

READING WITH THOUGHT AND EFFORT:
PHILIP PULLMAN'S *HIS DARK MATERIALS* TRILOGY, AND ITS
REIMAGINING OF THE WORKS OF JOHN MILTON AND WILLIAM BLAKE

"BUT YOUR READING WILL BE EVEN BETTER THEN, AFTER A LIFETIME OF THOUGHT
AND EFFORT, BECAUSE IT WILL COME FROM CONSCIOUS UNDERSTANDING."
--XAPHANIA, *THE AMBER SPYGLASS*

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INTRODUCTION

“IN THE BEGINNING . . .”
--GENESIS 1:1

Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy—*The Golden Compass* (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997), & *The Amber Spyglass* (2000)—has been categorized as fantasy fiction for young adults.¹ While the trilogy is very appealing to a young adult audience, it is also theologically complex and critically exciting. *His Dark Materials* is the latest link in a chain of interconnected works that center on the Fall story. The preceding links are the poems of William Blake, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667)², and of course, Genesis. The works in question not only share a basic plot, but they also have a wide appeal. According to Carole Scott, “Since the Bible itself speaks to a variety of ages and intellects, it is not surprising that the three authors [Milton, Blake, and Pullman] continue this tradition.”³ Through this study, I have attempted to clarify two things: the literary merit in *His Dark Materials* and

¹ Citations throughout will be parenthetical and will use the following abbreviations: *GC* (*The Golden Compass*), *SK* (*The Subtle Knife*), and *AS* (*The Amber Spyglass*). All quotes are from: Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass* (New York: Knopf, 1995), *The Subtle Knife* (New York: Knopf, 1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

² Citations throughout will be parenthetical and will include the book and line(s) quoted. All quotes are from: John Milton, *Paradise Lost* in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 297-710, which uses Milton’s original spellings.

³ Carole Scott, “Pullman’s Enigmatic Ontology: Revamping Old Traditions in *His Dark Materials*,” *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 103.

the ways in which the trilogy's connections to Milton and Blake augment that merit.

Philip Pullman (1946-) grew up in England, Zimbabwe, Australia, and North Whales. After receiving his degree from Exeter College in Oxford, he taught middle school for twenty-five years and university for eight. He has published two plays and over twenty books, some novels and some picture books. He writes across genres and in addition to fantasy has written several fairy tales, two series of historical novels, and realistic fiction. *His Dark Materials* are his most recent books with the exception of *Lyra's Oxford* (2003), which is a short story that centers on Lyra Belacqua, one of the main characters of the trilogy. Of his own writing, Pullman says that the books are “mostly of the sort that are read by children, though I'm happy to say that the natural audience for my work seems to be a mixed one - mixed in age, that is, though the more mixed in every other way as well, the better.”⁴

John Milton (1608-1674) was a seventeenth-century English poet and essayist. Most of his works are theological in nature, though some are political, and many make use of his extensive knowledge of languages and scripture. Milton was a revolutionary and supported the execution of Charles I in 1649, after which he was Oliver Cromwell's secretary. After the return of Charles II from France in 1660, Milton retired and stopped writing politically. Milton had always had bad eyesight and went completely blind sometime in

⁴ Pullman, Philip, “About the Author,” *Philip-Pullman.com*, http://www.philip-pullman.com/about_the_author.asp.

the early 1650s. This was before he composed *Paradise Lost*, his most famous work, which was transcribed by others.

Paradise Lost is an epic poem divided into twelve books. Its structure is based on classical epic form, and the poem directly mimics Virgil's *Aeneid*, which also has a twelve-book format. *Paradise Lost* expands upon the original Fall story in Genesis, which only includes the temptation of Eve, the Fall, and the expulsion from Paradise. Milton combines this story with the story of Satan's rebellion and the War in Heaven. He presents the temptation and Fall as Satan's revenge on God for casting the rebel angels out of Heaven. Milton also includes the story of the creation of the world, as told through the angel Raphael and through Adam's memory of the creation of Eve.

William Blake (1757- 1827) is often considered the first of the Romantic Poets. Trained as an engraver, his only formal education was in art, though he was widely read. He wrote both epic poems (also known as his prophetic poetry) and collections of short poetry. These poems were illustrated and printed by Blake with the help of his wife, Catherine. Since the process he used of etching each page, printing it, hand coloring it, and hand binding was long, he did not make many, and very few copies of his works exist. He was largely ignored as a poet during his lifetime, and earned his living through his work as an engraver. In fact, in his sixties, Blake gave up poetry in order to focus on his engraving.

Much of Blake's poetry purports to have been inspired by visions, most of which were religious in nature. From these visions, he created a

mythology of the history of the world that alludes to but subverts the Bible. I will be focusing on a selection of his works. *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789-94) began with only the *Innocence* poems, but was later reissued to include the *Experience* poems. Its subtitle: “Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul” describes both its contents and its themes. Many of the poems are addressed to or have subjects who are children, and although the poems themselves do not concern growing up, their juxtaposition with one another shows what happens when the soul comes of age. *The Book of Thel* (1789) is the story of Thel, a young woman concerned about coming to maturity, as it will eventually lead to death. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) is a satirical take on the Bible. It presents Blake’s theories of contraries and the oneness of matter and spirit (discussed below) and purports to tell us some of the theology of Hell. *The Book of Urizen* (1794-1800) is the Genesis of Blake’s “Bible of Hell” (MHH, pl. 25) and contains Blake’s versions of Creation and the Fall.⁵

Chapters 1 and 2 of this study focus on *His Dark Materials* itself. The body of criticism on the trilogy is fairly new, and much of it seeks to establish *His Dark Materials* as a work with literary merit, and doing so is also my goal in the first two chapters. However, due to the complexity of plot within the trilogy, many critics spend the bulk of their time summarizing and sometimes

⁵ Citations throughout will be parenthetical and include the work, the plate number, and the line(s) quoted. The following abbreviations will be used: *Inn* (*Songs of Innocence*), *Exp* (*Songs of Experience*), *Thel* (*The Book of Thel*), *MHH* (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), and *Urizen* (*The Book of Urizen*). All quotations are from: William Blake, *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979).

must sacrifice interpretation. I have tried to avoid this by providing an initial brief plot summary at the beginning of Chapter 1.

In addition to the plot summary, Chapter 1 contains character studies for each of the three main characters. These are the Eve, Adam, and Satan of Pullman's fall story, but their actions are also keys to the main themes of the trilogy. The three represent language, destiny, the human will, and interpretation; and the characters' interactions play out the interactions between those concepts as well as give us insight into how the characters interact with the world around them.

Lyra, the main character who is the trilogy's Eve, represents both language (or art) and destiny. Her innate abilities to lie and to read a truth-reader called an alethiometer (discussed below) link her to language, and the number of true prophecies about her make her sometimes seem like destiny's puppet. Although she is interpreting what her alethiometer says to her, she is still a child and does not think deeply about the implications of what she is doing. She simply listens to what her alethiometer tells her, and then reports it to others. When Lyra does act, it is usually because the alethiometer or another character tells her to. Although she is a brilliant leader, it is because of her charisma (a language-linked trait). She usually leads others to implement ideas she gets from someone else.

Lyra's Adam, whose name is Will Parry, is complementary to Lyra, and represents action and the human will. He shuns destiny, and listens to no

one but Lyra and himself. Not even angels can tell Will what to do, and his power over them comes from physical strength:

“Then are [angels] stronger than human beings, or weaker?”

“Weaker. You have true flesh, we have not . . . “

“No. If I’m stronger, you have to obey me. Besides, I have the knife. So I can command you . . .”

(*AS*, 11)

Though all humans are stronger than angels, Will’s physical strength also comes from the subtle knife (discussed below). Since this knife can cut windows between parallel worlds, Will is the one who moves Lyra from place to place. Lyra knows what must be done, but she cannot do it without Will.

Mary Malone, like Satan, whom she represents, is different from the Eve and Adam figures. Like Milton’s Satan, she is both older and more knowledgeable than Lyra and Will; and because of this knowledge, her role is that of the interpreter who spreads knowledge to others. In order to reach their highest potential, language and action must listen to what wisdom tells them. But wisdom cannot create change alone because it needs language to express the knowledge and action to make the changes.

Chapter 2 delves slightly deeper into the themes of *His Dark Materials*. Here, I examine how Pullman uses characters and plot devices to convey the moralistic and theological views of the trilogy. First, I look at three secondary characters: Serafina Pekkala, Iorek Byrnison, and Lee Scoresby, whom I see as the voices of the storyteller in *His Dark Materials*. These three characters show the potential Lyra and Will hold; they show what can happen if one follows the “right” morals as set forth by the trilogy. These

characters venerate knowledge, loyalty, nature, and wisdom, as well as asserting the views of secular humanism. Despite its roots in theological writings, *His Dark Materials* shuns religion and spirituality and instead asserts knowledge and the physical world as the highest power. These three characters are the strongest example of that view.

The second part of Chapter 2 is a study of two of the most integral and most difficult to interpret devices in the trilogy: dæmons and Dust. These devices are complicated in their very definitions, which possess multiple facets I will describe in depth later. These complex definitions lead to complex interpretations of what dæmons and Dust represent as metaphors. However, both are central to the plot and themes of the trilogy, and the way in which a reader defines dæmons and Dust affects their interpretation of the entire story.

In the second half of this paper, Chapter 3 provides explanations for and examples of the allusions to Milton and Blake that can be found in *His Dark Materials*. These examples mainly relate to setting and character similarities, though there are also several thematic similarities throughout the works of the three authors. This chapter also contains a section on another notable source for the trilogy: Heinrich von Kleist's "The Puppet Theatre."⁶ The canon of works that center on the Judeo-Christian Fall story are by nature referential to works that come before them. The original story in Genesis starts the tradition and contains what could be considered the pure, basic story.

⁶ The title of this essay can also be translated as "On the Marionette Theater," which is the title Pullman uses in his acknowledgements.

This story was reinterpreted by Milton, whose works were then reinterpreted by Blake. Then, Pullman combined and reinterpreted both Milton and Blake's works.

When Milton wrote *Paradise Lost* he expressed an intention to "justify the ways of God to men" (*PL*, I.26). To do this, he drew on Genesis, and rewrote it in a way that reimagines but reinforces the original story. He expands upon it by adding lavish descriptions, giving the central figures more detailed characterizations, and combining the story found in Genesis with his rendition of the war in Heaven, the inspiration for which came from the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel. Later, Blake, who venerated Milton, would allude to Milton's account in many of his works, including *The Book of Urizen*. Pullman continues this tradition by referencing Milton and Blake, as well as the Bible, in *His Dark Materials*. It is through the referential nature of these books that they become more than simple fantasy stories for young adults.

Finally, Chapter 4 discusses the differences in the points of view with which the three authors choose to ally themselves. Milton's theology, like his plot, is conventional, though he does occasionally depart from his story to explore such theological puzzles as "Do angels eat?" Blake, even though his telling is subversive and argues that God and religion have been corrupt from the beginning, still maintains the conventional power structure. In Blake's works human beings are still the creations of a supreme being, as well as partially responsible for their own restricted position.

Pullman, on the other hand, goes a step further than Blake. Not only are God and religion corrupt in the trilogy, they also have no real power over human beings. In *His Dark Materials* God is not the creator, and angels are weaker than humans are. The most important difference is that in Pullman's work, the Fall is positive. This is different from Milton's concept of the fortunate fall, which is only fortunate because it can be redeemed, making the redemption the positive event. Pullman's positive fall is redemption in itself; humanity needs the fall to preserve knowledge, which helps us reach our full potential as human beings.

The philosophical and theological standpoints demonstrated by the three authors affect the ways they present the main themes of their works, so Chapter 4 also contains a study of the most prevalent shared theme: free will and agency. I also relate the authors' concepts of free will to their feelings on religion and how it becomes corrupted. The canon is connected thematically, and these shared themes are what make *His Dark Materials* stand out from other young adult novels. The surface theme of *His Dark Materials* is one of growing up and learning to love and sacrifice, which is not so out of place in a young adult novel. But Pullman also delves into themes found in *Paradise Lost* and Blake's works. Free will and agency are main themes of the trilogy, as well as *Paradise Lost*. Blake's works and *His Dark Materials* share the theme of corrupt religion and the ways it stagnates humanity, harms the innocent, and attempts to destroy joy and knowledge.

