

Pullman, Juveniles, Hamilton and Cerberus

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 15 Aug 2001

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Nigel Price — 15 Aug 2001, 22:21

Pullman, Juveniles, Hamilton and Cerberus - a most excellent firm of accountants...

#1 Pullman on the Booker Prize Long List

I heard on BBC Radio 4's "Front Row" programme (nightly magazine-style radio programme discussing the arts) tonight that Pullman's "Amber Spyglass" has been included in the long list for this year's Booker Prize. The presenter referred to this as being unusual in that Pullman was regarded primarily as a children's writer. The pundit commenting on the list expressed surprise on different grounds, namely that although Pullman was a very fine writer, "Amber Spyglass" was a mess and not his best work. It was, he said, the last volume of a trilogy, the first two volumes of which had set up so many themes, expectations and parallel worlds that the third volume could never resolve all the plots and issues satisfactorily.

Have not read any Pullman yet. The discussion of Pullman on this list first intrigued me, and then almost put me off altogether. I'm sure that I'll get round to him some time when all the fuss has died down.

#2 Juvenile fantasy

On the recently aired subject of juvenile fantasy: I've been reading a variety of books to my eight year-old daughter over the past couple of years. She loved "The Hobbit" and adored the Narnia books. She thought that "The Silver Chair" was the best, and I'm not sure that she isn't right. Some of the volumes I'd particularly enjoyed in the past (including "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe" and "The Voyage of the Dawn Treader") seemed a little disappointing this time round, while others ("Prince Caspian", for instance) were better than I remembered. I insisted on reading "The Magician's Nephew" in its correct place, as the penultimate book in the series. I still think that the opening section of that volume, on the deserted dying world, takes some beating.

(Of course, being a slightly illiterate and narrow-minded Baptist, I didn't mind the religious bits at all. Charlotte, who loves animals and wants to become a vet, for a long time didn't even realise that there was any religious agenda in the Narnia books, and just thought that they were the most wonderful tales of world which has talking animals and a magic lion for its king.)

We've also read the first three of Ursula LeGuin's four "Earthsea" books. These are exquisitely written, and read aloud beautifully. I've read them before, but we were both quite mesmerised. The major downside, however, is that they are incredibly gloomy and depressing in places. In that sense, they're not entirely ideal as bedtime reading. We're taking a break before tackling the final volume, "Tehanu", and are currently reading "Swallows and Amazons", which is much more jolly, although it was rather slow in getting started.

(I'd never read "A Wrinkle in Time", so I bought and read it a while back to see if it was

something that Charlotte might enjoy. I thought it very dull and preachy, and terribly old fashioned. Perhaps I've just grown too old...)

#3 A sixth head for Cerberus

As a footnote to my earlier posting on Hamilton's "Night's Dawn" trilogy: the apparent allusion to "The Fifth Head of Cerberus" in "The Reality Dysfunction" is a brief, trifling and passing thing. The short story "Deathday", however, in the collection "A Second Chance at Eden", shows much closer and more significant parallels with Wolfe's novel.

* Complete and utter spoiler for "Deathday" *

In summary...

Stricken with grief over the death of his wife, a human colonist on a distant world hunts down what he imagines is one of the last examples of an aboriginal alien species. The other members of the race have been killed off by humans. The alien is a shape shifter, able to change both its shape and colour in order to blend in with its surroundings. It is also telepathic and able to project its thoughts and feelings into the human's mind. After he has killed the alien, the colonist discovers its eggs, which hatch out creatures which take on human shape. A hatchling in his house takes on the appearance of his late wife, and tries to seduce him. Hatchlings outside his house take on his own appearance, and shoot him with his own rifle.

Well, OK, not **exactly** the same as TFHoC, but you can see that there are some strongly common themes coming through - shapeshifting, telepathic projection, apparently threatened aliens replacing humans - even the hunting motif.

Incidentally, an interesting early example of the "alien evolves into a human" motif can be found in F L Wallace's short story "Student Body", originally published in "Galaxy" magazine in 1953.

Nigel
Minety, Wilts

Michael Straight — 16 Aug 2001, 09:02 · follows Nigel Price

On Wed, 15 Aug 2001, Nigel Price wrote:

* Complete and utter spoiler for "Deathday" *

Well, OK, not **exactly** the same as TFHoC, but you can see that there are some strongly common themes coming through - shapeshifting, telepathic projection, apparently threatened aliens replacing humans - even the hunting motif.

Your description actually reminded me more of Bradbury's Martian Chronicles than FIFTH HEAD.

-Rostrum