



I was brought up on CS Lewis, a Christian parable thinly veiled as magical realism. As a child, I loved it and it was heartening to see the series revived for a new audience through a decent film franchise. Truth be told however; the stories cloy, the writing is timidly Dickensian, and the characters dated. Pullman's series, by comparison, is as riveting in concept as it is inspired in execution. One reads, flipping page after page in quick succession, not wanting the joy to finish. He is expert at describing the world in which his characters move and bringing them to mind with such sparkling clarity that one can see the dust being blown around by their feet. The characters are beyond thrilling - there has never been a better creation than Mrs Coulter - and the overarching secular argument that unites the whole, the point of it all, is as coherent a philosophy as drinking blood and eating flesh. This is not a book only for children.

His Dark Materials (The Northern Lights, The Subtle Knife and The Amber Spyglass) by Philip Pullman, Scholastic Children's Books, £6.99, ISBN 978-1407-13022-4 and others