CHAPTER 1

“WHAT MEN OR GODS ARE THESE?”
--JOHN KEATS, “ODE ON A GRECIAN URN”

The Story

His Dark Materials is the story of two children on the verge of puberty, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, and of their journey through several different worlds to save knowledge and consciousness by reenacting the Fall of Adam and Eve. Lyra comes from a parallel universe where history has developed in such a way that science and religion are intertwined and The Church is the most powerful force in the world. All scientific discoveries are linked to theology and dismissed if found heretical. The Church sponsors or monitors all scientific research in the name of God, who is called “the Authority.” Will comes from our world, as does Dr. Mary Malone. Dr. Malone is a scientist who fills the role of the tempter in *The Amber Spyglass*.

The first book, *The Golden Compass*, focuses solely on Lyra Belacqua (later renamed Lyra Silvertongue). Lyra has been raised at the fictional Jordan College in Oxford, England by the scholars of that institution. The only family she knows is Lord Asriel, whom she believes to be her uncle. She sneaks into the Scholars’ private parlor on the night of one of Lord Asriel’s visits and ends up saving his life. While she is hidden there, she overhears a

presentation by Lord Asriel and first hears about Dust, a mysterious substance that every scientific and theological group in her world is working to understand. It is believed that Dust is directly linked to original sin and to dæmons, another oddity of Lyra's world. Dæmons can represent many things (see below), but can be simply defined as a physical manifestation of the soul. They are animal shaped, and children's dæmons change their form, while adults have "settled" dæmons that stay in one shape.

Lyra soon forgets about Dust in the face of more exciting news. A mysterious group called the Gobblers is stealing children from all over England, and Lyra's friend Roger is taken. Lyra vows to rescue Roger, but before she can get started she is taken to London by the mysterious and glamorous Mrs. Coulter. Before Lyra leaves the college, the Master gives her a strange device called an "alethiometer," which looks like a golden compass with four hands. The alethiometer is a fortune-telling device that can answer any question through the use of symbols. The three small hands are manipulated by the reader, who points them at three symbols that contain the components of the question somewhere in their layers of meaning. The fourth hand then swings around and indicates which symbols' meanings make up the answer.

In London, Lyra learns that Mrs. Coulter is in league with the Gobblers. Lyra runs away from Mrs. Coulter and is rescued by the "gyptians," whom she knows from Oxford.⁷ They agree to help her rescue

⁷ Gypsies. Because of the parallel but alternate history of Lyra's world, the etymology of many words has changed. Many words they use are etymologically related to words in our

Roger and the other children from the Gobblers and reveal that Mrs. Coulter is Lyra's mother and Lord Asriel is her father. The group goes north and hires an armored bear named Iorek Byrnison and an aeronaut named Lee Scoresby.

On the way to rescue the other children, Lyra ends up in the hands of the Gobblers again, this time at their experimental station at Bolvangar. It turns out that the scientists there are trying to eradicate original sin by cutting away the children's dæmons, a horrific process that often kills the children. The gyptians arrive in time to rescue Lyra and the other children, and Lee Scoresby flies off with Lyra, Iorek, and Roger to rescue Lord Asriel from the armored bears of Svalbard. The king of the armored bears is a usurper, and Iorek is the rightful king. The balloon is attacked and knocked out of the air, and Lyra is separated from the rest of the group. She travels on her own to Svalbard, where she convinces the usurper to have a duel with Iorek. Because she is able to trick a bear, Iorek renames her Lyra Silvertongue.

Lyra and Roger then continue on to the house the bears have provided for Lord Asriel, who is trying to open a window into the parallel world that can sometimes be seen in the aurora. He does this by separating Roger from his dæmon, which kills Roger and makes Lyra believe that she has betrayed him. The book ends with Lyra crossing through the window and into the new world.

The Subtle Knife continues the story of Lyra's journey, but it focuses mainly on Will Parry, the other main character in *His Dark Materials*. Unlike

own lexicon. For example, "anbaric" is used instead of "electric" while "electrum" is used instead of "amber."

Lyra, Will is from the England in our world, and knows nothing about other worlds or Dust before he begins his journey. Will's mother is mentally ill, and his father has been missing since Will was an infant. He discovers his way into other worlds when he is running away from men who are trying to find information about his father's research. Will's quest throughout *The Subtle Knife* is to find his father, because Will believes that this will cure his mother's insanity.

While in the world of Cittàgazze, which is the first world other than his own Will enters, he gains possession of the Subtle Knife, a knife that has two edges. One edge can cut any form of matter (including angels), and the other can create windows into any one of infinite parallel worlds. He is marked as the knife bearer because he fights and loses two fingers for the knife. It is also around this time that the children travel back into our world and meet Mary Malone, a scientist studying Dust.

Will also meets Lyra in Cittàgazze, and their destinies become intertwined when the alethiometer tells her that her task is to help Will find his father. Will does find his father at the end of *The Subtle Knife*, but it is not the heroic reunion he has fantasized about. Instead, the two do not recognize one another, and fight. At the moment they finally do realize who the other is, one of the witches traveling with the children kills John Parry. Unlike Lyra's alethiometer, the knife cannot tell Will anything about how it is created, why it is his destiny to carry it, or what he should do. Therefore, the story of Will

and the knife is not resolved until *The Amber Spyglass*, the final book of the trilogy.

The Amber Spyglass tells the story of Will and Lyra's actual Fall. The story starts with Will, who is on his way to rescue Lyra, who has been kidnapped by Mrs. Coulter and is being kept asleep in a cave. While she is asleep, Lyra dreams about the World of the Dead, and that she is talking to Roger there. She makes a vow to go into the World of the Dead and rescue him. Will meets Iorek and makes his way to the cave to rescue Lyra, but while he is there the Subtle Knife breaks. Luckily, armored bears are great blacksmiths, and Iorek agrees to mend the knife. Meanwhile, Lord Asriel has discovered an empty world and is setting up his Republic of Heaven to take on the Authority; the Church has sent out Father Gomez, an assassin, to kill Lyra before she can Fall; and Mary Malone reaches the world of the Mulefa. The Mulefa are strange beings that are something like small elephants on wheels. The wheels are actually the seedpods of huge trees, and are integral in the Fall story the Mulefa tell (described below).

Will and Lyra continue on to the World of the Dead, where they find out that they cannot cross into the actual Land of the Dead with their dæmons, and they must leave them behind. They make this sacrifice and cross the river into the Land of the Dead. There they find that the dead languish there perpetually tormented by Harpies, who constantly remind the dead of the negatives they experience in life. Will and Lyra find Roger, as well as John

Parry and Lee Scoresby (who sacrificed himself to keep Church soldiers from finding Will and Lyra). They decide to help the dead escape the World of the Dead and convince the Harpies who inhabit that world to let their victims go in exchange for the promise that everyone who passes through must tell the Harpies true stories. They make their way to a point in the World of the Dead where Will is able to cut through into another world. When the dead pass through they disintegrate and their atoms are reabsorbed into the fabric of the universe just as dæmons' atoms are.

Meanwhile, Lord Asriel begins his battle, and Mary helps the Mulefa discover what is happening to Dust, which is leaving their world. Will and Lyra travel into the Mulefa world themselves, where they are reunited with their dæmons. After a conversation with Mary, Lyra realizes that she is in love with Will and by acting on this love she Falls. This Fall very strongly attracts Dust to Will and Lyra, which temporarily stops the draining of Dust. After realizing that they love one another Lyra and Will make the horrible discovery that Dust is leaking out of the worlds through the windows made by the Subtle Knife. The knife must be destroyed, which means that travel between the worlds is stopped. However, they also know that no one can survive very long outside their own world. It is only possible to leave one window open, and that must be the window from the World of the Dead. Lyra and Will must give each other up in order to do what is right.

The Golden Compass: The Liar and the Truth Reader

Usually, it takes scholars in Lyra's world years of study and huge piles of reference books to decode what the alethiometer is saying, or even to ask it a question. Lyra, on the other hand, reads the alethiometer through intuition. At first, she does not fully understand what she is being told, but she quickly learns how to find the right meaning of the symbol she is looking at. This ability to read the alethiometer is the most helpful tool she has on her journey.

Much of Lyra's destiny seems to stem from her parents, who are both powerful figures in the world she inhabits. At first, she does not know that they are her parents, and when she does, "to see Lord Asriel as her father was one thing, but to accept Mrs. Coulter as her mother was nowhere near so easy" (GC, 130). Mrs. Coulter and Lord Asriel are fighting on different sides of the same war at first, and when they learn how special Lyra is, both of them want her to join their side. Lyra has two quests she sets herself on in *The Golden Compass*. The first is to rescue Roger, but the one that becomes more important to her is to find Lord Asriel in order to rescue him and give him the alethiometer. From the beginning, Lyra allies herself with the enemies of the corrupt church.

The witches in this world have a prophecy about Lyra, and one of them tells her that it is "because of your father, and his knowledge of other worlds" (GC, 187), but both Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter play parts in bringing Lyra to her destiny. Mrs. Coulter is the founding member of the General Oblation Board, the organization behind the experiments at

Bolvangar. Without her mother, Lyra would not know that the church considers Dust evil, and wishes to destroy it; she would not know that she wants to learn about it and protect it. And Lord Asriel is the goal Lyra is working toward for the entirety of the book because she thinks that she is supposed to bring him the alethiometer. In reality, she is working her way toward the doorway he creates into another world, because she must go into the other world to complete her destiny. Lord Asriel creates the chance for one of the major steps Lyra takes toward her destiny.

Before Lyra even understands that there are multiple universes in existence, she is adept at fitting into different worlds. She is like a chameleon, fitting in perfectly in places where she should not. She fits into Jordan College life even though she is a female and a child, characteristics that normally would have kept her out of that institution. When she is taken in by the gyptians, one of them, Ma Costa, eventually has to remind her that, “You en’t gyptian, Lyra. You might pass for gyptian with practice . . .” (GC, 112). Blending in is Lyra’s survival strategy at Bolvangar, because it keeps her from being noticed by the scientists, and it works until Mrs. Coulter arrives and recognizes her. And finally, when she is with the bears, “...they made room for her and treated her with immense courtesy, as if she were a queen” (GC, 357). In each situation, she finds the way to act that is most to her advantage, and does so immediately. The only times she is out of her element are when she is with her parents. Though she finds Mrs. Coulter’s world mesmerizing, Lyra does not quite fit in there. And Lord Asriel keeps her too off guard for

her to assess the situation, and figure out how to lie to him. With Lord Asriel, Lyra is truly herself because she can't be the liar with him. Lyra controls situations by hiding her true self, but with Lord Asriel, she cannot control what is happening or hide herself.

Lyra also has other seemingly inborn abilities that make it easier for her to accomplish the tasks set before her throughout *The Golden Compass*. One is her ability to lead others. She leads the children of Oxford when they play, and this ability comes back to her when she has to lead the children out of the experimental station at Bolvangar. Her leadership also means that she is used to making decisions and having them work out. So, when she decides that she is going north to rescue Roger, there is no doubt in her mind that she will succeed.

The other ability that helps her is her ability to lie. While this would usually be seen as a negative, the narrative voice seems to approve of Lyra's lying. She uses it to get herself out of bad situations, and to expand her influence over other children. "Alethiometer" translates literally to "truth measure" from the Greek. The alethiometer cannot lie, while Lyra often finds it difficult to tell the truth. For Lyra, lying gives her "the same sense of mastery...the same sense of complexity and control that the alethiometer gave her" (GC, 281).

Her name is Latin for "lyre" which is a homonym for "liar." Her surname, Belacqua, was the name of an "acquaintance of Dante's. The early commentators say that Belacqua was a maker of musical instruments, noted

for his indolence,”⁸ but when she cons the usurper king of the bears, the true king, Iorek, gives her the name “Silvertongue” (GC, 348). Lyra goes by the name Lyra Silvertongue for the rest of the trilogy, and so her whole name has to do with lying.

Lyra is given her new name after she executes her first plan by herself; all of her other plans have worked out by coincidence. Her plan to rescue Roger is a childish dream at best, her decision to run away from Mrs. Coulter only works because the gyptians find her, and she cannot figure out how to get herself onto the gyptian expedition north until they decide to take her. Even her escape from Bolvangar works through seemingly divine providence. But there is no intervention of fate in her plot with the bear kings; it relies solely on her ability to dissemble, and Iorek’s ability to fight. Her successes are based on lying or destiny.

This brings up the question of Lyra’s free will. The alethiometer doesn’t always make her decisions for her, but once she makes a decision it helps her succeed in her venture. For example, she decides to go north before she can even read the alethiometer, but once she is there it helps her get out of trouble. At one point, Lee Scoresby the aeronaut, and Serafina Pekkala, a witch queen who helps and protects Lyra throughout the trilogy, are discussing Lyra’s future, and this is where the question of free will is brought up most strongly in the book.

“And this child seems to me to have more free will than anyone I ever met. Are you telling me that

⁸ Charles S. Singleton, ed., *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio*, vol. 2, *Commentary*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1973), 89.

she's just some kind of clockwork toy would up and set going on a course she can't change?"

