

“...there ought to be one fairy for every boy and girl.”

“Ought to be? Isn't there?”

“No. You see children know such a lot now, they soon don't believe in fairies, and every time a child says, 'I don't believe in fairies,' there is a fairy somewhere that falls down dead.”¹



Recently, in the woods not far from here (relatively) we held a secret gathering of young men and women – I do still count myself among their number as of even date – from all over the city. We are not a secret society – I only say, a secret gathering, as since most people don't enjoy the things we do, we generally don't publish it. A great part of the time we discussed things or listened to lectures. We discussed metaphysics, semantics, motivational architecture, improvisational strategy, abandonment law, flotsam, jetsam, zealous moderation, and so forth. There was quite a *lot* of talking, if you ask me, and every year it always borders on being a little more than 'just enough.' We are nothing if not passionate about our pet topics.² But over against these intellectual pursuits were quite a lot of enjoyable rigours and rituals, which, being more physical and interactive, were also more fully spiritual: the group theatre, the ballroom dancing; we even played a tournament, double-elimination, of *ullamalitztli*, the ancient Aztec game where your team tries to hit a small rubber ball into a stone hoop using only elbows, knees, hips and head. We set up circles of torches around a central fire at night in the forest, and sang rounds in Latin and *koine* Greek. Obviously, as Pliable said to Christian upon hearing his description of the Celestial City, “The hearing of this is enough to ravish one's heart.” But, you see, as I said, not everyone enjoys such things. Everyone *could* enjoy them, and *should* enjoy them, but you see, most people won't even if they get the chance.

One morning during the week, I struck up a conversation with a girl named Brianna, partly to practice my Portuguese, but mainly to ask her about a friend of mine that she also knew. I had not seen this friend since we started these 'secret' gatherings, and his name was Thomas.

“Why don't you invite Thomas?” I said. “He's one of us! And you would be able to drive together.” She said, “it's the drive I'm afraid of; not the drive here so much as the drive home. Thomas finds something to disagree with in just about everything. I feel sure the whole drive home would be him explaining to me about everything he felt was wrong with everything that was said over the week, or with the arrangements, or with the thinking behind everything.” This was news to me. “He's never disagreed with anything *I've* said,” I said. Her dampness was not to be fazed by this merely empirical challenge. “Well then that's just because you've had the good fortune never to say anything he found fault with.” I contemplated the chances of this happening by accident. She said, “He and my dad went to a lecture once, and afterwards he spent three whole hours sitting with him in the car, talking about everything he disagreed with.” I inwardly conceded that her understanding of the case was probably more informed than mine. I thought about our correspondence and how much he really would enjoy it if only he would allow himself to. I knew what it was like. I had been like Thomas. Even if, by some accident, he found himself in the room with us, he *wouldn't* have been

¹ *Peter Pan*, J.M. Barrie – ch. 3

² That is meant generally of the race; you may quote me on it.

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able to enjoy it. (Which was Brianna's point exactly.) Ah well, I thought, no one wants to bring a skeptic to a sacred forest council. But he's missing out.

Even granting Brianna's account of him to be not quite square on *all* points, it is unavoidable that one way or another, Thomas left a very real, and not altogether favourable impression on her spirit. In fact it is not too much to say that she was dead to him, in a passive kind of way. When you're in the room with a 'true believer', with an Affirmer, there is the spark of recognition, and the comfortable safety – not necessarily of being on the same page about things – but simply of not having to defend yourself or be on your guard or justify everything to this person in your head. When there is a skeptic in the room, on the other hand, things that were bright and real now seem faded and doubtful. The skeptic says "I do not believe in faeries," and somewhere a faerie falls down dead.

Sometimes a critic becomes a friend and a brother. Like a birth, it is the same little miracle repeated again. And it is after you believe that you are allowed inside.

– Joel Dueck



*Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past and Future, sees
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees.*

*Calling the lapsed Soul
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole;
And fallen, fallen light, renew!*

*O Earth, O Earth, return!
Arise from out the dewy grass
Night is worn,
And the morn
Rises from the slumberous mass.*

*Turn away no more:
Why wilt thou turn away
The story floor
The wat'ry shore
Is giv'n thee till the break of day.*

— William Blake, 'Hear the Voice of the Bard', 1794