

# Reflections

reading notes

NOVEMBER 2003—*Bad Books*

Walker Percy once wrote, “Bad books always lie.”

A good book is one that tells the truth about the way things are regardless of the genre, even fantasy. In fact, fantasy literature can sometimes tell us the truth about the way things really are better than other forms of fiction. Some books are more of a reflection of the author’s thinking (or indigestion) than they are a reflection of reality.

The statement of Percy’s, when applied to fantasy, in particular young adult fantasy, offers the reader a useful tool for critiquing the books we read.

Some young adult stories have been “written off” because they depict some of their characters doing wrong things. The uncle of the main character in Bruce Coville’s *The Skull of Truth*, is discovered by the family to be “gay.” The mother of the main character in Herbie Brennan’s book, *The Faerie Wars*, creates a topsy turvy life for her family because it is discovered that she prefers her husband’s secretary (another woman) over her husband. Herbie doesn’t condone the behavior. He doesn’t engage in moralizing either. He simply depicts the trouble such a thing would cause a family.

I am not as critical of these books as I am of Philip Pullman’s popular trilogy, *The Dark Materials*. He claims to believe there is a God, but he has waged war on the God of Scripture, and in Nietzsche like fashion kills Him off. His depiction of God—and his depiction of man for that matter—is a lie. In Pullman’s books, God is not the eternal creator, but an angel, the first angel to exist, who deceives man into believing that he is an eternal being who created the universe. This lie moves many to worship and serve him. Pullman has a fanciful imagination and a great writing style, but what he writes of God and man is a lie.

The Harry Potter books have received some heat over the years, but they do not lie. Harry lies, but that is precisely what a young boy might do. Ms. Rowling is not implying through her characters that lying is alright. In fact, in Book 5 Harry is punished by a wicked woman precisely because he will not lie concerning his knowledge of Voldermort’s return.

You can’t always judge a book by its cover, but you can judge it by whether it tells the truth about life or not. Pullman lies. Rowling doesn’t.

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