"We are all subject to the fates. But we must all act as if we are not," said the witch, "or die of despair. There is a curious prophecy about this child: she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not her destiny to do it."

(GC, 310)

This is where the alethiometer comes in; it steers the decisions Lyra makes on her own toward fulfilling her destiny.

The original title for *The Golden Compass* was *Northern Lights*, and the title was changed for publication in the United States. This change in title also changes the focus of the story. *The Golden Compass* puts the focus on the alethiometer and gives it the most importance, while *Northern Lights* evokes Lyra's journey and the question of destiny and free will. It is also important to note that the UK title is not ***The Northern Lights***, it is simply *Northern Lights*. The former suggests the aurora, while the latter applies to both the aurora and the chapter title "Bolvangar Lights." It is in this chapter that Lyra arrives at the experimental station, where she will ultimately fulfill her quest to rescue Roger. This is the expression of her free will, because she is the impetus for the attack on Bolvangar. And the aurora, through which Lord Asriel opens a window between the worlds, is the first step toward her destiny. This window is how she leaves her own world for the first time and meets Will, but it is the cause of Roger's death. When Roger dies, Lyra begins her journey to the World of the Dead, where "the prophecy that the

Master of Jordan College had made to the librarian, that Lyra would make a great betrayal and it would hurt her terribly, was fulfilled” (*AS*, 285).

The title *The Golden Compass* makes sense when it is compared to the titles of the other two books in the series. *The Subtle Knife* is named for a knife that allows Will to cut through into other worlds. *The Amber Spyglass* is an instrument created by Dr. Mary Malone, the trilogy’s Satan figure, which allows her to see Dust. Dust is the driving force behind the events of the trilogy, and is constantly being explored and explained, but is still difficult to define. These are all instruments that have extraordinary powers, and all three are instruments commonly used by explorers, who are prominent figures in these stories.

Lyra’s instrument is very different from the knife and the spyglass. Both Will and Mary have to construct their instruments in some way. When Will’s knife breaks, he must help Iorek mend it by holding the edge straight with his mind. Mary is not even given the idea for her instrument; she must come up with the idea, and implement the entire thing herself. Lyra doesn’t need to earn her alethiometer or the ability to read it; both are simply handed to her. Will needs to fight for the knife, and gives up two fingers to earn it, which is what marks him as the knife-bearer. The Mulefa know that Mary needs a way to see Dust, but they do not tell her this and she must do all the work herself. On the other hand, the master of Jordan College simply hands Lyra the alethiometer, and she finds that she has an inborn ability to read it.

Unlike the alethiometer, the aurora is something that Lyra decides on her own to work toward and effort is required on her part to get there. Her decision to go north comes in the second chapter, and she mentions several times that although her quest in the north is to save Roger, she also wants to see the aurora. The book ends with: “Lyra and her dæmon turned away from the world they were born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky” (*GC*, 399). She has attained her goal of going to investigate the world she saw in the aurora during Lord Asriel’s presentation at Jordan College.⁹

Lyra’s special traits seem to be what allow her to read the alethiometer. Her life is defined by power, ability, free will, and destiny, all of which are affected by the alethiometer. In turn, the alethiometer moves her destiny forward. Though the title suggests that this is the alethiometer’s story, it is really the story of Lyra’s journey.

The Subtle Knife: The Will and the Way

Will’s name is very important. While his name may be short for William, he never indicates his full name as something that identifies him.¹⁰ “Will” is not only a name, but also a word that brings up one of the main themes of *His Dark Materials*, as well as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: free will. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “will” has many meanings

⁹ This final sentence echoes the first sentence of *The Golden Compass*: “Lyra and her dæmon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen.” (*GC*, 1). The first sentence of the book and the last sentence of the book are both about Lyra moving toward her destiny.

¹⁰ Will’s name evokes William Blake, while his father’s name, John, evokes John Milton. John Parry is Will’s predecessor, just as Milton was Blake’s predecessor.

including intent, desire, choice, and inclination to do.¹¹ According to Lauren Shohet, Will's last name also fits in with his allegorical identity as the human will.¹² She also states that after he obtains the Subtle Knife, he "can execute action better than anyone in the trilogy . . ." ¹³ the knife turns Will into an instrument of action and movement, which fits with the definition of the human will as "inclination to do." All of these are important pieces of Will's story. His journey is all about the choices he makes, and his main concern besides finding his father is determining what he wants and who he is.

Like the alethiometer, the knife is closely linked to Will and Lyra's destiny. It creates a way for them to meet, as well as giving Lyra a way to move from world to world. This is important, since the witches' prophecy says that her destiny must happen in another world. The knife provides the means to many prophecies in fact, including Lord Asriel's prophecy that "Death is going to die" (*GC*, 377), and the prophecy the master of Jordan College makes. Will's mother always tells him that his destiny is to "take up his father's mantle" (*SK*, 10). When Will finally meets his father, John Parry tells him that he is a warrior, and that he cannot change it. "Then you're a warrior. That's what you are. Argue with anything else, but don't argue with your own nature" (*SK*, 320). However, Will rejects this destiny, and tells his father's ghost, "You said I was a warrior. You told me that was my nature,

¹¹ *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.dictionary.oed.com>, s.v. "will, n¹."

¹² "Will's surname 'Parry,' suggests the way the will must flexibly deflect and engage the challenges it meets" in Lauren, Shohet, "Reading Dark Materials," in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 26.

¹³ Shohet, "Reading Dark Materials," 27.

and I shouldn't argue with it. Father, you were wrong. I fought because I had to. I can't choose my nature, but I can choose what I do. And I will choose, because now I'm free" (*AS*, 418). Unlike Lyra, Will rebels against the parts of his destiny that he does not agree with.

Just as Will makes his destiny his own, he also makes the knife his own. In *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Vladimir Propp postulates that to earn a helpful magical device, the hero must pass a trial.¹⁴ Will's trial is a fight over the knife with a man named Tullio on the top of the Torre de Angeli in Cittàgaze, and Will sacrifices two fingers to win it. The missing fingers are the mark of the knife bearer, so the old man who used to be the bearer teaches him to use the knife and tells him what is known of its history. Later, after the knife breaks, Will's trial to keep the knife comes in mending it. When it is mended, the knife becomes more Will's and its appearance matches the function Will has given it. After being mended, the knife is a rugged tool instead of a pretty, shiny toy used for thievery. The knife is also more like Will: it is powerful, but it doesn't stand out right away. They are also both scarred in some way: Will from his past, and the knife from being mended.

While Lyra's story focuses on destiny, Will's focuses on intentions and choices. Even when he is facing destiny, it is about the choices he makes. While they are repairing the Knife, Iorek warns Will, "Your intentions may be

¹⁴ "XII. The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc., which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or helper . . . A hostile creature engages the hero in combat . . . Combat here has the character of a scuffle or brawl . . . XIV. The hero acquires the use of a magical agent." In Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), 39-43.

good. The knife has intentions too . . . The intentions of a tool are what it does . . . But sometimes a tool may have other uses that you don't know. Sometimes in doing what you intend, you also do what the knife intends" (*AS*, 181). The Knife does indeed have different intentions than Will. While Will is trying to save Dust, the Knife creates Specters, which feed on a person's agency. The tool Will uses to fight for agency also creates creatures that destroy agency.

While the Guild that created the knife used it to enter other worlds and steal, Will uses the knife to enter other worlds and hide. Hiding is a big part of Will's life, because he does not want anyone to know what's going on with his mother's mental health. It becomes even more important after he kills one of the men who break into his house. The men are goons or spies for an unknown power, and are looking for letters that John Parry, Will's father, sent his wife just before he disappeared. Will must hide his mother from society, the letters from the spies, and himself from the law; this makes the knife perfect for Will because it helps him hide. Anywhere he is, he can slip into another world, close the window, and it's impossible for anyone to find him. Will is so busy hiding that often he does not fully appreciate or experience life. The knife not only helps him hide from life and experiences, it also creates Specters, which suck away a person's will to live. Through the knife's creations, Will learns what a horror it is to always hide. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, part of Will's growing up is realizing that he can no longer hide. He must go back to his world and take responsibility for what he has

done and for his mother. Part of this decision is the realization that he must destroy the knife because of the knife's "intention" to create Specters.

The Amber Spyglass: Teacher, Interpreter, Tempter

Mary Malone is the unlikely third main character in *His Dark Materials*. Unlike Will and Lyra, she is an adult already. Mary does not travel with Will and Lyra, but instead, makes her own journey to their ultimate destination and waits there for them. Mary cannot go with them because their journey is also their coming-of-age, which she has already experienced. She simply has to wait and help them complete their task. The coming of age is about learning to appreciate life, and Mary has already done that. She leaves being a Nun in order to experience love, and her role as the serpent, the tempter, is to teach Lyra that what she feels for Will is love.

Instead of coming of age, Mary learns to appreciate a completely new level of experience. Throughout her journey, she is learning to see things that are not usually visible to her, or to see visible objects in a different way. If Will is an embodiment of action and desire, and Lyra is an embodiment of language and story, as Lauren Shohet suggests,¹⁵ then Mary is the embodiment of seeing, interpreting, and understanding. She is knowledge, and she tries to give Will and Lyra knowledge just as the serpent tries to give Adam and Eve knowledge.

¹⁵ “. . . in the trilogy’s symbolic dimension, Lyra figures as something like lyric/narrative/art; Will, something like human will/desire/agency” in Shohet, “Reading Dark Materials,” 25.

The reader is introduced to Mary when she is at a turning point in her life. This is important because Mary's journey is about change, just as Will's journey is about choice. The alethiometer brings Lyra to Mary at a point when the latter's future is uncertain, especially the future of her research. Because of this uncertainty Mary is receptive to any direction fate can send her, so Dust sends her Lyra. Although Mary knows about Dust and has been researching it for many years, Lyra gives her a new perspective on the problem and inspires Mary to improve the computer program she uses to communicate with Dust. These improvements allow Mary to communicate directly with Dust, and this communication begins her journey. Lyra also explains the state of mind necessary to commune with Dust, which Mary likens to John Keats' concept of "Negative Capability, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."¹⁶ Because Mary's focus is active knowledge, she must relearn how to be intuitive in order to communicate with Dust.

Mary has also fulfilled her role as interpreter for the first time by making it easy to understand Dust. The alethiometer works only through symbols, which take many years of study or, in Lyra's case, "grace" (*AS*, 491) to interpret. Only special people can understand Dust that way, but with Mary's computer program, anyone could. Through her translation, she has created the opportunity to spread knowledge democratically instead of

¹⁶ John Keats to George and Thomas Keats, 1817, in *Selected Poems and Letters*, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 261.

hierarchically, something Milton would have approved.¹⁷ Unfortunately, this knowledge must be destroyed to keep it out of the hands of the enemy.

Knowledge is power in *His Dark Materials*, which is why the Regent, and by extension the Church and all other groups in power, want to keep the worlds ignorant. Mary's ability to interpret must only be used to spread knowledge, not to restrict it.

Mary also introduces another way of listening to Dust: the *I Ching*, a complicated Chinese divination system that is part of Confucianism. Simply put, the questioner flips a coin or tosses yarrow stalks to obtain numbers from which to build a six-line figure. These hexagrams are interpreted as six-line verses that explain how the questioner should approach the situation they are asking about. The *I Ching* is another way that Mary acts as a translator. The verses given by the book interpret the markings, but the verses themselves are enigmatic, and Mary must figure out what they mean. Mary's reading of the *I Ching* is similar to the way everyone but Lyra must read the alethiometer, but the book cannot give her answers as exact as the ones the alethiometer gives.

From our world, Mary moves into the world of Cittàgazze, where she is marked as special because the Specters do not bother her. Specters normally attack all adults, though they ignore children and actively avoid Will and the Knife. It is interesting to note that they also ignore Father Gomez when he is moving through that world. This is not due to their being from

¹⁷ Milton believed in the importance of knowledge and in the right of all people to receive knowledge because of his belief that "any man who wishes to be saved should work out his beliefs for himself" but those beliefs could only be worked out through diligent study of scripture. John Milton, *On Christian Doctrine* in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 1156-1201.

another world, since they attack the witches quite readily. Father Gomez believes that his sacred duty is what protects him: “I have no knife,” said Father Gomez. “But I have a sacred task. Maybe that is protecting me against these—Specters”” (*AS*, 121), and he may be right.

Specters drain a person of all will and purpose. Since both Mary and Father Gomez are acting with a purpose that is handed down from a higher power, their purpose is not their own. Therefore, the Specters cannot attack them, because the two do not have a purpose they can lose. Instead, they are like children, blindly following instructions, and uncaring of the consequences. Neither of them has anything to lose from their actions. Father Gomez believes that there are no consequences for him because he has performed preemptive absolution for the sin he will commit when he kills Lyra. Mary has nothing to lose, since she has already made the decision to give up her career and her life to follow the instructions Dust gives her.

