



The Battle of the Sun

Books Reviewed:

[The Battle of the Sun](#) [1]

Issue:

[181](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Caroline Heaton](#) [3]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

Reading this book is like sitting entranced before a flickering series of magic lantern slides. Or again, like watching a hand deftly deal out fan after fan of tarot cards with a cast of symbolic figures: Jack, the Radiant Boy; his counterpart, the Golden Maiden; the Magus; the Keeper of the Tides; Mother Midnight; the Sunken King; the Knight Summoned? They are supplemented by an array of grotesques: The Eyebat, Wedge and Mistress Split (the male and female halves of a ?whole? cleaved in two), Abel Darkwater, with his boar-like head. If Jeanette Winterson were not already known as a consummate storyteller, the poetic roll call of these names would suggest an imagination steeped in literature, magic and folklore: the language of this new tale is resonant with echoes of all three.

Winterson takes her young readers on an exhilarating journey through Elizabethan London, sweeping them along the great thoroughfares and back alleys, in and out of taverns, great and mean houses ? along the banks of the Thames, within its tides, upon its smooth, turbulent or gilded surface. Gold is one of the key elements and symbols of the story. On one level, it is the heart?s desire of the dark Magus, who kidnaps Jack Snap, as he has kidnapped a series of other boys to toil in the Dark House to fulfil his great alchemical project. It is also temporarily the lure and deception of greedy London citizens when the Magus?s project appears to succeed and everything in the city is petrified into gold. But, more profoundly, it is Jack?s task to find ?the gold within?, a self, integrity and purpose not manipulated by others. Like every fairytale hero he has a series of tasks to fulfil, from negotiating with a riddlesome Dragon, whose Cinnabar Egg he must find, to freeing the Sunken King and rescuing the Magus? captives who have been turned to stone.

Similarly, his steadfastness and kindness bring him an array of helpers, including the nimble Crispis, a diminutive captive of the Magus, to the Golden Maiden, herself ? otherwise known as Silver. She will be familiar to readers of Winterson?s **Tanglewreck**, to which this title makes deft allusion, cleverly weaving in elements of Silver?s own story from the ?future? of the earlier book. Readers will need nimble wits to keep abreast of the crisscrossing plot, as it drives towards the grand climax of the Battle of the Sun, simultaneously furthering Silver?s quest to protect the Timekeeper, a magical clock, from both Abel Darkwater and her time-travelling nemesis ? met here in the guise of the Abbess.

The exuberant storytelling and wit are beautifully and unobtrusively grounded by psychological truth-telling: if alchemy and time provide the plot?s dynamic, love ? its poignant lack or nurturing presence ? is the real theme, the golden thread running through the tale. Many of the dark characters have an unacknowledged, unassuaged wound: the Magus, whose

mother died in childbirth and father ??sold him for a gold coin?; the son the Magus disowns; the fundamentally broken Wedge and Split. Mistress Split glimpses wholeness through her passion for Jack?s loyal dog, Max, while Jack?s loving mother remains his watchful guardian in the Magus? Dark House, a living talisman even when imprisoned in stone.

A marvellous book for both young and old readers ? I look forward to the third in the series which is surely promised by the tantalising conclusion.

Running Order:

55

Source URL (retrieved on Aug '20): <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/181/childrens-books/reviews/the-battle-of-the-sun>

Links:

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-battle-of-the-sun>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/181>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/caroline-heaton>