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Creating a Past and a Future for Humans and Supernaturals

Harris, Charlaine and Toni L.P. Kelner, eds. Dead but not Forgotten. London: Gollancz, 2014. pp. 343.

Dead but not Forgotten is a collection of short stories about the characters presented in the thirteen Sookie Stackhouse novels published by Charlaine Harris between 2001 and 2013. The fifteen short stories were not written by Harris herself, but by a series of novelists and best-selling authors. The tales are compelling and their plots are as suspenseful as the original novels by Harris, whose contents they are consistent with. Indeed, the characters are faithful to the spirit of Harris' books and their adventures are a (super)natural and logical continuation or anticipation of what occurs to them in Harris' fictional universe. The stories are indeed set in different time periods: they fill the gaps between the novels or they either precede or follow the facts narrated in Harris' books. Jeffrey J. Mariotte's “Taproot,” for example, focuses on a case assigned to Detective Andy Bellefleur during Sookie's sojourn in Dallas in the second novel. “Nobody's Business,” written by Rachel Caine, narrates instead about two secondary characters of the saga, white agent Kevin Pryor and his colored colleague Kenya Jones, and how they fall in love with one another during a dangerous mission that precedes the events described in the first book of the series (Dead Until Dark). Jeanne C. Stein's “Love Story,” however, is set decades before Sookie's birth and narrates about her grandmother Adele’s extramarital affair with a male fairy. On the other hand, Christopher Golden's “Tyger, Tyger” – which is focused on the kidnapping of mighty weretyger Quinn by a militaristic organization that uses the “two-natured” as mercenary soldiers – is set soon after the end of Harris' last book in the series (Dead Ever After).

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Dead but not Forgotten presents, therefore, both human and supernatural characters as much as primary, secondary, and even “extra” characters of the saga, thus offering readers a (new) perspective on their lives, emotions, and inner thoughts that was not possible in Harris' novels because of their first-person narrator's point of view. The stories are imbued in the same Southern Gothic atmosphere that characterizes Harris' novels and the TV series based on them, HBO's True Blood, created by Alan Ball. As Caroline Ruddell and Brigid Cherry have noted, the focus of Southern Gothic is on the macabre, the grotesque, and on the aesthetics of decay – typical Gothic features that are mingled with the warm and sunny climate as well as with the historical and contemporary concerns of the South (39–41). The settings of Dead but not Forgotten are the swamps of Louisiana and the abandoned buildings where secrets are (literally) buried. The style of the tales is colorful and exciting, and their vocabulary is sometimes very intense and poetic. Furthermore, some of the tales are extremely funny, as when the half-demon Diantha wonders whether Santa Claus is a real elf or a vampire (in Leigh Perry's “The Real Santa Claus”) or when Bubba (who is actually the vampirized Elvis, whose transformation has left him deranged) explains his culinary fondness for cats in Bill Crider's “Don't Be Cruel.”

Apart from commenting on actual historical facts (such as Hurricane Katrina), Dead but not Forgotten also offers many causes for reflection on the discourse of Otherness and on the point of view of minority groups. As is the case in both Harris' saga and True Blood, the focus on supernatural characters and the perspective of their “difference” to human beings is linked with the supernatural beings' claims for equal rights and for an argument against prejudices and intolerance, whether it is based on sex, sexuality, religion, or race. On the other hand, the perspective of the human characters towards the magical creatures provides the reader with a vast array of ideological positions on diversity – from the hatred of the members of the Fellowship of the Sun (who want to exterminate vampires because they believe them to be an abomination of nature) to the gradual acceptance of difference or the seductive embrace of it. Dennis Rothermel's argument that “the extranatural species [. . .] all allow for the refraction of all-too-human traits where we can see them better, and especially as what becomes exposed challenges suppositions about love, devotion, servitude, hatred, family, community and conformity” (96) is equally

applicable to Dead but not Forgotten, which reflects on all of these themes through its use of a varietyof different characters.

Dead but not Forgotten is an ideal volume for the fans of the Sookie Stackhouse novels, who will be certainly entertained by the new adventures of the characters they have come to appreciate and love for over a decade. On the other hand, however, the book is barely intelligible to those fans of TrueBlood who have not read Harris' novels. Indeed, after generally following the narrative of the first three books, the HBO series has developed an autonomous plot, especially since its fifth season, producing a completely different finale by the end of the seventh season. The adventures of the single characters narrated in this volume would therefore not be fully appreciated by True Blood fans, who would experience many difficulties in recognizing them and the role they assume in the novels.

Works Cited

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