In the countryside outside of Cittàgaze, Mary finds another window that has been left open, and moves into the world of the Mulefa. The Mulefa are essential to Mary’s quest in many ways. Not only do they provide the materials for her to build her spyglass, they also provide her with the problem she must solve and the environment to fully develop her role as one who spreads knowledge and as an interpreter. Mary’s second task, which she is given after she builds her spyglass, is to figure out why the seedpod trees that provide the basis for Mulefa life are dying and find a way to save them. This is linked with the task Dust gives her to “play the serpent” (*SK*, 250), because

only by helping Will and Lyra achieve their destiny can she solve the problem she discovers with the trees.

The Mulefa hold a unique outlook on knowledge in *His Dark Materials*. In all of the other worlds we see, knowledge is linked to sin and evil, but the Mulefa see knowledge as a positive thing. This is most clearly expressed in their creation story, which Mary's Mulefa friend, Atal, tells her:

“Ever since we have had the sraf [Dust], we have had memory and wakefulness. Before that, we remembered nothing.”

“What happened to give you the sraf?”

“We discovered how to use the wheels. One day a creature with no name discovered a seedpod and began to play, and as she played she--”

“She?”

“She, yes. She had no name before then. She saw a snake coiling itself through a hole in the seedpod, and the snake said--”

“The snake spoke to her?”

“No, no! It is a make-like [metaphor]. The story tells that the snake said, ‘What do you know? What do you remember? What do you see ahead?’ And she said, ‘Nothing, nothing, nothing.’ So the snake said, ‘Put your foot through the hole in the seedpod where I was playing, and you will become wise.’ So she put a foot where the snake had been. And the oil entered her blood and helped her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the sraf. It was so strange and pleasant that she wanted to share it at once with her kindred.

(AS, 224)

The story of how the Mulefa became aware beings has one integral difference from the story told in Lyra's world and our world: the Mulefa are not punished for gaining awareness; it only brings good to their world. Because they see knowledge so positively, they do not try to repress or control it, and all adults know the entirety of the history and present of their entire world.

Their willingness to share knowledge means that Mary has all the pieces she needs to fulfill the tasks set before her.

Unlike the humans in *His Dark Materials*, the Mulefa can see Dust without augmenting their vision. Perhaps this is because they have a positive view of Dust, or perhaps it is because they are so connected to their environment. Either way, humans cannot see Dust with the naked eye. Lord Asriel takes pictures of it with a specially treated film, and Mary creates her spyglass. The spyglass is important because it allows Mary to see the way Dust moves and to figure out what is wrong with the wheel trees.

The spyglass is made from things that closely relate the Mulefa to Dust, and it allows Mary to see Dust the way the Mulefa see it. Dust is strongly attracted to art: “He got a piece of ivory, just a lump, and there were no Shadows [Dust] with that. It didn’t react. But a carved ivory chess piece did. A big splinter off a wood plank didn’t, but a wooden ruler did. And a carved wooden statuette had more” (*SK*, 88), and Mary must be taught to use the lacquer for the spyglass by a “craftsman” (*AS*, 226). This means that the lacquer is a kind of art, and therefore will attract Dust very strongly. The oil she spreads on the lacquer comes from the center of the seedpods used as wheels. According to the Mulefa creation legend, they start being able to see Dust when the oil from the wheels enters their bloodstream. Before Mary builds the spyglass, she is like a child to the Mulefa, unable to see Dust. The spyglass allows her to see as an adult, and she sees the problem clearly. The

spyglass also helps her make connections that are central to Will and Lyra's story.

Mary's way of seeing things changes many times during her life. The first big change is when she leaves being a nun to devote her life to science. She does not believe that the church and science can coexist in her life. In Lyra's world, science is done for the glory of God, which is what Mary was trying to do when she was a nun. What Mary found was missing from her life as a nun was love and human connection, and it could be argued that that's what is missing from Lyra's church. Then come the changes in seeing which Lyra and the spyglass bring about. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, Serafina Pekkala teaches Mary to see the dæmons of people whose dæmons are inside them. This is interesting, because Mary is learning to see like a witch, and she is the one who completes the witches' prophecy that Lyra will be a second Eve. Mary is key to Lyra's position as a second Eve because she is the tempter, and without her Lyra would not fall. Thus, prophecy is yet another kind of knowledge that Mary is advancing.

Mary completes a type of trinity with Lyra and Will. Lyra is knowledge or language, Will is action, and Mary understands. The three are dependent on one another because to make a decision you have to understand the consequences of your actions. Will and Lyra cannot make their final decision without understanding it, and Mary is the one who helps them do that. She also completes the parallel that can be drawn between the main characters of *Paradise Lost* and the main characters of *His Dark Materials*.

Mary is the Serpent to Will and Lyra as Adam and Eve. In *Paradise Lost*, the Angel Raphael gives Adam and Eve knowledge about the way the world works. The serpent doesn't give them any new knowledge when it tells them to eat the apple, it just gives them a new understanding of the knowledge they have. Lyra knows that she feels something special for Will, but she does not know what it is until Mary tells the story of her first love.

As Mary said that, Lyra felt something strange happen to her body. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a great house she hadn't known was there, a house that was somehow inside her, and as she turned the key, she felt other doors opening deep in the darkness, and lights coming on... It was the strangest thing: Lyra knew exactly what she meant, and half an hour earlier, she would have had no idea at all. And inside her, that rich house with all its doors open and all its rooms lit stood waiting, quiet, expectant.

(*AS*, 444)

Mary does not interpret Lyra's feelings; instead, she gives Lyra the understanding to interpret them herself.

CHAPTER 2

“ . . . THERE IS A FIRE
AND MOTION OF THE SOUL WHICH WILL NOT DWELL
IN ITS OWN NARROW BEING . . . ”
--GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON, “CHILDE HAROLD’S PILGRIMAGE”

The Humanist Trilogy

Many critics classify Philip Pullman as a secular humanist, which the Council for Secular Humanism defines as:

A way of thinking and living that aims to bring out the best in people so that all people can have the best in life. Secular humanists reject supernatural and authoritarian beliefs. They affirm that we must take responsibility for our own lives and the communities and world in which we live. Secular humanism emphasizes reason and scientific inquiry, individual freedom and responsibility, human values and compassion, and the need for tolerance and cooperation.¹⁸

With the exception of dismissing the supernatural, this classification brings three of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy’s characters immediately to mind: Serafina Pekkala, Iorek Byrnison, and Lee Scoresby. All three play pivotal parts in the action of *His Dark Materials*, as well as directly state several of the main themes, but they are often overlooked in criticism. There is a sense in which all three are “outside” the story, even though the trilogy would not work without them. Their position as outsiders places them on a similar level

¹⁸ The Council for Secular Humanism, “Homepage,” *Council for Secular Humanism*, <http://www.secularhumanism.org>.

with the author and the reader, which allows these characters to act as links between the author, the story, and the reader.

Serafina Pekkala gives the reader an understanding of what the “right” theology is in the view of the trilogy. She places sensation and a type of spirituality-of-self above organized religion, for which she expresses nothing but disdain. Her spirituality is firmly grounded in the physical world; she tells Lyra: “[Witches] feel cold, but we don’t mind it, because we will not come to harm. And if we are wrapped up against the cold, we wouldn’t feel other things, like the bright tingle of the stars, or the music of the Aurora, or best of all the silky feeling of moonlight on our skin. It is worth being cold for that” (GC, 313). She also constantly expresses her disdain for the Church because they try to remove sensation and the natural in their efforts to eradicate sin. For her, taking away the ability to feel would be like taking away her connection to nature, and by extension, her religion. Serafina especially hates Mrs. Coulter, who Serafina sees as being at fault for the atrocities at Bolvangar.

In her position of wise woman, fortune-teller, and warrior, Serafina gives us a glimpse of Lyra’s potential future. Like Lyra, she has wisdom beyond that of normal humans, and she wants to spread that knowledge rather than contain it. Both are also leaders and orators. Serafina is the queen of her witch clan, and Lyra is something of a queen to the gang of children she plays with in Oxford. Serafina is seen debating with the other clan leaders in *The Subtle Knife*, and she discusses free will and destiny with Lee Scoresby in *The*

Golden Compass. Lyra, as a lesser manifestation, gets what she wants by lying instead of through logic. Neither of them fears a battle, especially if that battle defends what they think is right, but their focus is wisdom.

Iorek possesses wisdom, strength of will, and is a proven warrior. He is solidly involved in the world around him, and his main virtue is strength, both physical and mental. He is the voice of caution in the story, as well as one representative of nature. The bears suffer the most when Lord Asriel opens his huge window in the North, and many of the consequences that cause the bears' suffering are similar to the effects of global warming. When Iorek warns Will against repairing the Subtle Knife, the bear is advocating the secular humanist ideal that understanding and knowledge are tantamount to interacting with the world. Like Serafina, Iorek warns against interfering with nature, especially when one does not know the consequences.

If Serafina is Lyra's potential, Iorek is Will's. Like Iorek, Will is a warrior who concerns himself with protecting those he loves and with defending his pride. Bears "were brought up by their mothers, and seldom saw their fathers" (*GC*, 341), just as Will was raised by his mother and only knew his father from photographs and later the letters he finds in his mother's room. The two are alike in their fierceness and in their loyalty to Lyra. While Iorek has an intuitive understanding of the world, Will's quest is to gain understanding and knowledge. Will was raised in an unnatural environment because his father was missing. Through his quest to find his father, Will hopes to recreate a natural world for himself. When the bears' habitat is

destroyed, Iorek also seeks to recreate what is natural by bringing the bears to the Himalayas where it is always cold. Both learn that they must accept it when what is natural changes, because it cannot be recreated the way it was. They must work with the concrete instead of the ideal.

Lee Scoresby is the least likely of this trio. He is neither superhuman, nor does he hold a position of power. Unlike Serafina and Iorek, who fight for wisdom and honor, respectively, Lee fights for free will. The only people we see Lee attack are those who would try to stop Lyra from having a choice in her fall. He balks at Serafina's view of destiny, preferring free will and choice. "Oh, I like choice, though," he said. "I like choosing the jobs I take and the places I go and the food I eat and the companions I sit and yarn with" (*GC*, 308).

Lee is an odd mix of the typical and the atypical, the simple and the complex, which makes him representative of the potential of "everyman" in the same way Serafina and Iorek represent the potential in the children. Like many men, Lee has a dream of earning enough money to create his own earthly paradise: "I'd like to end my days in comfort. Buy a little farm, a few head of cattle, some horses . . . Nothing grand you notice. No palace or slaves or heaps of gold. Just the evening wind over the sage, and a ceegar, and a glass of bourbon whiskey" (*GC*, 309), but that dream is quickly replaced by a more spiritual, higher-minded dream. After he dies, and even for some time before, Lee's strongest desire is to be absorbed back into the universe. He

does not stretch for control or glory; he is simply content to do what he does and to do it well. He is an impressive warrior, able to hold off a squadron of Church mercenaries on his own, but he does not enjoy battle the way Iorek does.

This combination of strength and compassion could lead to an interpretation of Lee as a Christ figure, which would indeed put him in a position to inspire other humans. His actions as a warrior also link him to Christ. In the battle at Alamo Gulch (*AS*, 299-305), Lee sacrifices himself so that John Parry can escape and go on to help Will and Lyra. This is Lee's crucifixion; and his ascension also comes in a battle. Lee is one of the ghosts who stay behind to aid Lord Asriel's army in the battle between the Republic of Heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven. At the end of the battle, Lee's ghost leads Lyra and Will to safety, fulfilling their goal:

And now that their purpose was achieved, now that the children had found their dæmons and escaped, the dead warriors allowed their atoms to relax and drift apart, at long, long last.

. . . the last little scrap of consciousness that had been the aeronaut Lee Scoresby floated upward, just as his great balloon had done so many times . . . the last of Lee Scoresby passed through the heavy clouds and came out under the brilliant stars, where the atoms of his beloved dæmon, Hester, were waiting for him.

(*AS*, 418)

After bestowing one last gift, Lee ascends to his own personal heaven.

Although he is not the one to open this paradise to the dead, he is one of the first to take advantage of it. Iorek and Serafina seem to see this Christlike potential in Lee. Along with Lyra and Serafina, Lee is one of the three people

Iorek cares for, and Serafina invites him to join the witches' council, when "no man had ever been known to join a witch council" (*SK*, 48). They see Lee as something more than just human.

