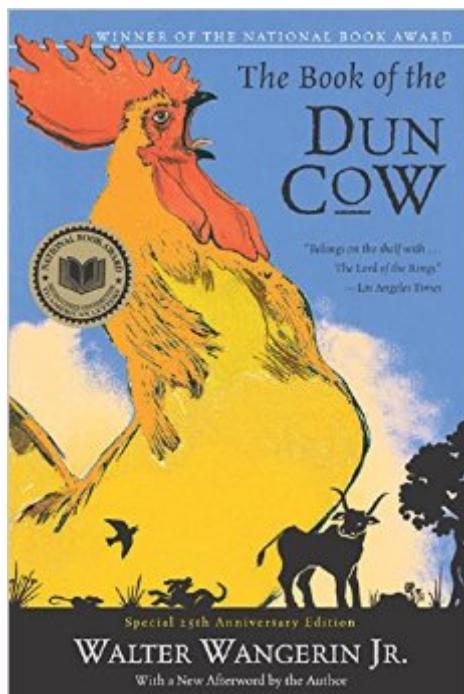


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The Book Of The Dun Cow



Synopsis

Walter Wangerin's profound fantasy concerns a time when the sun turned around the earth and the animals could speak, when Chauntecleer the Rooster ruled over a more or less peaceful kingdom. What the animals did not know was that they were the Keepers of Wyrm, monster of evil long imprisoned beneath the earth ... and Wyrm, sub terra, was breaking free.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Wangerin has written a book that begs to be read aloud, but is a joy to read to yourself as well. His use of language is breathtaking -- evoking both a classic fairy tale and stylized character study. Do NOT let the fact that the main characters are talking animals throw you. TBODC is fable about Chauntecleer the Rooster, his Coop (and the surrounding lands), and their battle against a monstrous, mythic evil. Both intimate and epic, the story of the animals' battle are filled with heartrending sadness and soulcleansing joy. I would hard-pressed to label or categorize this book. Many have called it an allegory, and there ARE allegorical elements to it, but it is much more (or much different) from straight allegory. I consider myself a reasonably intelligent person, and a skilled reader, but Wangerin layers his story with meanings and submeanings, many of which I am sure escaped me. I didn't care, though. The wonderful language and emotion of the story immersed me into Chauntecleer's world, and I could marvel at the depth without knowing exactly HOW deep it went. If you're searching for a new fable that feels familiar but not predictable, one you can treasure and read aloud to friends and family, The Book of the Dun Cow is for you.

When I was 9 years old, my father read this book to me. It stayed with me. I am now 30 and after re-reading Watership Down last month I was reminded of this book, and of how good it was. Last weekend, I spent three days reading it to my new bride. We both cried. There are some people who chose to read this novel as some kind of radical religious parable. Those people are missing the point. It is a pure story of how everyone, everyday, fights against the urge to be the worst they could be; and how sometimes, with the right circumstance they become the best they can be. Without this hope, we are all alone and simply, ""marooned."

Before my review of the rest of the book I would like to spend a paragraph in praise of my favorite character from the book. Mundo Cani, if you are a dog person, will evoke such emotion from you that you will fall in love with him within bare lines. If you are not a dog person, and, in fact, hate all dogs, it might take as much as a few pages for you to fully enjoy and care for this humble and self-sacrificing character. Mundo Cani is worth the price of the book all by himself, and the depth of the other characters that play their parts in this beautiful story will simply spoil you for the flat and tasteless fare that many of us sometimes find we have accidentally become accustomed to. As a reader, I regretfully admit, I am fairly easy to please. However, I am happy to amend that quality with a very critical nature when it comes to comparing newer or lesser-known writings with my established favorites among classics. Very few works, in my opinion, can stand rank file with the best of, to name a few, Lewis, Tolkien, and Peake. If anyone had told me before I read this Book of the Dun Cow, that it should surpass Watership Down, that I should stand in awe of a cow the way I stood for Galadriel, that I should fear maggots and a simple cockatrice more than any foul thing born in the darks of Mordor, that my mind should be as stirred by prose concerning a chicken coop as it was by the darkly beautiful language that told of the Castle Gormenghast, and that this same story should be imbued with meaning so as to rival or even surpass the great works of C.S. Lewis, I would have spit on their forehead, laughed in their face, and made a crude reference concerning a deficiency in their genetic background. As it is, I must swallow all of my pride and humbly apply to any readers of this review, that Wangerin has taken a barnyard where others have taken castles and great forests, and created characters of cows where others used tall elves and mysterious wizards, and, with these common instruments, has created an epic work of fantastic literature that can stand fairly beside any of these others' greatest works.

The blurbs on the cover, and inside, compare this novel to Orwell's ANIMAL FARM, Tolkien's LORD

OF THE RINGS and Adams' WATERSHIP DOWN - all of which are apt. The difference between this and Orwell's book - the most obvious jumping-off place of reference, with animals as characters - is, as another reviewer so correctly points out below, Wangerin has added the elements of spirituality and faith to the mix. I'm reminded on many of the works I've read by Frederick Buechner - although he uses human beings as his characters, I see many parallels between the gently gripping writing styles employed by Buechner and Wangerin. Even though all of the characters in this novel are animals, the reader should be able to identify and empathize with them easily. The author has imbued them with the qualities one would expect to find in novels of the fantasy/adventure genre - they are brave and heroic and pure-hearted. Well, for the most part - what makes these characters most compelling is not their shining virtues (although there are many), but rather their 'warts', their shortcomings, their thoughts and actions that are somewhat less than heroic, sometimes downright selfish and dishonorable and despicable. The inspiration lies in the fact that through their faith, and through the goodness that lies at the core of all creatures' hearts, they overcome these obstacles and manage to BE heroic when they are afraid, find the faith to BELIEVE their cause is just and that they have a chance to triumph, find the good within themselves to put aside the more petty instincts and simply DO THE RIGHT THING. The story is a gripping one - a classic case of the ultimate battle between the forces of Good and Evil. Wangerin's prose flows along rather like a river, drawing the reader along for the ride - and it's a rewarding one. Now all I have to do is read the sequel. Speaking of which...this novel was recommended to me (and loaned to me) by a dear friend - and after reading and experiencing it, I can easily see why she was drawn to it, why she returns to it (she tells me) again and again. This is a book filled with innocence and hope and positivism - qualities I see in abundance in her. Thanks, Dren...this was a great recommendation!

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