

What Lyra and Will do; to alga

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 28 May 2001

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Adam Stephanides — 28 May 2001, 09:29

on 5/27/01 2:12 PM, Alice Turner at pei047 at attglobal.net wrote:

Adam:

I
think Moloney has put his finger on the basic flaws of the ending,
though
he's wrong to state as a definite fact that Will and Lyra do no more
than
kiss.

I think he's probably right about the kiss.

When I wrote the above, I meant only that he should not have presented this as unquestionably true. But having thought more about the question and reread the relevant passages, I now think it very likely that Lyra and Will did indeed have sex. I have a number of arguments to support this claim; none is conclusive by itself, but taken together they make a strong case, imo.

1. In Chapter 35, we see them kissing, then we cut away, then after an undefined period of time we see them returning to Mary. This is a recognized convention to imply that sex has taken place, when it can't be shown or explicitly stated (e.g. GONE WITH THE WIND).

2. As I've argued before, Lyra is tempted and "falls." In this context, "falling" is usually taken to mean sex, not smooching.

3. At the end of Chapter 35, Lyra and Will are referred to as "children-no-longer-children." Again, traditionally it is sexual intercourse which is generally considered to make one a man or a woman, not lesser acts.

4. Lyra has certainly thought about sex: she tells Will "'I want to kiss you and lie down with you and wake up with you every day of my life till I die'" (TAS, 496); and their lovemaking is described in quite physical terms. And there's no indication that they are restraining themselves.

5. After they learn that they must separate, this scene occurs: "He stroked her warm hair, her tender shoulders, and then he kissed her face again and again, and presently she gave a deep, shuddering sigh and fell still." (TAS, 498) Now one could read this as meaning simply that she's stopped crying, and maybe it's just my dirty mind, but this does seem to me to hint fairly broadly that they have Done the Deed. At any rate, I very much doubt that the double entendre is accidental. There follows the daemon-stroking scene, which is itself described in extraordinarily sexualized language (read it again if you don't believe me). This scene, and the chapter, end with the sentence "So, wondering whether any lovers before them had made this blissful discovery, they lay together as the earth turned slowly and the moon and stars blazed above them." (TAS, 499) Again, I can't believe that the double entendre here is accidental.

To sum up, if Lyra and Will don't have sex, there is no reason for Pullman not to make clear that they don't, or to put in all these hints that they do have sex. On the other hand, if they do have sex, then there's a very good reason for Pullman not to say so explicitly: to keep his book accessible to younger readers. And within these limits (and the bounds of tastefulness and of Lyra and Will's characters), I'd say Pullman goes about as far as he can in implying that they have sex.

There's also a bit of external evidence, though of a primarily negative sort. In the readerville discussion, when the question of what Lyra and Will did comes up, Pullman doesn't deny that they have sex: he says "It's none of my damn business! My imagination withdrew at that point." (message

#31) Had the thought of them having sex never entered his mind, or had the idea of two twelve-year-olds having sex been inconceivable to him, he surely would have said so. Pullman goes on to say "If you want to follow them under the tree and watch what happens, you must bear the responsibility for what you see. Personally, I think privacy is a fine and gracious thing. I describe a kiss: and there are some turning-points in life for which a kiss is quite enough." I take this as meaning that if you want to think that Lyra and Will only kissed, you can.

As for your other points:

Her daemon, after all, has
not yet settled.

Do you mean that since her daemon had not settled at the start of the scene, this shows she was innocent and hence unlikely to think of having sex? But that's precisely the point of the scene, that she is "choosing" not to be innocent any longer. (Though I agree with you that the "choice" aspect is unclear.) Or do you mean that the fact that their daemons are still shifting after the scene shows that they did not have sex? But their daemons do settle after the scene I discuss in point five above; and in any case, I don't recall any indication that it is specifically loss of virginity which causes one's daemon to settle. (If it is, then since Lyra tells Will that daemons settle "about our age, or a bit older. Maybe more sometimes," (TAS, 457) you must be wrong about Lyra being too young for sex.)

And if they did have sex, in her role as Eve she would
have to get pregnant, which is a bit much for a 13-year-old.

Lyra is definitely Eve, whether or not she has sex. I don't see why you think this doesn't require her to have sex, but does require her to get pregnant if she does have sex. In any case, her being the new Eve doesn't mean that she has to correspond to the biblical Eve in all particulars (she wasn't created from Will's rib, for example).

On another topic:

Mrs. Coulter, who serves the Church, seems to have been, and remains,
rather a lively sort in that department.

There are a couple of Lord Asriel/Mrs. Coulter fanfics on the site.

--Adam