Lee, Iorek, and Serafina also share a trait with one another that most of the characters in the book do not possess: they are happy when they are alone. In his article "Fantasizing It As It Is: Religious Language in Philip Pullman's Trilogy, *His Dark Materials*" David Gooderham argues that many of the characters are unhappy because they are forced to be alone.¹⁹ Even characters from Lyra's world, where people have dæmons and are therefore never truly alone, feel lonely at times. Lauren Shohet says definitively that, "Interdependence is the condition of all people,"²⁰ but unlike other characters, Lee is content with only his dæmon for company. Serafina is even content without her dæmon, who has been separated from her in a similar process to the one Pan and Lyra go through in the World of the Dead,

There's a region of our north land, a desolate, abominable place, where a great catastrophe happened in the childhood of the world, and where nothing has lived since. No dæmons can enter it. To become a witch, a girl must cross it alone and leave her dæmon behind...now they can roam free, and go to far places and see strange things and bring back knowledge.

(*AS*, 473)

One of the bearlike ways Iorek brings back to Svalbard after defeating Iofur is the concept that "armoured bears generally are not social beings" and do not

¹⁹ David Gooderham, "Fantasizing It As It Is: Religious Language in Philip Pullman's Trilogy, *His Dark Materials*," *Children's Literature* 31 (2003): 171.

²⁰ Shohet, "Reading Dark Materials," 30.

live together in courts or communities; they only come together for war.²¹ By being comfortable alone, and through their other values, Lee, Iorek, and Serafina are the best role models for Lyra and Will, who must sacrifice being together and lead their lives alone in order to protect Dust.

The things these three characters stand for, such as wisdom, honor, duty to humanity, loyalty, and strength shine through as the main virtues of the trilogy. These are the morals that help Will and Lyra when they are in trouble. The virtues The Church promotes: submission, piety, zeal without reason, and the suppression of knowledge, are what get the children and other characters into trouble. In fact, many of the secondary characters who follow the values of the Church end up dead. Thus, the secular humanists, and not the church, are the moral superiors of *His Dark Materials*, and Lee, Iorek, and Serafina are the role models Pullman speaks through to explain what's right to his readers.

What are Dæmons and Dust?

The two elements in *His Dark Materials* that are the hardest to grasp are also two of the most central components to understanding the philosophy and theology of the trilogy: dæmons and Dust. In Lyra's world, every person has a dæmon, which can be simply explained as a physical manifestation of the spirit. Dæmons are the key to understanding the theology of the trilogy, and they provide several important clues to Dust. Dust is central to both the

²¹ Laurie Frost, *The Elements of His Dark Materials* (Buffalo Grove, IL: The Fell Press, 2001-2006), 258.

creation and the continuing existence of all the worlds, and is the pivotal element of the books. Every character in *His Dark Materials* is on a quest to understand or control, destroy or preserve Dust. Both dæmons and Dust are left somewhat ambiguous by Pullman, and readers are left to their own definitions, which individualizes a reader's understanding of the book as well. Dust and dæmons are incredibly useful in reading and interpreting *His Dark Materials* because their multiplicity of meaning ties together the many different facets of the story, and depending on how the individual reader interprets them, they can give the trilogy different meanings.

Dæmons are part of a person, but a part that is somewhat independent of the rest of the psyche. It is separate from the rest of the person's being, but unless a person goes through an extreme trial, his or her dæmon is not physically independent. Trying to create too much physical distance between the dæmon and the body produces physical pain and sometimes death: "Dæmons could move no more than a few yards away from their humans" (GC, 195). Witches' dæmons are an exception to this rule "The witches have the power to separate themselves from their dæmons a mighty sight further'n [normal people] can. If need be, they can send their dæmons far abroad on the wind or the clouds, or down below the ocean" (GC, 164). Pantalaimon and Kirjava (Lyra and Will's dæmons) can also do this because their humans have passed through a place the dæmons cannot follow. For Will and Lyra, this is the World of the Dead, and Serafina Pekkala tells Pantalaimon and Kirjava that witches go through a similar trial in order to gain the ability to separate

from their dæmons. These separations are quite different from the “intercisions” performed at Bolvangar. At Bolvangar, the purpose of the scientists and the Church is to destroy the bond between the dæmon and the body, while the process the Witches, Will, and Lyra go through simply stretches the bond between the two but leaves it intact.

Dæmons are especially important in the trilogy because of their connections to Dust and to the turning point between childhood and adulthood. Children’s dæmons are “unsettled” (*GC*, 167) and can change shape at will to fulfill the child’s needs or to reflect the child’s emotions. When a child reaches adulthood, the dæmon stops changing and “settles” into one “fixed” shape for the rest of its life. In the trilogy, the process of settling is strongly linked to sexuality and desire. Mrs. Coulter tells Lyra that, “at the age we call puberty, the age you’re coming to very soon, darling, dæmons bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings, and that’s what lets Dust in” (*GC*, 284). Some critics liken the scientists grabbing Pantalaimon at the experimental station to molestation.²² Santiago Colas says,

The description [of what happens when one of the doctors grabs Pantalaimon] recalls what we might expect from a passage describing sexual abuse, particularly the molestation of a child. The violation renders Lyra immobilized, disgusted, and incapable of coherent thought . . . The link between human and dæmon now appears also as a site of sexuality.²³

²²See for example: Santiago Colas, “Telling True Stories, or The Immanent Ethics of Material Spirit (and Spiritual Matter) in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*” *Discourse* 27, no. 1 (2005): 54. and Maude Hines, “Second Nature: Dæmons and Ideology in *The Golden Compass*,” in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 42.

²³ Colas, “Telling True Stories,” 54.

The following scene between Will and Lyra solidifies the connection between dæmons settling and sexuality, but presents it as capable of being a beautiful thing instead of only a violation:

Will put his hand on hers. A new mood had taken hold of him, and he felt resolute and peaceful. Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean, he moved his hand from Lyra's wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her dæmon.

Lyra gasped. But her surprise was mixed with a pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn't protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will's dæmon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew Will was feeling exactly what she was.

And she knew, too, that neither dæmon would change now, having felt a lover's hands on them. These were their shapes for life: they would want no other.

(AS, 498-499)

Dæmons can be simplified in many different ways. Some critics say they are a physical manifestation of personality, others say soul or spirit, some bring up Jung's idea of the animus or anima, and many of them provide more than one definition at a time, proving the complexity of dæmons.²⁴ Maude Hines defines them as "nature" but also posits that "Destiny works like ideology here; nature, like free will,"²⁵ so dæmons can also represent free will or agency. Colas presents a theory that these do not exist in the dæmon itself,

²⁴ For example, dæmons are called "Pullman's innovative depiction of the human soul . . . the physical realization of the Jungian idea that we have an *anima*, or *animus*." In Anne-Marie Bird, "'Without Contraries is no Progression': Dust as an All-Inclusive, Multifunctional Metaphor in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," *Children's Literature in Education* 32, no. 2 (2001), 115.

²⁵ Hines, "Second Nature," 40-41.

but “within the invisible, but very much material bond *between* human and dæmon.”²⁶ It is when this bond is broken that negative consequences occur.

In “The Puppet Theatre” (1810), Heinrich von Kleist says that “spirit cannot err when it is non-existent.”²⁷ By breaking the bond between human and dæmon, the scientists at Bolvangar hope to destroy the spirit and therefore make the children unable to err. The nurses at the experimental station on Bolvangar still have their dæmons, but have undergone intercision and have “strange blank incuriosity” (*GC*, 283), much like the “zombis” (*GC*, 375), who are also supposed to be victims of intercision. If the separation of the body and the dæmon is too drastic *and* the bond is destroyed, the body will die. This is what happens to a man who grabs Lee Scoresby’s balloon as it is taking off: “the other man, feeling the rope lift, instinctively clung on instead of letting go . . . The poor man’s dæmon, a heavysset husky, howled with fear and pain from the ground as the balloon surged up toward the sky” (*SK*, 221), and to Tony Malarias, the little boy Lyra and Iorek find without a dæmon. The dæmons of Bolvangar’s child victims seem able to survive for a short time without the children, as Lyra finds when she discovers

the dæmons of the severed children: ghostlike forms of cats, or birds, or rats, or other creatures, each bewildered and frightened and as pale as smoke . . . Lyra could hear faint cries of pain and misery.

(*GC*, 259)

²⁶ Colas, “Telling True Stories,” 55.

²⁷ Heinrich Von Kleist, “The Puppet Theatre.” n *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans David Constantine (London: J.M. Dent, 1997), 412.

Presumably, the children belonging to these dæmons have also survived in the same state as Tony and will soon die of shock.

Dæmons can also be seen as a metaphor for free will and for reason. When humans are separated from their dæmons, they lose their desire and their intent, which we know to be part of the definition of will. Dæmons also express their displeasure when their humans are doing something they don't agree with. The presence of both free will and reason in the definition of dæmons ties back to Milton, who posited that "reason is also choice" (*PL*, III.108).

Dust is extremely complex to interpret, even more so than dæmons. It lends itself with equal ease to being interpreted as wisdom or knowledge, sensation and sensuality, creative force, self-awareness, a replacement for God, or any combination of these. The Fall theme is a factor that largely informs interpretations of Dust. The Christian tradition says that Adam and Eve gain "knowledge of good and evil"²⁸ when they eat the fruit, which supports its definition as wisdom or knowledge. However, Adam and Eve also become aware of their nudity, just as Lyra's new awareness when she begins attracting Dust is of her sexual and emotional attraction to Will. This lends credulity to a definition of Dust as not only knowledge, but knowledge of the self, or self-awareness.

Dust and dæmons also have strong connections to the physical, the sensual, and the sexual. One concept of a dæmon is a physical manifestation of the spirit or soul. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake says that,

²⁸ Genesis 2:17 (King James Version)

“Man has no Body distinct from his Soul, for that calld Body is a portion of the Soul discern'd by the five Senses” (*MHH*, pl. 4), and so the concept of a physical soul or spirit is another way to connect to Blake.

Dæmons attracting Dust to a person at puberty supports the concept of Dust as self-awareness, because when a person's dæmon settles, more Dust is attracted to that person. Settling also tells the person who they truly are and that allows the person to experience self-awareness more strongly. A wise old sailor tells Lyra, “They always have settled, and they always will. That's part of growing up . . . There are compensations for a settled form . . . [Like] Knowing what kind of person you are” (*GC*, 167). This concept is also supported by the fact that “dust is just another name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself” (*AS*, 31), which is how the angel Balthamos explains Dust to Will.

Anne-Marie Bird posits that Dust is a theological metaphor to replace a supreme being with a pantheistic view. She also points out the many connections between Blakean theology and Dust.²⁹ When a Blakean spin is placed on Dust, it also becomes a representative for contraries or for energy. In Blake, energy is the source of evil according to religion, but in reality, it is the source of all pleasure. Energy in Blake is bound by reason, just as Dust is attracted to self-aware matter and is more strongly attracted to adults, who have settled dæmons and stronger reasoning skills.

The Church's war against Dust and their attempts to destroy it also tie in to Blake. Blake was a firm believer that the church was out to destroy

²⁹ Bird, “Without Contraries is no Progression,” 118.

anything joyous, especially sensual or sexual pleasure. Dust is heavily interrelated with the sensual and the sexual in *His Dark Materials*, and that is why the church is attempting to destroy it. The priests in Blake's "The Garden of Love" who are "binding with briars, my joys and desires" (*Exp*, pl. 44, 12) are using those briars to separate the speaker from his dæmon and from Dust. Likewise, in Blake, the church's actions always have the worst effect on children, like the child in "Little Boy Lost" (discussed below). This could be because adults have self-awareness and agency (and Dust in *His Dark Materials*), while children do not. It is much easier to victimize those without choice, so the children's innocence puts them at risk while the adults' experience protects them. Blake also shared Pullman's view that through a reenactment of the Fall and preservation of Dust--though he does not call it that—the world can be rescued from corruption:

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby
commanded to leave his guard at tree of life and when he
does, the whole creation will be consumed, and appear
infinite and holy, whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.
This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual
enjoyment.

(*MHH*, pl. 14)

So Blake and Pullman see the same problem as well as the same solution in the war between Dust and the truth.

I believe that Pullman intended for Dust and dæmons to be complicated and to have several different interpretive definitions. Throughout the book, characters are searching for the meanings of these things. Lyra has many different quests throughout the trilogy, and the only constant is that she

is working to understand Dust. The Church believes that they know what Dust is, but they are trying to obtain proof and find a way to destroy it. Lord Asriel is trying to find a way to use Dust to gain power. Even in our world, Mary Malone is making the first discoveries that would lead to a scrutiny of Dust. She continues this work in the Mulefa world, where they understand Dust itself, but do not understand why it is acting differently than it always has. Most of the information the reader gets about Dust comes from characters who are just as confused as the reader. Many of these people believe that if they understand Dust they will understand dæmons or vice-versa. Dust's definitions of itself are vague and when combined with the other information we have, are impossible to interpret only one way.

