

Fairy blood

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 02 May 2000

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Alice Turner — 02 May 2000, 09:19

Jack wrote:

That's pretty much true, although there seems to be a growing body of stories/books dealing with the interpenetration of faery and mundanity. I'm thinking of Emma Bull's overrated *_War for the Oaks_* and Charles de Lint's stuff, all of which seems to work from the assumption that the faery place has been/is being marginalized, although it is still accessible--and the upshot seems generally to be that encountering faery enriches existence.

This body of work has been christened (poorly, I think) Urban Fantasy, and I suspect that a lot of it is written in imitation of *_Little, Big_*, despite the fact that they seem to disagree with it premise. (In fact, I seem to recall that the most recent trade paperback release of LB was touted as both Urban Fantasy and Magic Realism.)

Michael Swanwick called it (or something like it) "hard fantasy" in a rather nice essay that I read because it got reprinted in an (otherwise fictional, or at least fiction) "Best Of" collection. It's a better term because it doesn't require an urban setting. Most of LB isn't urban.

There is one exceptional treatment of the boundaries between faery and mundanity that leaps to my mind: Robert Holdstock's excellent *Mythago Wood* books. That's a very different notion of faery--actually an externalized Jungian collective unconscious--but it has a similar effect of drawing people in and making them less than they were. In fact, I'd say there's a strong streak of Lovecraft through the *Mythago* books.

I wonder about that. I felt that Holdstock was coming from the older British tradition, and also from the fact that Britain (including Scotland) during the 60s and 70s was a place where far-out experimental psychology, with and without drugs--generally LSD--, was getting a lot of attention (Laing and such, also Doris Lessing). I've only read the one (first) book, but I did review it, so I read it carefully. LSD as a psychiatric drug makes a lot of sense re that book.

Adam wrote:

Alice does not disapprove of Smoky's adultery because his task is to father children for the fairies.

But Alice is very upset when she thinks that Smoky has fathered Sophie's child (because this somehow deprives her of her starring role in the Tale? or because it indicates that Sophie, not Alice, is the bride picked out by the fairies for Smoky?). It's only when she learns he hasn't that she becomes tolerant of the adultery.

Yes, I recanted on this.

Don't you have it backwards? The adultery took place before Lilac existed. Or is there a later adultery that I missed.

Right. No, no later adultery.

I remembered the part about August being everyone's progenitor. And, from a later post, you regard the single eyebrow as the sign of fairy blood. I'm no expert on fairy lore, but going solely by LB itself, it seems to me that the single eyebrow might well be a sign of the ability to see fairies, rather than of being a fairy. And there are other things in LB which make me skeptical of Violet's being a fairy or part-fairy. For one thing, there is no explicit indication in LB (unlike in earlier lore) that fairies do or can mate with humans. (Dr. Bramble's lecture is hardly reliable information.) And the fairies Crowley depicts don't seem the type to mate with humans. Finally, Violet is just depicted as too human to be of the same species as the very inhuman Mrs. Underhill.

The first time I read the book, I think I took it that way--that the eyebrow was simply an indicator that one could see the fairies. The second time, too many clues turned up--the fact that the fairies are dying out, August's impregnating all the girls--for it to be logical any other way but that the fairies had figured out a way to perpetuate themselves. Violet seems pretty normal--fairy wives, traditionally, can pass, to a degree--but Lilac is weird enough, and so are Alice's girls. (The fact that Smoky is "chosen" and has to be approved of by the fairies seems to indicate that his genetic stock is compatible.) What motivation would the fairies have, otherwise, for "saving" this particular family? For the world isn't, after all, destroyed, and we can envision a recovery, but this family won't be in it.

But (assuming the Drinkwaters have fairy blood), it's not knowledge of having fairy blood that counts, it's the blood itself. George doesn't know he has fairy blood, neither does Auberon, and Sylvie doesn't even know she's a Drinkwater. It still sounds more like a parody of Christianity than Gnosticism to me.

Well, that's latency, which I did get into earlier. George doesn't know, but he does pass the genes down to Lilac. And to Sylvie. And neither George nor Auberon has the eyebrow, though Auberon develops it later. I don't think all of this is going to add up exactly. Most novelists don't quite think that way; they're happy with a general grand idea. I don't mean that as a cop-out, but when I pressed JC for geographical details on just where in Upstate New York the house was situated, he said "Oh, somewhere near Brigadoon." Which is actually a pretty good answer.

-alga