

Mopsa the Fairy

The Urth list — 3 messages, 2 voices, 29 Aug 2000

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Adam Stephanides — 29 Aug 2000, 11:27

An anthology recently appeared edited by Martin H. Greenberg entitled "My Favorite Fantasy Story" (published by Daw) in which a selection of prominent fantasy authors were each asked to "pick the one fantasy story that spoke to them, touched them, made them reexamine the genre in a new light." Wolfe was one of the authors included, and his choice was "Mopsa the Fairy," a nineteenth-century children's story--really a short novel--by Jean Ingelow. Among the things that Wolfe says about the story in his brief introduction is that "Ingelow dared answer a question that no other such writer has even dared ask: If there really were a fairy princess, what would she be like?"

So we Wolfeans have another text to mine for possible allusions by Wolfe. I confess that after a first reading, no examples of influence sprang to mind, though there are thematic similarities with THERE ARE DOORS.

--Adam

William Ansley — 06 Sep 2000, 23:24 · follows Adam Stephanides

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--Adam

I find this a very odd thing for Gene Wolfe to say, considering it is a certainty (based on the evidence of "The Eyeflash Miracles") that Wolfe read Baum's Oz books. Ozma is nothing if she is not Baum's idea of what a "real" fairy princess would be like. She may not be a terribly *inspired* fairy princess, but she is definitely a fairy princess.

I suppose it all depends on what Gene Wolfe means by 'really' in "if there really were a fairy princess". Based on my (mostly failed) attempts to understand his fiction, I must admit I have no idea how I would go about trying to understand his reality.

William Ansley

Adam Stephanides — 07 Sep 2000, 13:48 · follows William Ansley

William Ansley wrote:

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Wolfe explicitly mentions Baum in his introduction; he says: "You will find much here that recalls Oz; you will also find the eeriness that L. Frank Baum set out to banish from his own fairyland. (He was thirteen when 'Mopsa' was issued, and it must have frightened him.)" And: "Ingelow was writing for boys as single-mindedly as Baum ever wrote for girls..." I haven't read enough Baum since childhood to judge the truth of these statements.

I suppose it all depends on what Gene Wolfe means by 'really' in "if there really were a fairy princess". Based on my (mostly failed) attempts to understand his fiction, I must admit I have no idea how I would go about trying to understand his reality.

And I must admit that after a single reading of "Mopsa," I don't know what it is about the fairy princess in this story that makes Wolfe regard her as realer than any other fairy princess. Nor do I share Wolfe's enthusiasm for the story, although that's a common reaction of mine to the writers Wolfe lauds (with the exception of Lafferty).

--Adam