These multiple meanings make dæmons and Dust a lot like the symbols on the alethiometer. Each symbol has several different meanings or concepts it represents, and Lyra must keep all of them in mind when she is reading. She explains it like this:

‘I kinda see [the meanings]. Or feel ‘em rather, like climbing down a ladder at night, you put your foot down and there’s another rung. Well, I put my mind down, and there’s another meaning, and I kind of sense what it is. Then I put ‘em all together. There’s a trick to it like focusing your eyes.’
(GC, 151)

And then a bit later:

‘I just make my mind go clear and then it’s sort of like looking down into water. You got to let your eyes find the right level, because that’s the only one that’s in focus. Something like that.’ . . . Then she sat still, letting her mind hold the three levels of meaning in focus and relaxed for the answer, which came almost at once.
(GC, 174)

Like Lyra when she reads the alethiometer, in order to truly understand the meaning of the trilogy, we have to hold the many meanings of Dust and dæmons in our minds at once and then use those meanings to create an interpretation of the trilogy. Every meaning is important because it informs the next meaning and the interpretation of the trilogy in general.

CHAPTER 3

“HEAR THE VOICE OF THE BARD!”
-- WILLIAM BLAKE, “INTRODUCTION”

Sound and Setting

Pullman’s love of *Paradise Lost* is evident in his introduction and notes written for a recent edition of the poem.³⁰ In the introduction, Pullman explains how he came to love *Paradise Lost* and why Milton is not only a great poet, but also has “great storytelling power” (7). We not only learn Pullman’s feelings on Milton, we also learn some of his philosophy of storytelling, because he explains exactly what he feels Milton does right as a storyteller. This philosophy is also exemplified in *His Dark Materials*. It is also telling for *His Dark Materials* that Pullman agrees with Blake’s criticism of Milton in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which Pullman calls “the most perceptive, and certainly the most succinct, criticism of *Paradise Lost*” (8), in that it explains why Pullman’s reading of Milton, and therefore the trilogy has such a Blakean bent.

Pullman’s enthusiasm for Milton’s writing in general and *Paradise Lost* in particular is manifest in this introduction. He speaks eagerly and passionately about Milton’s use of language; he argues for Satan as a better

³⁰ Quotes throughout this section are from: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Philip Pullman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

character than God is; and he sets Milton up as a master of the storytelling craft. The first thing Pullman says about *Paradise Lost*, and the most recurring praise he gives it, is that the words create sound imagery. For him, “sound is part of the meaning” (3) of the poem. He gives this example of the imagery evoked by the sounds of the poem:

Ply stemming nightly toward the pole—in those words I could hear the creak of wood and rope, the never ceasing dash of water against the bows, the moan of the wind in the rigging; I could see the dim phosphorescence in the creaming wake, the dark waves against the restless horizon, the constant stars in the velvet sky; and I saw the vigilant helmsman, the only man awake, guiding his sleeping shipmates and the precious freight across the wilderness of the night. (2)

The sound of a poem, Pullman says, is the first step to understanding it. Even without knowing the meaning of the poem, one can appreciate the sound, and from that appreciation begin to understand it.

The experience of reading poetry aloud when you don’t fully understand it is a curious and complicated one. It’s like suddenly discovering that you can play the organ. Rolling swells and peals of sound, powerful rhythms and rich harmonies are at your command; and as you utter them you begin to realize that the sound you’re releasing from the words you speak is part of the reason they’re there. The sound is part of the meaning, and that part only comes alive when you speak it. So at this stage it doesn’t matter that you don’t fully understand everything: you’re already far closer to the poem than someone who sits there in silence looking up meanings and references and making assiduous notes. (3)

According to Pullman, “no one, not even Shakespeare, surpasses Milton in his command of the sound, the music, the weight and taste and texture of English words” (43).

Pullman calls Milton a “master of imagery” (245), and writes at length about the incredible way he describes Hell and Paradise, as well as the imagery the sound of the poem evokes. There is no mention of the descriptions of Heaven, although Pullman references these descriptions in *His Dark Materials*. Pullman loves the settings in *Paradise Lost*; he says of them: “it was the landscape, the atmosphere, that was my starting point [for *His Dark Materials*]” (9), which is high praise, because Pullman believes that some writers “. . . are drawn to a particular atmosphere, a particular kind of landscape; they want to wander about in it and relish its special tastes and sounds, even before they know the story they’re going to tell” (5). Milton’s landscape was even more important than the theology of the poem in the creation of *His Dark Materials*; Pullman started with the landscape, but he did not set out to tell the same story.

But as the narrative began to form itself on the page, I found that—perhaps drawn by the gravitational attraction of a much greater mass—I was beginning to tell the same story too. I wasn’t worried about that, because I was well aware that there are many good ways of telling the same story, and that this story was a very good one in the first place, and could take a great deal of re-telling. (9)

As with the sound, Pullman finds that the imagery leads to the meaning of the poem. In recreating the landscape, he found it impossible not to mirror the themes of the poem as well.

Pullman is a great admirer of Satan’s characterization, but he feels that God speaks “in that unattractive whine we hear from children who, caught at a scene of mischief, seek at once to put the blame on someone else” (77) and

that he is “petty and legalistic...which is quite different from [Milton’s] view of the Son” (137). This reading of the Father as a tyrant and the Son as the bringer of mercy is very Blakean, and Pullman’s strong affinity for Blake informs his reading of *Paradise Lost*.³¹ Blake also felt that God the father was a petty tyrant, while the Son was the loving one.

However, it is Satan who holds Pullman’s interest. In his notes on Book 9, Pullman argues that Satan’s characterization is far more psychologically complex than God’s and that “Once again we see how much more *interesting*, as a character, Satan is than God” (245). Pullman tells readers that “this is a story about devils” (5) because the story starts with the rebel angels. The devils have our sympathy because the opening

. . . enlists the reader’s sympathy in *this* cause rather than *that*. Alfred Hitchcock once pointed out that if a film opens with a shot of a burglar breaking into a house and ransacking the place, and then, with him, we see through the bedroom window the lights of a car drawing up outside, we think ‘Hurry up! Get out! They’re coming!’

So when the story of *Paradise Lost* begins, after the invocation to the ‘heavenly muse’ we find ourselves in Hell, with the fallen angels groaning on the burning lake. And from then on, part of our awareness is always affected by that. This is a story about devils. It’s not a story about God. The fallen angels and their leader are our protagonists, and the unfallen angels, and God the Father and the Son, and Adam and Eve, are all just supporting players. (4-5)

³¹Hatlen writes, “. . . he has developed what I take to be a Blakean redaction of the Miltonic mythos. . .” in Burton Hatlen, “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman’s Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*,” in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 2005), 86.

God's characterization does not matter as much as Satan's because He is only a secondary player. Because Satan is the main character, he is more fully psychologically developed.

Though many elements from *Paradise Lost* show up in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman does not like some things about the way Milton tells the story. He sees Milton's diversions into theological exploration as "a storyteller [taking] his eye off the impulse of the story for a short while" (137) and therefore avoids any explanation of specifics that don't affect the story. Pullman also disagrees with the way Milton depicts curiosity, which Pullman thinks is "a dominating human characteristic. Raphael's advice about [curiosity] is to curb it" (221) and in *Paradise Lost*, Raphael is in the right because he is an angel. Lyra, on the other hand, needs her curiosity to fulfill her destiny as the second Eve in *His Dark Materials*, which shows that for Pullman curiosity is not just a dominating characteristic, it is an essential one.

Many of the storytelling characteristics Pullman admires in *Paradise Lost* are also apparent in *His Dark Materials*. According to Pullman, "the opening governs the way you tell everything that follows" (4) and the specifics he lists as part of a good opening apply to both works. Pullman advocates starting *in medias res*, and he does just that with Lyra sneaking into the Retiring Room, and Milton does by beginning with Satan on the burning lake. Both authors also start their stories with the focus and the sympathy of the reader on the main character.

The main characters are also the driving force behind the plot, because as Pullman says, “it helps the tightness and propulsion of the story enormously if it’s the protagonist himself who sets the action going” (6). Another part of this “tightness” is the element of suspense, especially through dramatic irony. Pullman finds it amazing that Milton can create so much suspense in a story we already know, and honors the poet by again comparing him to the master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock:

To cite Alfred Hitchcock again, who knew more about suspense than most other storytellers, you can depict four men sitting at a table calmly playing cards, and the audience will be on the edge of their seats with tension—as long as the audience knows that there is a bomb under the table about to go off. Milton knew that too. (7)

The suspense in *His Dark Materials* comes because for a while we are not sure whether we know the story or not, while the suspense in *Paradise Lost* comes from the fact that the reader knows what will happen, but not when. The final similarity is that both stories are about humanity, because “no work can be truly great if it is not about ourselves” (349).

Glimpses of Heaven and Hell

In his introduction to *Paradise Lost*, Pullman writes about the influence Milton’s epic poem had on *His Dark Materials*. He says that in the beginning the idea was to write “a long fantasy for young readers, which would at least partly...evoke something of the atmosphere...in *Paradise Lost*.” Pullman also expresses his belief that, “[Authors] are drawn to a particular atmosphere, a particular kind of landscape” and that the landscape comes

before the story.³² The atmosphere of *Paradise Lost* permeates *His Dark Materials*, especially *The Amber Spyglass*. Landscapes, scenes, and characters alike have definite roots in the poem.

The first comparison that can be drawn is between Milton's Hell and Pullman's Republic of Heaven. Both are described as landscapes full of sharp rocks, fiery lakes, sulphur, and adamant. In his book, *The Magical Worlds of Philip Pullman* (2006), David Colbert devotes an entire section to these similarities. Colbert begins with this quote from *The Amber Spyglass* describing the Republic of Heaven: "A lake of molten sulphur extended the length of an immense canyon, releasing its mephitic vapors in sudden gusts and belches...On the highest rampart of the fortress was a tower of adamant..." (*AS*, 55-56). He then points out the connections in Milton between Satan, sulphur, and adamant.³³

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan and Hell are associated with "sulphurous fire" (Book XI, line 658), "ever-burning sulphur" (Book I, line 69), "sulphur and "sulphurous hail" (Book I, line 171)... "Adamant," the name of a crystal once considered unbreakable, is connected to Satan throughout *Paradise Lost*, Satan is imprisoned in "adamantine chains" (Book I, line 48); Hell itself has "gates of burning adamant" (Book II, Line 436), "three [gates] of adamantine rock, impenetrable, impaled with

³² Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Oxford University Press. New York. 2005.

³³ Adamant is defined as: "Name of an alleged rock or mineral, as to which vague, contradictory, and fabulous notions long prevailed. The properties ascribed to it show a confusion of ideas between the diamond (or other hard gems) and the loadstone or magnet, though by writers affecting better information, it was distinguished from one or other, or from both. The confusion with the loadstone ceased with the 17th c., and the word was then often used by scientific writers as a synonym of DIAMOND. In modern use it is only a poetical or rhetorical name for the embodiment of surpassing hardness; that which is impregnable to any application of force." in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.dictionary.oed.com>, s.v. "adamant, n." Interestingly enough, the Gallivespians, who are fairy-like beings used as spies in Lord Asriel's army, use a device called a "lodestone resonator" (*AS*, 59) to communicate between their spies in the field and the Adamantine Tower in *The Amber Spyglass*.

circling fire” (Book II, line 646); and Satan is “armed in adamant and gold” (Book VI, line 277).³⁴

Satan and Lord Asriel rule over similar places because their characters fulfill similar functions. But there is one major difference: Lord Asriel inhabits his world with the purpose of ruling over it, while Satan is imprisoned in Hell and declares himself its ruler to make the best of a bad situation.

One passage describing the rebel angels’ fall in *Paradise Lost* is very similar to a scene in *The Amber Spyglass* where Baruch, an angel who has been spying on the Authority and is bringing important information to Lord Asriel, is being chased by the Authority’s angels while he is trying to get to Lord Asriel’s fortress. In *Paradise Lost*,

...the Sulphurous Hail
Shot after us in storm, oreblown hath laid
The firey Surge, that from the Precipice
Of Heav’n receiv’d us falling, and the Thunder,
Wing’d with red Lightning and impetuous rage
(*PL*, 1.171-175)

The rebel angels have been pursued over the edge of Heaven and fall into Hell, chased by burning hail and lightning. Baruch’s flight starts at the edge of a lake like the one described above, but unlike the rebel angels’ it begins with an upward motion.

