

Daemonising Pullman

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 02 Aug 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2749>

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.

Tony Ellis — 02 Aug 2001, 11:57

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes wrote:

1. This is a brilliant novel.

<snip>

...But there's no reason for calling them daemons; it's just an in-yer-face choice to irritate easily-irritated Christians.

I'm glad you're enjoying the book I know as Northern Lights, Dan'l, but I can't agree with you that this is the only reason Pullman chose the word "daemon". The Marriage of Heaven and Hell probably irritated a few easily-irritated Christians in its time too, but what it was supposed to do was make people think.

I would hope that a child reading Pullman's book might be very interested to learn that a word used by Christianity to mean an incarnation of evil originally meant something as harmless as "spirit", and might wonder what other little misappropriations and mistakes may have taken place over the years.

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?

The Crushed Butterfly theory of time has been tediously fashionable in SF writing for a long time now, but it -is- just a theory. Another one is that the stream of history would simply flow around any change, and carry on much as before. If that theory leads to more books like Pullman's, or Wolfe's There Are Doors, where the changes are small and thought-provoking rather than huge and predictable, then I for one am happy to give "logic" a miss for a while. :-)

Michael Straight — 02 Aug 2001, 10:05 · follows Tony Ellis

On Thu, 2 Aug 2001, Tony Ellis wrote:

The Crushed Butterfly theory of time has been tediously fashionable in SF writing for a long time now, but it -is- just a theory. Another one is that the stream of history would simply flow around any change, and carry on much as before. If that theory leads to more books like Pullman's, or Wolfe's There Are Doors, where the changes are small and thought-provoking rather than huge and predictable, then I for one am happy to give "logic" a miss for a while. :-)

Well, if you're willing to admit it's illogical, I can't argue with you, but I think dismissing objections as "just the Crushed Butterfly theory" is ridiculous. All of human history and society would be very, very, very different if men died immediately after having intercourse. No one would ever know his/her father! No man would have more than one child! Every man alive

would be celibate. This makes Star Trek Voyager look like tightly-plotted diamond-hard science fiction.

-Rostrum