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The Urth list — 5 messages, 5 voices, 03 May 2000

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Dan Parmenter — 03 May 2000, 13:50

From: "Alice Turner" <pei047 at attglobal.net>

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.

Bingo. Also bear in mind the name of the central family in the Mythago Wood books - Huxley. Given Aldous Huxley's interest in hallucinogens, this is a clear signpost. Without being an expert on Jung or Joseph Campbell, their influence also seems to loom over the series. I'm a huge fan of several of the Mythago books, especially the first one. I don't see it as being in the Lovecraft (beyond the "my father is a lunatic who toys with Strange Forces which later consume me" angle) or the British fantasy tradition at all - I've always thought of MW as almost being the anti-Narnia. It's a "Wood Between the Worlds", but Ryhope Wood is a brutal and savage place. Holdstock's early writing is unsubtle and brutal as well, but filled with many images that linger.

The first sequel, LAVONDYSS, continues the feel of the first, but the subsequent books in the series like THE HOLLOWING and GATE OF IVORY/GATE OF HORN are, IMO, pretty bad. Everything that was ambiguous and mysterious in the first book has been reduced to the level of fantasy role-playing game mechanics, indeed, it often reads like a description of an FRP campaign rather than a novel. The other problem with the series is that Holdstock has now told us the exact same story from three different points of view (including the novella called "The Bone Forest") which is much less interesting than it sounds.

Lex Shellac

p.s. Re: Emma Bull - an appreciation of electrified folk-rock music of the Fairport Convention school can be very helpful for stuff like WAR OF THE OAKS. The book itself practically tells you what the soundtrack is by dropping in various musical references.

p.p.s. Hmmm, now I'm getting off-topic. I suspect that Gene Wolfe wouldn't really like any of these books :-) There, I got him in!

Alice Turner — 03 May 2000, 23:07 · follows Dan Parmenter

From the Kind and Helpful Ratso (what a paradox!)

"I came upon a Persian parable called _The Parliament of the Birds_, which supplied me with a plot remarkably -- uncannily -- suited to what I had already thought up.

For heavens's sake! Chaucer wrote "The Parliament of Foules" (Fowls) which I read in somewhat cribbed Middle English back when I was an English major in college, but I don't remember (a) it (though if I had the energy I could leap from my seat and consult my old textbook); or (b) that there was a Persian original. Where would Chaucer have got it from? But I'm sure he did. Crowley is quite scrupulous with period details in -The Deep- (as I prove in my essay on the same that so few of you [humiliatingly for me] wish to read).

"Lastly, I had toyed for some time with the idea of writing a story,
or a
series of stories, about a powerful mage who solves crimes or puzzles
like
a detective, puzzles that turn out to be cosmogonic or otherwise
earthshaking: the reawakening of a sleeping emperor, for instance --
or
something like that.

That's Hawksquill, sort of. He didn't pull that part off, I feel.

So, this all came together. A last quotation: "... Among the very
first
images I had had of my family was of a man packing his married life in
a
bag and setting off on a final journey: and some eight years later I
wrote
down that scene, close (at last!) to the end of the book, the book you
have."
So, there it is for those who don't have it.

Yes, the Gladstone bag, which I (erroneously, but not, I feel, altogether erroneously) attributed to Mary Poppins in yet another of my underappreciated essays. It's a marvelous image.

Rat rants on re Hawksquill (and given the Alice factor here, perhaps you ought to stick to my Vironese name):

Unpersuaded am I, Alice. It does not seem so simple, and Ariel
Hawksquill
is the problem. Where does she get fairy blood? But then again
(against
me), she's not conceived in the pentacle either. I guess you could say
that
Oliver H. gets "infected" by Violet -- a kind of Fairy VD -- and then
this
is passed to his daughter Ariel.

Hawksquill is a cousin, but not on the Violet side. Ayee. No rejoinder.

The chart does not strike me as "evidence" either way. The backstory,
it
seems to me, is to establish that the Rev. Bramble was an apostate
Anglican, turning away from Christianity and possibly scientific
humanism
toward fairy magic, and this is the point of initiation of the "tale."

That sounds somewhat accusatory. Lots of Victorians were experimenting with "spiritism" and that's what JC was playing with, granted.

From mantis, alluding to yet another of my undervalued essays:

Which is why I brought up Tarot before. As alga mentioned long time
past,
the tarot deck varies in number of cards (there isn't really a

"standard"

except by more or less arbitrary), but it is always much more than 52.

The

52 deck, aka the deck of standard playing cards, forms the basis for the JCdeck (not to be confused with "the Crowley Tarot"!!) as it appears in THE DEEP and LITTLE, BIG.