He waited until a cloud of stinking smoke billowed off the yellow surface [of the lake], and darted up into the thick of it. Four pairs of eyes in different parts of the sky all saw the brief movement, and at once four pairs of wings beat hard against smoke-fouled air, hurling the watchers forward into the cloud... The first to break out of the cloud...would have the advantage... And unluckily for the single flier, he found the clear air a few seconds after one of his pursuers. At once they closed with

³⁴ David Colbert, *The Magical Worlds of Philip Pullman* (New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 2006), 18.

each other, trailing streams of vapor, and dizzy, both of them, from the sickening fumes...then another hunter flew free of the cloud. In a swift and furious struggle, all three of them, twisting in the air like scraps of flame, rose and fell and rose again, only to fall, finally, among the rocks at the far side.
(AS, 55-56)

The atmosphere of these two passages is similar; both involve sulphur, clouds, and righteous angels driving a rebel angel out of the sky. The “scraps of flame” in Pullman also echo the “red Lightning” in Milton. However, the differences in these scenes point to thematic differences between the two works. Pullman, who advocates the idea that life must be experienced fully, involves all of the angels more physically than Milton. He also spurns Milton’s ideal angels who drive the rebels down into Hell with ease because God is all-powerful and will not let them lose. Pullman’s angels are not backed by a force that is sure to win, nothing comes easily to them; Baruch’s enemies must work and fight to drag him down out of the sky.

Another area of the Republic that seems to come from Hell in *Paradise Lost* is the foundry under Lord Asriel’s fortress. There,

hammers the size of houses were lifted to the ceiling and then hurled downward to flatten balks of iron the size of tree trunks, pounding them flat in a fraction of a second with a blow that made the very mountain tremble; from a vent in the rocky wall, a river of sulphurous molten metal flowed until it was cut off by an adamant gate, and the brilliant seething flood rushed through channels and sluices and over weirs into row upon row of molds, to settle and cool in a cloud of evil smoke
(AS, 213)

Here again, we see sulphur and adamant, but the similarities don't stop there. When Satan and the other rebel angels are building their kingdom in Hell, they build their own foundry:

Nigh on the plain in many cells prepar'd,
That underneath had veins of liquid fire
Sluc'd from the Lake, a second multitude
With wond'rous Art found out the massie Ore,
Severing each kind, and scum'd with Bullion
dross:
A third as soon had form'd within the ground
A various mould, and from the boyling cells
By strange conveyance fill'd each hollow nook
(*PL*, 1.700-707)

Both foundries have similar molding technology, though Asriel's has advanced far beyond Satan's. Bringing a foundry in also gives readers even more of a sense of hellishness. If an ironworks on Earth is hellish, the scope of one in Hell will be even larger and more terrifying.

The similarities between the two works are not confined to Lord Asriel's world and its similarity to Hell. Milton and Pullman both incorporate a Clouded Mountain that is God's dwelling-place. In both cases, the mountain is presented as foremost a war base in the battle between God and the Rebels. Pullman describes the Clouded Mountain as being made of a substance "which glowed and faded in a slow breathlike rhythm, with a mother-of-pearl radiance" (*AS*, 395), and

It reminded [Mrs. Coulter] of a certain abominable heresy, whose author was now deservedly languishing in the dungeons of the Consistorial Court. He had suggested that there were more spatial dimensions than the three familiar ones—that on a very small scale, there were up to seven or eight other dimensions,, but that they were impossible to examine directly. He had even constructed a model of how they might work, and

Mrs. Coulter had seen the object before it was exorcised and burned. Folds within folds, corners and edges both containing and being contained: its inside was everywhere and its outside was everywhere else. The Clouded Mountain affected her in a similar way: it was less like rock than like a force field, manipulating space itself to enfold and stretch and layer it into galleries and terraces, chambers and colonnades and watchtowers of air and light and vapor.

(*AS*, 395)³⁵

The Clouded Mountain is also just that—constantly covered in a thick layer of clouds that no one on the outside can see through. Milton’s is “a flaming Mount, whose top brightness had made invisible” (*PL*, V.598-599) and when God is angry “clouds began/To darken all the Hill, and smoak to rowl/In duskie wreathees, reluctant flames, the signe/Of wrauth awak’t” (*PL*, VI.56-59). It is interesting to note that Satan’s palace in Heaven is “High on a Hill, far blazing, as a Mount/Rais’d on a Mount, with Pyramids and Towrs/From Diamond Quarries hew’n, and Rocks of Gold” (*PL*, V.757-759), and is an even more obvious source for Pullman’s Clouded Mountain than God’s seat. This enhances the fact that there is no set good and evil in *His Dark Materials*; everyone, including God, is capable of being associated with either one.

Not only does the Clouded Mountain look familiar from one story to the other, but its inhabitant does as well. In *Paradise Lost*, the angels praise God, singing:

Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit’st
Thron’d inaccessible, but when thou shad’st

³⁵ This description is similar to the drawings of M. C. Escher, and the descriptions of tesseracts in Madeline L’Engle’s young adult fantasy books *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* (1978).

The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud
 Drawn round about thee like a radiant shrine,
 Dark with excessive bright thy Skirts appeer,
 Yet dazle Heav'n, that brightest Seraphim
 Approach not, but with both wings veil thir
 eyes.

(*PL*, III.375-382)

When Mrs. Coulter and her dæmon go to visit Metatron in the Clouded Mountain, he is described in much the same way:

Facing them was a being made of light. He was man-shaped, man-sized, she thought, but she was too dazled to see...
 “Please, great Regent, hide yourself a little—my eyes are dazled...”

He drew a veil of cloud in front of himself. Now it was like looking at the sun through smoked glass, and her eyes could see more clearly, though she still pretended to be dazled by his face.

(*AS*, 397)

This gives an idea of how the Regent has managed to act in God’s stead for so long, he looks like God is supposed to look. Metatron has taken God’s power, His glory, and even his appearance.

There are direct connections drawn between Hell and the Republic of Heaven, as well as the two Clouded Mountains. This makes sense because these places play similar roles in *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials*. But there are also similarities between Milton’s Heaven and Hell and the various worlds visited in *His Dark Materials*. One of these is the World of the Dead, which is more like Hell in *His Dark Materials* than the Republic is because the inhabitants are imprisoned there. For Pullman, not being able to have experiences is the worst thing that can happen to a person. For him, the World of the Dead, which is devoid of experience and memory, is the best

representation of Hell. He describes it as “a great plain that extended far ahead into the mist. The light by which they saw was a dull self-luminescence that seemed to exist everywhere equally, so that there were no true shadows and no true light, and everything was the same dingy color” (*AS*, 294). Before Satan builds his kingdom there, Milton’s Hell is

A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great Furnace flam’d, yet from those
flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Ser’d onely to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all;

(*PL*, 1.61-67)

Both are dull places, and Milton’s idea that “peace and rest can never dwell” in Hell is mimicked in Pullman’s *World of the Dead*. Roger tells Lyra that,

there’s no change when you’re dead, and them bird-
things... You know what they do? They wait till you’re
resting—you can’t never sleep properly, you just sort of
doze—and they come up quiet beside you and they whisper all
the bad things you ever did when you was alive, so you can’t
forget ‘em

(*AS*, 307-308)

The “bird-things” are Harpies, and they have turned Pullman’s *World of the Dead* into a Hell because the good experiences you’ve had in your life don’t matter to them until Lyra comes. Before her intervention, they prevent the ghosts in their care from feeling hope. Lyra brings hope into the *World of the Dead* just as Satan brings hope to Hell in *Paradise Lost*.

The hope that Lyra and Satan bring to their respective Hells is the chance to escape back into the physical world. In both cases, to do this one

must cross a wide and dangerous abyss. Lyra's abyss is created in the World of the Dead by the Church. The Church's scientists create a machine that will destroy Lyra at an atomic level from a remote location. The plan is foiled, but the resulting explosion rips an abyss that is like one of Will's windows to another world, except it leads to absolute nothingness. In Milton, the abyss is Chaos, and contains everything God needs to create worlds. The scene where Satan crosses Chaos is where the title of *His Dark Materials* came from:

Into this wilde Abyss,
The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus'dly, and which must ever fight,
Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more Worlds,
Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend
Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
Pondering his Voyage; for no narrow firth
He had to cross.

(*PL*, II. 910-920)

Without question, this scene was very much in Pullman's mind when writing his books, shown in the similarity between these two descriptions of the abyss one must cross to get out of Hell:

...a dark
Illimitable Ocean without bound,
Without dimension, where length, breadth, &
highth,
And time and place are lost; where eldest Night
And *Chaos*, Ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternnal *Anarchie*,

(*PL*, 2.891-896)

It was a vast black emptiness, like a shaft into the deepest darkness...The darkness below was so profound that it seemed to pull the eyesight down into it, and a ghastly dizziness swam over their minds when they looked.

(AS, 355-356)

This abyss remains important to the plot of *His Dark Materials* because it is the place where the final battle between the Republic of Heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven is won. During the battle, Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter wrestle with Metatron. They sacrifice themselves in order to win, and throw him into the abyss. With Metatron dead, the totalitarian goals of the Kingdom are also destroyed. In *Paradise Lost*, the abyss is important because the rebels build a bridge across it so they can bring Sin and Death to Earth, which changes the world forever. This bridge anticipates the snow-bridge Lyra crosses to get to the other world at the end of *The Golden Compass*.

Earthly Ties

Although many of the analogous scenes between *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials* are heavenly or hellish, these are not the focus of either story. Both are far more concerned with what happens here on Earth than with Heaven and Hell. Earth is distinct because it is simultaneously spiritual and physical, good and evil, and it is caught in the middle of a battle the scope of which is beyond imagining.

It is especially difficult to pinpoint Earth in *His Dark Materials* because there is no distinct Heaven or Hell; everything is a physical place, so physicality has very little to do with identifying a world as Earth. The closest Pullman gets to Hell is the World of the Dead and, ironically, Lord Asriel's Republic of Heaven. The most Heaven-like setting is the Clouded Mountain,

though as a machine of war, it is in no way a paradise. The Mulefa world is the place most like Eden in *His Dark Materials*, but it resembles all three settings in *Paradise Lost*. Pullman successfully combines Heaven, Hell, and Paradise into the best representation possible of a post-lapsarian Earth.

The landscapes of the world of the Mulefa and Eden are very similar. Both are lush, well tended by expert hands, and are still slightly wild and natural. This similarity of landscape is an indication that the world of the Mulefa is the paradise of *His Dark Materials*. The first dawns we see in Eden and in the world of the Mulefa are both evocative of Heaven on Earth. They are glorious and simple at the same time:

Now when as sacred Light began to dawne
In Eden on the humid Flours, that breathd
Thir morning insence, when all things that
breathe,
From th' Earths great Altar send up silent praise
(*PL*, IX.195-195)

And in *The Amber Spyglass*:

The wide golden prairie that Lee Scoresby's ghost had seen briefly through the window was lying quiet under the first sun of morning.

Golden, but also yellow, brown, green, and every one of the million shades between them; and black, in places, in lines and streaks of bright pitch; and silvery, too, where the sun caught the tops of a particular kind of grass just coming into flower; and blue, where a wide lake some way off, and a small pond closer by reflected back the wide blue of the sky.

And quiet, but not silent, for a soft breeze rustled the billions of little stems, and a billion insects and other small creatures scraped and hummed and chirruped in the grass, and a bird too high in the blue to be seen sang little looping falls of bell notes now close by, now far off, and never twice the same.
(*AS*, 419)

The quiet, the light, and the sense of a chorus of praise are present in both descriptions. The differences between the two are also interesting to note. The “silent praise” of Milton’s dawn evokes a sense of restriction and decorum, while the insects and birds in Pullman’s description add another sensory dimension. The senses are important to Pullman since they are the way one experiences the world, and not fully to experience the world is just another kind of death.

I have already discussed Mary Malone as one of the Satan figures in *His Dark Materials*; it is not surprising that one of her experiences mirrors that of Satan while crossing Chaos. While on his long journey across the abyss, Satan allows himself to drift for a time so that he can observe Heaven:

That *Satan* with less toil, and now with ease
 Wafts on the calmer wave by dubious light
 And like a weather-beaten Vessel holds
 Gladly the Port, though Shrouds and Tackle
 torn;
 Or in the emptier waste, resembling Air,
 Weighs his spread wings, at leasure to behold
 Farr off th’ Empyrean Heav’n, extended wide
 (*PL*, II.1041-1047)

Similarly, while observing Dust, Mary has an out-of-body experience and finds herself floating in the Dust stream. But unlike Satan’s slow drift, Mary is caught in a wild storm:

The drift was mesmerizing. How easy it would be to fall into a trance, and let her mind drift away with the floating particles . . .

