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Panel: 7. Classical Antiquity and Mass Culture

Classical Fantasy: Homer and Plato in Philip Pullman's „His Dark Materials“

Philip Pullman's best-selling fantasy trilogy "His Dark Materials" (1995-2000) has spawned radio and stage adaptations, a movie ("The Golden Compass", 2007), and an avalanche of secondary literature. Yet whereas Pullman's debt to Milton's "Paradise Lost" and his relationship to related works such as C. S. Lewis' "Chronicles of Narnia" and Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" is well-known, the fact that Pullman borrows freely from Classical literature has barely been noticed. In particular, Pullman's dæmons and the concept of intercision owe much to Aristophanes' humorous account of the origin of erotic love in Plato's "Symposium" (189 d-192e). Even more importantly, his trilogy is just as much a reprise of Homer's "Odyssey" as of Milton's "Paradise Lost", with Lyra as a modern-day Odysseus and Will as her Telemachos.