

McKillip question

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 16 Jan 1999

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Alice Turner — 16 Jan 1999, 23:41

Begging your pardons, but hoping the group might appreciate something novel to focus on for a minute or two, I'd like to solicit your opinions, very much including lurkers' opinions, on something I'm scratching my head over just now. I've been asked for an essay on Patricia McKillip, which I was pleased to accept, as I more or less "discovered" *THE FORGOTTEN BEASTS OF ELD* 25 years ago and may have had something to do with its riding over works by established writers like Poul Anderson to win the very first World Fantasy Award.

The review will focus on the Riddlemaster trilogy, coming out for the first time in a omnibus edition this March. But I have for the past few weeks been reading her books of the 1990s, the only ones still in print (i.e. that I could get) except for *ELD* (still magical) and the galley of the trilogy, which I haven't allowed myself to read yet. What I am puzzling over, quite seriously, is why a prize-winning, gifted (she really is, take my word for it) and fairly prolific writer 20-odd years down the line has not moved beyond the standard tropes and situations of High Fantasy--princes, dragons, firebirds, mages, spells, sentimental feudalism along the standard medieval Celtic line. Any thoughts beyond "that's what puts bread on the table," "she's really just a YA writer" and ""she's comfortable in that world" will be gratefully accepted. (Use my email address; I don't want to burden the list--also, you don't need to have read McKillip; stray thoughts are welcome.)

To take it just a tad further, think how far Le Guin, who started with these very tropes in *Earthsea*, has gone. Think of Vance, who writes the same book over and over (like Iris Murdoch in the mainstream), but has made an enjoyable and recognizable style and world of his own, or Alice Hoffman who has taken the conventions into the mainstream, or how Crowley has used them for his own purposes, or how Swanwick has defined "hard fantasy."

Thanks in advance,

-alga