

Daemons

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 07 Aug 2001

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2765>

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 — 07 Aug 2001, 10:30

To Tony Ellis:

Hey, -my- hypothetical child occasionally looks words up when it finds them being used in an unexpected manner, or asks a grown-up. I can't help it if your hypothetical child is too lazy. :-)

Actually, so does mine, and so do I; but frankly, this doesn't seem to qualify as using the word "daemon" in an unexpected manner. It's some supernatural being that changes shapes, okay, that's a demon, my hypothetical ["You bitch about the present/and you blame it on the past/I'd like to find your hypothe, uh, inner child/and kick his little ass" -- D. Henley] child has no problem with that. And then, because said child has read a moderate amount of SF/F, she has no problem adapting when the word is revealed to mean something like an externalized soul. At no point does anything happen which would send such a child scurrying to look it up in her funk & wagnall's.

Nor, if she did, would I bet on said child giving even a glance to the word's etymology; nor, if she did, is said etymology likely to be much help -- consider Merriam-Webster's Collegiate etymology of "demon" (to which "daemon" refers one), for example:

Middle English demon, from Late Latin & Latin; Late Latin daemon evil spirit, from Latin, divinity, spirit, from Greek daimOn, probably from daiesthai to distribute

Nothing in here even hints at Socrates' usage, which is what (I presume) Pullman has in mind. From all of which I stand by my original conclusion: that it is fairly unlikely that a child, reading THE GOLDEN COMPASS, will (as you originally put it) learn that a word used by Christianity to mean an incarnation of evil originally meant something as harmless as "spirit."

Pullamn is a Brit, and as a writer I bet he uses the OED, nor I think does he worry a lot about a word's use being unexpected when it is also correct. Here is the very FIRST, also second, meaning of "demon" in the OED. (I have left out derivations, as they seem implicit.):

1. a. In ancient Greek mythology (= _____): A supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men; an inferior divinity, spirit, genius (including the souls or ghosts of deceased persons, esp. deified heroes). Often written dæmon for distinction from sense 2. 1569 J. Sandford tr. Agrippa Van. Artes 2 Grammarians..doo expounde this woord Dæmon, that is a Spirite, as if it were Sapiens, that is, Wise. 1587 Golding De Mornay xix. 303 And vnto Cratylus again [Plato] saith, when the good man departeth this world..hee becommeth a Dæmon. 1638 Mede Gt. Apost. iii. Wks. (1672) iii. 627 et seq. 1680 H. More Apocal. Apoc. 252 Dæmons according to the Greek idiom, signify either Angels, or the Souls of men, any Spirits out of Terrestrial bodies, the Souls of Saints, and Spirits of Angels. 1774 J. Bryant Mythol. I. 52

Subordinate dæmons, which they supposed to be emanations and derivatives from their chief Deity. 1846 Grote Greece i. ii. (1862) I. 58 In Homer, there is scarcely any distinction between gods and dæmons. b. Sometimes, particularly, An attendant, ministering, or indwelling spirit; a genius. (Chiefly in references to the so-called 'dæmon of Socrates'. Socrates himself claimed to be guided, not by a _____ or dæmon, but by a _____, *divinum quiddam* (Cicero), a certain divine principle or agency, an inward monitor or oracle. It was his accusers who represented this as a personal dæmon, and the same was done by the Christian Fathers (under the influence of sense 2), whence the English use of the word, as in the quotations.

-alga