



Puppet Master

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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A fond parent might think from the title that this is a playful story about a children's entertainer. Think again. This is a sombre tale set in nineteenth-century Prague with more than a hint of the Gothic.

Milena's father, a puppeteer, died at work. His widow then disappeared and is widely held to be dead too. A new puppet master appears on the scene, the Master, accompanied by two sinister assistants. Milena is descended from a famous clairvoyant, Queen Libuse. The Master, however, believes himself to be the true descendant of this Queen, and the rightful heir to the throne of Prague. It transpires that the Master (who strongly reminds me of the Child Catcher in **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang**) is kidnapping children, though to avoid a massive spoiler I shall not reveal to what purpose he puts them. Of course we learn that Milena's mother has also been captured by the Master.

The narrative of this book is rich. Owen has immersed herself in the folklore of Prague and uses it to paint a dense and ostensibly convincing tableau. The mythology and the Czech language are memorably enough expressed to make an adequate impression on a young reader. For linguistic enthusiasts, Owen includes a pronunciation guide for Czech names and places. The characters are quite deliberately rather formulaic figures in a mythical landscape, rather than credible fictional creations. The language used varies widely, in places lyrical and subtle, in others plainly descriptive. Tasteful illustrations add a dimension to the story.

The book is divided into very brief chapters, which creates a disruptive air of discontinuity. Inside this small book is a longer and more developed book trying to get out. The author could perhaps have been encouraged to work these promising themes to a fuller conclusion, as Pullman would have done ? a strong book that might have been even stronger.

Running Order:

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