

Gnosticism (Pullman; heavy spoilers)

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 May 2001

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Alice Turner — 05 May 2001, 10:17

Going back a bit to the Gnostic discussion:

From Wombat (responding to John Bishop):

Good summary, with one thing omitted: That every person contains within himself (or herself) the spark of the divine breath. The point of "the knowledge" and the self-abnegation is to allow that spark to rejoin the greater God outside the created world. Direct contact with the divine is both possible and difficult.

In Pullman, there is the question of Dust. Interestingly, responses to Dust are mixed--is it good or evil? All we know at first is that it is attracted to sexually mature humans, not to children. And that this is also true of the soul-vampires, the Specters of Cittagazza, who are certainly evil (and scary, Bear). In Manichaeism, this is Light, if good. Otherwise it would be Dark Matter (matter being bad and identified with Satan or Ahriman). Dust is certainly matter for this is a scientific world (the Dr. Malone part of it, anyway) and we know more about matter than the Gnostics or orthodox Early Christians (who were also inclined to think of matter as evil) did. Pullman, like Mani, has pulled together elements from a number of religions. I *wish* he had stayed on track; it's such a good and ambitious idea.

Pullman got lost, I think, in the sheer cumbersomeness of his schema and its (their?) relation to Gnosticism. It might have been easier to posit Lyra as Sophia instead of Eve--Sophia, too, makes a big mistake which leads to the formation of the world as it is instead of what it should be (we wish). By separating this Eve from her Adam, yes, you certainly avoid temptation: none of the Edenic boinking John Bishop evoked so gladly. But Sophia conceived the abortive Demiurge on her own! Besides, the original schema, both Gnostic and Christian, try to account for the wicked ways of human beings, not only what seem the injustices of heaven, and Pullman, in harrowing Hades and in squelching Specters, doesn't cope with that. Though I suppose if you equate Dust with goodness, and you've fixed things so that there will be a good deal more of it, you have performed a redemption.

And of course Metatron is kaput, though it seems as though that might have happened anyway, kidz or no kidz.

Crowley coped with Sophia a bit more easily (only a bit, because I'm not sure anyone reading the book without a pony could figure it out) by equating Sam with Sophia only during the "passage time." The grown Sam of the fourth book will no longer be Sophia in any way, nor, I predict, will she have any notion that she ever was. And Crowley was only borrowing from Gnosticism, not trying to set a scheme.

Sorry, this is all a bit rambling.

-alga