

Pullman cont'd

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 29 May 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2676>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Alice Turner — 29 May 2001, 20:01

Adam:

Well, the use of Dark/Light imagery doesn't necessarily indicate influence from Manichaeism--it's common enough. In fact, I don't recall noticing any influence of Manichaeism in particular, though there is Gnostic influence.

The Dark/Light thing has been done to death in fantasy since Tolkien, but not the way Mani did it, and not the way Pullman does it either. The part I am thinking of in Mani is the possibility of accretion of light particles by the elect, which they can achieve by forsaking sex, meat and wrong-doing. *Matter,* of course, is "dark." Children are naturally "light" (even Happy Burger-eating ones, I presume), but dark matter (here Dust) closes in with puberty. Men can escape it to a degree by right living (and following Mani), women hardly ever.

Pullman, the non-believer, is thus saying that this is junk. That matter is (and sex, and maybe the Happy Burger too--he certainly puts in a good word for whisky--yay!) worthy. That decency and kindness, not "right living" are what count--that a witch, certainly in folklore on the Dark side, can be noble. (Or not.)

By putting a Prot in the papacy, he is, I think, doing just what Mani did, which is to form a syntho-religion encompassing everything handy for him, including relevant bits of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. It's neater for the plot. As I recall, it's the only religion on all these worlds, except for the witches' belief in the death goddess (the real Finnish death-goddess, slightly misspelled), but they're way out of the mainstream.

This is sort of an aside, but I would think a writer like Pullman, while imbibing his tot after a good day's work, must occasionally reflect on his own role as Demiurge, creating worlds from the pleroma, peopling them, and hoping that the Muse, or her daemon, will breath the divine spark into these people.

Other way around; the drawings were in the first two books, and the epigraphs in the third. There is a website, www.geocities.com/the_golden_compass/index.html which has the epigraphs. It also has the covers to the UK editions of NL and SK, both the juvenile and adult editions (I quite like the adult covers), but none of Pullman's drawings yet. From my cursory scan of the epigraphs, I'd say they're interesting but don't settle anything (a number of them are drawn from the Blake poem at the start of TAS), but a closer analysis might reach a different conclusion.

Thanks for this.

The separation between Lyra and Will has nothing to do with Original Sin, since the books reject the idea of Original Sin, as I've argued before. (Nor did the Gnostics believe in Original Sin as a yielding to temptation; I'm surprised that you read the books as Gnostic books and still read the ending as you do.) And whether or not Lyra and Will have sex, they definitely "fall"; Lyra's bringing the fruit to Will's mouth, and his accepting it, make this clear.

Okay, I concede. I haven't reread even the second book all the way through yet, and didn't take notes the first time. But wrt Gnosticism, see above re all-purpose syntho-religion. Pullman gives us a corrupted world, a Gnostic world, it seems useful to say, especially as he seems so clearly conscious of doing just that, and plops a barely pubescent Adam and Eve into it, lets them have a brief honeymoon (see, I conceded), then separates them forever. Their coupling is somehow a salvation, though I can't see quite how. (I'm suddenly reminded of Sev and Apheta conceiving the New Sun). I shouldn't have harped on Original Sin; I guess I was just annoyed at the seeming pointlessness of it. Did you read his *Liber Angelorum*, up on the Random House site? I double-checked all his references in Davidson--the man has been doing his research!

As far as I can tell, though, the Authority doesn't even shape the material universe out of pre-existing, as the Demiurge did. Our universe came into existence by itself; the Authority just moved in and took over.

I don't think Pullman wants to give religion even that much. He is bent on sabotaging **all** religions, including Gnosticism, if we agree to call it a religion (to be useful).

I wasn't aware of that fact about Gnosticism, and it is an interesting commonality. But for Pullman, humans are above angels not because they contain the divine pneuma, but because they are flesh. I would argue that HDM is not Gnostic, although it's influenced by Gnosticism (of course, the waters are muddied by the fact that "Gnosticism" was not a term any of the people we think of as Gnostics ever used; it was applied by later historians.)

Yes, they are **matter.** Attracting Dust. This is Pullman's point, or one of them.

In the readerville discussion, Pullman says he personally doesn't believe in God (message #65). And I, myself, don't recall any evidence of the Alien God in the books.

No, what I meant is if he were pressed in an interview--he has to be a bit cagey because of the repressive nature of juvenile publishing in the US. He hasn't yet been pressed, by kids, at least.

Agreed that Lyra is not making a conscious choice between innocence and experience, as it seems to me that Pullman's theme really requires.

But she

does make a sort of choice, in showing her love to Will by giving him the fruit. And for the reasons I've given before, it is this choice which is the cosmic choice she is destined to make.

Conceded, or at least on hold. But what about all that pushing and shoving by the adults?

One last thing: I saw in SFC today that His Dark Materials has been optioned, though we all know that doesn't mean much. If -The Amber Spyglass- beats the latest Harry Potter for some of the juvenile awards, which it might well, there's a shot, though. In one interview, Pullman said that his ideal Mrs. Coulter would be Nicole Kidman. Yes! Yes! Yes! I saw "Moulin Rouge" yesterday and kept getting distracted by the idea--she would be perfection. And what's nice is that she will continue to be perfection for, I would venture, the better part of two decades to come, just in case there is a delay. If you Aussies have any influence, beg her!

(For those who care, MR is more silly fun than the critics have made it out to be.)

-alga