

Pullman Again

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 30 Jul 2001

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 30 Jul 2001, 16:42

Okay, so based on the discussion here I picked up a copy of "The Golden Compass" and finished it last night, and have drawn two equal and opposite conclusions:

1. This is a brilliant novel.
2. This is a lousy fantasy novel.

More detail may perhaps be required.

It is a marvellous novel. The characters and action are just plain overwhelming. The end of Chapter Two in particular, which pulls the rug totally out from under the reader's feet, but in such a gentle way ("... because they were both old, and they were both anxious") utterly blew me away. This man can write.

But he hasn't a clue about the logic of fantasy, at the small or at the large level.

At the small level there are things like the naming of names. "Daemon." Okay, I understand that it's supposed to come from the Greek daimonion and really only means "spirit," and that it's the person's soul (the way the armour is the bear's soul). But there's no reason for calling them daemons; it's just an in-yer-face choice to irritate easily-irritated Christians. Ditto for "experimental theology"; it is neither, and the words just mislead.

On a larger scale: does anyone, can anyone, believe that in a world this different -- where every human has an externalized animus/anima, where bears are sentient, etc. -- the history of the world would be similar enough that someone called John Calvin would become something called Pope of something called the Catholic Church? (I set aside, as irrelevant Christian-baiting the nature of "the Church" in this world.)

The logic of fantasy just isn't there, and irritates me far more than the religious whomping.

Nonetheless... it's a cracking good book. I just wish Pullman knew something

about fantasy; then it could have been a great book.

--Dan'l

Alice Turner — 31 Jul 2001, 12:04 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Said Dan'l re =The Golden Compass=:

But he hasn't a clue about the logic of fantasy, at the small or at the large level.

I don't think that, with a real writer, it's quite so cut-and-dried. (Most writers of commercial fantasy are not, by my definition, "real" writers; Pullman, otoh, most certainly is.)

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"Daemon."

Okay, I understand that it's supposed to come from the Greek *daimonion* and really only means "spirit," and that it's the person's soul (the way the armour is the bear's soul). But there's no *reason* for calling them daemons; it's just an in-yer-face choice to irritate easily-irritated Christians. Ditto for "experimental theology"; it is neither, and the words just mislead.

Can't you accept that he is, at one level, joking? And at another being deliberately provocative? This is quite okay by me, more so than Madeleine L'Engle maundering on about mitochondria and God in a rather better known fantasy series for children. Pullman is quite genuinely (imo) repelled by the efforts of a lot of classic fantasy to push religious agenda, and he's deliberately countering it--but with humor.

On a larger scale: does anyone, *can* anyone, believe that in a world this different -- where every human has an externalized animus/anima, where bears are sentient, etc. -- the history of the world would be *similar* enough that someone called John Calvin would become something called Pope of something called the Catholic Church? (I set aside, as irrelevant Christian-baiting the nature of "the Church" in this world.)

Dan'l, that is a **joke**. Maybe not the best joke in the world, but still. It also serves another purpose--it's a signal that he is not targeting Catholicism or Anglicanism or any other ism, that they're all in it together. It's the same impetus that causes him to cast witches as good guys. (Not entirely, as you will see if you continue the series.)

The logic of fantasy just isn't there, and irritates me far more than the religious whomping.

It doesn't irritate me. It is, perhaps, a reminder to the reader that he is reading a book, written by an author, who can do as he likes.

Nonetheless... it's a cracking good book. I just wish Pullman knew something

about fantasy; then it could have been a *great* book.

I think it just might be the best juvenile, and even the best fantasy of the 20th century. Contenders, please? (Single books, only.)

-alga

Spectacled Bear — 02 Aug 2001, 14:38 · follows Alice Turner

At 00:42 2001-07-31, Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

...

On a larger scale: does anyone, can anyone, believe that in a world this different -- where every human has an externalized animus/anima, where bears are sentient, etc. -- the history of the world would be similar enough that someone called John Calvin would become something called Pope of something called the Catholic Church? (I set aside, as irrelevant Christian-baiting the nature of "the Church" in this world.)

I think Pullman actually acknowledges this point, and not only rejects the criticism but makes a feature of it. I'm thinking of the scene where Lyra sees the photo of the sledge in our world, identical in every detail to the one she has ridden, far more recently, in a different universe. Things are a lot more connected than she (or we) would expect. No attempt at explanation is made; it's simply beyond our present degree of knowledge. I can respect that a lot more than books that simply ignore the question.

In a multiverse where this sort of thing *did* work as we expect, any change will sooner or later alter the moment of conception of a human being, a different sperm will win the race, and a different person will be born. Only half of them will even be of the same sex as their counterparts. Histories will diverge quite rapidly thereafter.

Spectacled Bear.