

Gaiman, Mieville, Pullman, etc.

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 30 Nov 2004

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Alice K. Turner — 30 Nov 2004, 20:29

I've been off this list for quite a long time, just rejoined, and feel I should add some <g> support to Hmpf (though that is a distinctly non-vegetal name). Wow, pretty busy on this list. First, I have not read "The Problem of Susan" (is that actually the name of the story?), though I would very much like to as I have never, never forgiven Lewis (and we are going back to my early teens here) for what he did to Susan. Where can I find it?

Second, for Lexicon Urthus, try siriusfiction.com. Technically it is out of print, but you never know.

Third, I believe the Poughkeepsie ref goes back to Harlan Ellison who once replied sarcastically to the eternal fan question at a convention, "Where do you get your ideas?" "Poughkeepsie." It's an old factory town in upstate New York. If it wasn't Ellison, it was someone else; perhaps someone more conversant with SF history can set the record straight.

Fourth, I agree with the person who said that of Gaiman, Mieville and Pullman, Pullman is far the most important writer. Gaiman is a charmer, and a sort of god to the graphics-novel-manga crowd, and has done some really good straight-prose work too, off and on. Mieville, I have to agree, is a hack, and a clumsy writer too, though I will hand him the Armada, a wonderfully visual idea--also I sort of liked his B-movie mosquito women. But his soul is in pulp horror and doesn't extend much beyond it--certainly not to decent characterization or plots that make sense. I own his third book, but I'll have to have run out of everything else to read before I tackle it beyond the first three tedious chapters.

But Pullman has achieved a classic, which people will be reading many decades from now. Like a number of other people, including someone on this list (forgive me, I've been catching up with a bunch of digests and can't follow who-said-what), I have tended to scorn the third book as unworthy, and I still think the mulefa sequence was a mistake (the London theatrical version left it out, and if I were scripting the movie(s), I'd do the same). But I found myself recently passionately defending the "world of the dead" sequence, and I'd do the same again. It is so right and so inclusive in its descriptions (I'm speaking historically, and can make a case; I particularly like the use of the harpies) and so beautiful in its fervent Buddhist(ic) conclusion. Also, I found myself defending the sex-as-redemption ending, though I have sneered at the concept in other books, particularly a dreadful one of Sephen King's that I have thankfully forgotten the title of. (Mind you, I think King has written a few pretty good books too.) But here--oh, I don't know. "Spyglass" is a lumpy book, but I'll take those lumps and defend them. Or so it seems. The first book of the trilogy is simply perfect. Or so think I.

Fifth (as an aside), it seems to me that Tolkien presents a perfectly workable agrarian-feudal society. It may be a little mysterious how the dwarves and orcs and elves arrange for dinner (other than pillaging), but not in the case of the men or hobbits. If anyone gets seriously exercised about that aspect of the novels, I'd suggest half an hour's jogging followed by a shower.

-alga

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 01 Dec 2004, 09:43 · in reply to Alice K. Turner

Alga,

Welcome back! You've been missed.

First, I have not read "The Problem of Susan" (is that actually the name of the story?), though I would very much like to as I have never, never forgiven Lewis (and we are going back to my early teens here) for what he did to Susan. Where can I find it?

It's in Al Sarrantino's new antho, "Flights." It got onto this list partly because there's a longish GW story in there.

Third, I believe the Poughkeepsie ref goes back to Harlan Ellison who once replied sarcastically to the eternal fan question at a convention, "Where do you get your ideas?" "Poughkeepsie." It's an old factory town in upstate New York. If it wasn't Ellison, it was someone else; perhaps someone more conversant with SF history can set the record straight.

That story does come from Harlan, but it was Schenectady he used.

But Pullman has achieved a classic, which people will be reading many decades from now.

Well, two thirds of a classic ... grumble mumble. _TAS_ was, simply too long by a third. The Mulefa stuff, yes, could easily have gone, and so could a couple of other things. And as for the ending - sorry, but it was as irritating to me as the kid-porn ending in _IT_ (a book that was too long by about two thirds, written at the peak of Stevie's "bloated" period ... but endings have usually been King's weak point, from the "and everyone gets killed!" ending of _Carrie_ to the recent wet fart that concluded the up to that point simply brilliant _Dark Tower_ sequence); I can see what he was trying to do there and it could have been done well, but he simply failed to prepare the ground for it, and so when it happens it's out of left field and (to my mind) unjustified.

--Blattid but really Dan'I

www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer
"Saddam would still be in power if he were the President of the United States, and the world would be a lot better off."
-- The Forty-Third President, 10/8/04