So you see where I'm heading with this: the old "real" Tarot reflects the old order of fairies. The shifting of numbers, arranged from high to low as if a sequence across time, reflects their real dying off. Through the history of the real Tarot deck, from many cards to fewer, we see reflected the hidden history of the fairies.

(Over-reading? Who, me?)

Well, you do overread. But JC plays fast and loose with the Tarot, adapting it to suit his needs, and I think this is entirely legitimate in his contexts.

Questions of heaven and hell. Granted, there is ambiguity as to whether the formerly human are evolving upward toward angel status or devolving downward into nature idols. This is a point you've made and I agree with it.

That whatever-it-is that happens to Alice & Co. isn't simply death seems to be the case, because if so, then Smoky would show up at the party, since we know he just died. Maybe. That is, there is some sort of division between Smoky and the group. So you (Nutria) suppose that he has gone to heaven, while the group (Alice & Co., not alga & friends) takes a detour through hell.

No I don't! I don't accept this at all. I don't (a) think there's any objective (literary) evidence that Smoky has gone to heaven. (Adam, prove me wrong.) As I've said, I have doubts that JC remains a Christian, and though I also said that Smoky is a kind of saint, I am not sure that the reward for this kind of sainthood is "heaven." As opposed to (b) hell---I absolutely reject that, in this novel, fairyland, or wherever it is that our friends end up in, is equated with hell. I know that other writers have experimented with that, but no, no, no, not here.

Possible. But you know how JC keeps turning things over, examining things in other works: don't forget "Her Bounty to the Dead" (in ANTIQUITIES). Here the afterlife situation is basically this (iirc): there is only so

much room in heaven, so if you'd rather go into non-being, that's fine. Or "everybody gets the afterlife they want and feel they deserve" kind of a thing.

So, in the JC universe, there are many options as to "where Smoky goes when he dies."

Okay, you tempered it. But you're still being kind of sneaky.

To which the Rightious Rat added:

Sorry I was not more clear. I don't think Alice et al. really died, but that their transition is parallel to Smoky's death. "heaven and hell"

are

probably too loaded as terms to describe the two avenues.

Agreed!

-alga!

Peter Westlake — 04 May 2000, 10:36 · follows Alice Turner

At 23:07 2000-05-03 -0400, Alice Turner wrote:

... Crowley is quite scrupulous with period

details in -The Deep- (as I prove in my essay on the same that so few of you [humiliatingly for me] wish to read).

I'd like to read it! It was lucky I noticed this sentence, though, since I am skipping the Little, Big discussion until I have the time to read it (the book, that is) properly. It's most frustrating not being able to take part! Not that I would have much to offer, very likely; I am still trying to spot the hidden story (if there is one) in "Pandora by Holly Hollander". Clues, anyone?

SBear.

Adam Stephanides — 05 May 2000, 08:51 · follows Peter Westlake

alga wrote:

Crowley is quite scrupulous with period

details in -The Deep- (as I prove in my essay on the same that so few of you [humiliatingly for me] wish to read).

The only reasons I didn't request it are that I don't have my copy of THE DEEP with me and remember almost nothing about it, and I don't know if my dinky laptop can even handle attachments.

Yes, the Gladstone bag, which I (erroneously, but not, I feel, altogether erroneously) attributed to Mary Poppins in yet another of my underappreciated essays.

Not by me; once I finally saw it (I switched over from the digest to the individual messages, and temporarily missed a few) I liked it a lot, although the wrapping difficulty did make it hard to read. I spotted a couple allusions to children's literature in LB that your article didn't mention, but I'm sure it wasn't intended to be exhaustive. I'd love to see an exhaustive list as a first step towards a set of annotations, but I'm not sure this list is the proper place to collect material.

From mantis, alluding to yet another of my undervalued essays:

As I wrote in my reply to mantis, I never saw this one (on the tarot), but I'd like to.

--Adam

matthew.malthouse — 08 May 2000, 11:37 · follows Adam Stephanides

On 05/04/2000 04:07:37 AM Alice Turner wrote:

From the Kind and Helpful Ratso (what a paradox!)!

"I came upon a Persian parable called _The Parliament of the Birds_, which supplied me with a plot remarkably -- uncannily -- suited to what I had already thought up.

For heavens's sake! Chaucer wrote "The Parliament of Foules" (Fowls) which I read in somewhat cribbed Middle English back when I was an English major in college, but I don't remember (a) it (though if I had the energy I could leap from my seat and consult my old textbook); or (b) that there was a Persian original. Where would Chaucer have got it from?

Aescelus? (pardon my spellin')

Matthew