



His Dark Materials Trilogy - A Reader's Guide

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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This 'Reader's Guide' is one of a series written by 'a team of contemporary fiction scholars from both sides of the Atlantic'. The intended readers are primarily members of book groups, it seems, though the blurb also claims students at school, college and university. Other titles in the series reflect the principal market: **White Teeth**, **The Shipping News**, **The Remains of the Day...** Claire Squires has fulfilled her brief precisely - 'to provide accessible and informative introductions' for her target audience. Her bibliography is extensive, but her text is uncluttered by constant appeals to academic sources. The content is perceptive, lucid, without condescension and avoids controversy and eccentricity. The organisation, which is common to the whole series, is agreeably straightforward: a short biography of the novelist; a study of the novel (Daemons, the main characters, Innocence and Experience, the Fall and so on); the novel's critical reception (newspaper reviews in this case); a note on stage and possible film versions; and 29 questions, perhaps for those feeling anxious when it's their month to introduce the book to the group. I mean no criticism of Squires in admitting that it's the questions which worried me a little, though I can see they would open up interesting discussion. I suspect they might have worried Philip Pullman too, though his help is shrewdly acknowledged by the Oxford Brookes based author. Book groups don't (yet) have to be inspected, do they? They don't award NVQs or divide their members into Levels, or provide booster classes for those on the margins. Now there are book group guidelines on the web, in the newspapers, and the accolade of a recommendation from Richard and Judy. Couldn't we just let book and readers rub together for a couple of hours and see what we've discovered by the end of the evening, regardless of expert insights? We could read at our own levels, share our own, well, thoughts. Call me neanderthal, but I had the notion that was one of the pleasures of reading and, for that matter, how readers are made.

Running Order:

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