammon projection which is a nonlinear mapping of high dimensional vectors onto a two dimensional space.

None of these seem highly pertinent.

Andy Robertson — 02 May 2002, 20:19 · follows Matthew Davis

----- Original Message -----

From: "Matthew Davis" <matthew at michaelscycles.freemove.co.uk>

None of these seem highly pertinent.

The Salmon of Wisdom is a figure in Irish myth.

<quote>

Tuan, like Suibhne and Merlin, becomes the leader of the stag herds of Ireland, before taking the shape, in turn, of a boar, a hawk and a salmon, and finally a man again. Every time he wearsies with age, he returns to a certain cave where he fasts for three days, the period favored by Celtic seers for mantic journeys. Like Fintan, he undergoes intense hardships that ring with all the authenticity of lived experience:

I passed into the shape of a river salmon....was vigorous and well-fed and my swimming was good, and I used to escape from every danger and from every snare - to wit, from the hands of fishermen, and from the claws of hawks, and from fishing spears - so that the scars which each one of them left are still upon me.

Tuan's life as a salmon is brought to an end when fishermen of the chieftain Cairell catch him and serve him to his wife who eats the whole fish herself. She becomes pregnant with Tuan who remains conscious while in her womb, fully aware of who he is and of everything that is happening in Ireland.

So in a mysterious reversal which serves to highlight the magical interplay of human and non-human forms in the Celtic tradition, the man that eats the salmon to become a seer turns into the salmon who is eaten so that a man can be born.

..

</quote>

This may or may not be relevant. I have not read "A Fish Story".

But I will remark that, while we talk a lot about the Biblical references in the Briah cycle, the echoes from Celtic and Nordic myth - such as Horn's very obvious identification with Odin - seem to pass most of us by.

Urd, Skuld and Verdane are Odinistic in origin, for example - they are the names of the Norns.

hartshorn