Before she knew what she was doing, and because her body was lulled, that was exactly what happened. She suddenly snapped awake to find herself outside her body, and she panicked.

She was a little way above the platform, and a few feet off among the branches. And something had happened to the Dust wind: instead of that slow drift, it was racing like a river in flood . . .

And no matter how she struggled, she could make no headway. The force that carried her out was as smooth and powerful as water pouring over a weir; the particles of Dust were streaming along as if they, too, were pouring over some invisible edge.

And carrying her away from her body.

She flung a mental lifeline to that physical self . . .

(*AS*, 366-367)

Satan, as a spiritual being, has no need for a lifeline, because he has no body. He can float in his sea of light safely; but as an Earthly creature, Mary must create a lifeline to her body through physical experiences. She is not meant to be where she is because she is so closely tied to the physical. This also illustrates a minor theme of Pullman's that the physical is stronger than the spiritual.

Mary is not the only one whose actions mirror those of Satan when she is in the world of the Mulefa. Father Gomez, the priest sent to kill Lyra, also has a Satan-like moment. In *Paradise Lost*, there is a scene where Satan is searching for Adam and Eve, but hopes to find Eve alone.

For now, and since first break of dawne the
Fiend,
Meer Serpent in appearance, forth was come,
And on his Quest where likeliest he might finde
The onely two of Mankinde, but in them
The whole included Race, his purposed prey . . .
He sought them both, but wish'd his hap might
find
Eve separate,

(*PL*, IX.412-422)

In *His Dark Materials*, Father Gomez is searching for the two children. Like Satan, he is trying to facilitate the destruction of conscious life, but unlike Satan, he does not know it. Father Gomez also hopes to find Lyra alone because “the one thing he didn’t want to do was hurt the boy. He had a horror of harming an innocent person” (*AS*, 463). Lyra and Eve are the desired targets, but the hunters know that finding the two people together will be easier.

The Fall is an important plot element in both stories, and it is also a human/earthly occurrence. The point of the Fall itself is hard to determine in both cases, since Lyra and Eve both have vaguely sinful thoughts and feelings in the events leading to the big event. Eve’s dream in Book 4 is the first glimpse of the feelings that lead her to her Fall, just as Lyra’s understanding that leads to her Fall comes earlier than the Fall itself. The exact point of Will and Lyra’s fall is this:

There was a little clearing in the middle of the grove, which was floored with soft grass and moss-covered rocks. The branches laced overhead, almost shutting out the sky and letting through little moving spangles and sequins of sunlight, so that everything was dappled with gold and silver.

And it was quiet only the trickle of the stream, and the occasional rustle of leaves high up in a little curl of breeze, broke the silence . . .

Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits. With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, “Will . . .”

And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth.

(*AS*, 465)

Though this mirrors Eve giving Adam the fruit, it has another source in the dream Satan gives Eve that sets her on the path to transgression. Eve describes the dream to Adam when she wakes, and tells him that a figure she

thought was him “. . . drew nigh, and to me held, even to my mouth of that same fruit held part which he had plucked,” (*PL*, V.81-83). There is also a more positive comparison to a scene in which Adam and Eve sit on the banks of a stream to eat.

They sat them down, and after no more toil
Of thir sweet Gardning labour then suffic'd
To recommend coole *Zephyr*, and made ease
More easie, wholsom thirst and appetite
More grateful, to thir Supper Fruits they fell,
(*PL*, IV. 326-330)

This scene brings sin and love together, but for Pullman, the sin is a positive, because love itself is the ‘sin.’ Both of the scenes in *Paradise Lost* that compare to the one from *His Dark Materials* happen in innocence, and though Eve’s dream points toward sin, Milton does not seem to regard her as guilty yet, because the devil can still see “Vertue in her shape how lovly” (*PL* IV.848).

Another Earthly object that, like Mary’s memory of sensation, is far stronger than anything spiritual, is the Subtle Knife. Not only can it cut windows between worlds, its other edge can cut any material, even an Angel.

Pullman describes the knife as:

. . . an ordinary looking dagger, with a double-sided blade of dull metal about eight inches long, a short crosspiece of the same metal, and a handle of rosewood. . . as he picked it up he felt that it was light in his hand and strong and beautifully balanced, and that the blade was not dull after all. In fact, a swirl of cloudy colors seemed to live just under the surface of the metal: bruise purples, sea blues, earth browns, cloud grays, the deep green under heavy-foliaged trees, the clustering shades at the mouth of a tomb as evening falls over a deserted graveyard. . . If there was such a thing as shadow-colored, it was the blade of the subtle knife.

But the edges were different. In fact, the two edges differed from each other. One was clear bright steel, but steel of an incomparable sharpness. Will's eye shrank back from looking at it, so sharp did it seem. The other edge was just as keen, but silvery in color, and Lyra, who was looking at it over Will's shoulder said: "I seen that color before! That's the same as the blade they was going to cut me and Pan apart with—that's just the same!"

"This edge," said Giacomo Paradisi, touching the steel with the handle of a spoon, "will cut through any material in the world."

(SK, 180-181)

This description combines two from *Paradise Lost*. One is the description of Satan's landing-place on Earth; the other is Raphael's description of Michael's sword used in the battle against Satan and the Rebel Angels:

Compar'd with aught on Earth, Metal or Stone;
 Not all parts like, but all alike inform'd
 With radiant light, as glowing Iron with fire;
 If mettall, part seem'd Gold, part Silver clear;
 If stone, Carbuncle most or Chrysolite,
 Rubie or Topaz, to the Twelve that shon
 In *Aarons* Brest-plate,
 (PL, III.592-598)

. . . the sword
 Of *Michael* from the Armorie of God
 Was giv'n him temperd so, that neither keen
 Nor solid might resist that edge: it met
 The sword of *Satan* with steep force to smite
 Descending, and in half cut sheere,
 (PL, VI.320-325)

The knife combines two things closely associated with Satan, even though one is Earthly and the other heavenly. And unlike Michael's sword, it is not only the knife that is powerful; the person who wields it must be special, or they cannot use it. Since the knife was created by humans, but has this ability relating it to a celestial sword, it also combines the human and the spiritual.

Monkeys, Beasts, and Boys (Oh My!)

Pullman was heavily influenced by Milton in terms of atmosphere and setting, but many of his characters have their beginnings in Blake's poems. "However, while Blake's figures remain visionary and cloudy, the conceptions of Pullman's creatures are highly developed with characterization created through telling particulars as well as in general terms."³⁶ Lyra, Will, Mrs. Coulter, the Harpies, Specters, and even some dæmons have "cloudy" predecessors in Blake. Pullman has taken these characters and made them human rather than symbolic, another way in which he develops and reimagines Blake's works. Many of the references involve parent-child relationships, which is a common theme between Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *His Dark Materials*.

Blake's poems "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" are cited by Susan Matthews as influences for the cave scenes in which Mrs. Coulter is keeping Lyra prisoner and asleep at the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*.³⁷ In the poems, a little girl named Lyca is lost in the woods and as her parents search for her, she is rescued by lions who take her to live with them in their cave. Lines from "The Little Girl Lost" are the epigraph to the first chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*, which is where we first see what Mrs. Coulter is doing to Lyra. However, in Blake's poems the parents come to find

³⁶ Scott, "Pullman's Enigmatic Ontology," 102.

³⁷ Susan Matthews, "Rouzing the Faculties to Act: Pullman's Blake for Children," in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2005) PAGE.

their child and reawaken her, while Mrs. Coulter is keeping her child asleep. And while Lyca asserts that she cannot sleep while her mother is weeping, Lyra and the child in “A Cradle Song” can “Sleep sleep, happy sleep/While o’er thee thy mother weep” (*Inn*, pl.16, 19-20).

Mrs. Coulter’s monkey dæmon is a terrifying creature. Although it is beautiful and golden, it is sadistically violent. One of the most memorable scenes involving the monkey occurs in the cave where Mrs. Coulter is keeping Lyra:

The golden monkey . . . said something to the woman, who reached up to snatch a roosting bat from the cave ceiling. The little black thing flapped and squealed in a needle-thin voice that pierced Ama from one ear to the other, and then she saw the woman hand the bat to her dæmon, and she saw the dæmon pull one of the black wings out and out till it snapped and broke and hung from a white string of sinew, while the bat screamed and its fellows flew around in anguished puzzlement. *Crack—crack—snap*—as the golden monkey pulled the little thing apart limb by limb . . .

(*AS*, 52)

This mirrors a scene in Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* when Blake and his angelic guide encounter

a number of monkeys, baboons, and all of that species chained by the middle, grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains. However, I saw that they sometimes grew numerous; and then the weak were caught by the strong and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with and then devoured, by plucking off first one limb and then another till the body was left a helpless trunk

(*MHH*, pl. 20)

The chains these monkeys wear are reproduced later in *The Amber Spyglass* when Mrs. Coulter is Lord Asriel’s prisoner and the golden monkey is kept in “coils of a silver chain” (*AS*, 199). What is interesting about the monkey is

that while he still has a close relationship with Mrs. Coulter, they do not seem to be as much a part of one another as other people seem to be with their dæmons. The monkey seems more independent of her than other dæmons are of their humans, as if she separates herself from its sadistic cruelty.

Lyra is not the only one whose relationship with a parent mirrors one found in Blake's poems. Will, who spends *The Subtle Knife* searching for his father, is reminiscent of the child in "The Little Boy Lost" whose father leaves him behind while walking through the wilderness. The complementary poem to "The Little Boy Lost" is "The Little Boy Found," in which God finds the child and brings him back to his mother. The darkness in the wilderness of "The Little Boy Lost" is mirrored in the "nearly total darkness" (*SK*, 317) that covers Will just before he finds his father. The sense of restless wandering is also similar between the two boys. In the Blake poem, "The little boy lost in the lonely fen [is] led by the wand'ring light" (*Inn*, pl. 14, 1-2), while Will "felt such a need to move and keep moving that he hardly noticed the pain in his hand anymore" (*SK*, 316). Both Will and the boy in "The Little Boy Found" find a "father" who brings them back to their mother eventually. While the poem is literal, John Parry does this figuratively when he tells Will and Lyra that no one can live in a world that's not their own for very long.

Kleist and Grace

In addition to Milton and Blake, Pullman also cites Heinrich von Kleist's essay "The Puppet Theatre"³⁸ as a source of inspiration for *His Dark Materials* (AS, Acknowledgements). This philosophical essay on grace concludes that it is impossible for a self-aware human to have grace. Kleist wrote the essay as a series of stories told to him by his friend, Mr. C. The first story is about how marionettes will always have more grace than human beings, the second is about the way in which a young dancer lost his grace through self-awareness, and the final story is about a fencer's inability to trick a bear. Each of the three stories teaches a different lesson about grace, and each is alluded to in *His Dark Materials*.

Kleist's first story explains that marionettes are graceful because the marionettes themselves are not the ones performing, and the puppeteer does not move each individual limb. Instead, they move on a center of gravity and their "limbs, which were nothing but pendula, followed without further interference, mechanically, of their own accord" (411-412). Since the puppets have no free will, they cannot succumb to "affectation" when they dance, because affectation depends upon the center of movement being in a specific limb instead of in the center of gravity. The puppets are graceful because intention is transferred directly from the puppeteer to the puppet's center of gravity. If the puppets were to start making their own emotional choices, the grace would be gone.

³⁸ Quotations throughout this section are from: Heinrich Von Kleist, "The Puppet Theatre," in *Selected Writings*, ed./trans. David Constantine (London: J.M. Dent, 1997). Page numbers will be cited parenthetically.

Likewise, Kleist tells a story of a young acquaintance, who discovers too late “the damage done by consciousness to the natural grace of a human being” (414). The young friend had just seen a statue and while drying off after bathing “resting his foot on a stool, to dry it, and glancing at himself as he did so in a large mirror, he was reminded of the statue” (415). Kleist also saw the resemblance, but told the youth he was mistaken in order to “combat his vanity” (415). When the youth tried to prove himself by recreating the gesture, he found that “he was incapable...indeed, in the movements he made there was something so comical I could scarcely refrain from laughing at him” (415). When the young man begins to understand what he is doing, he loses the ability to do it naturally. In fact,

From that day, or from that very moment, forth the young man underwent an unbelievable transformation . . . An invisible and incomprehensible power seemed to settle like an iron net over the free play of his manners and a year later there was not a trace left in him of those qualities that had in the past so delighted the eyes of people around him.

(415)³⁹

The young man cannot recreate his movements because he is aware of the details of the perfection he reached, and always tries to recreate them in the same way.

These stories both help explain why Lyra lost her ability to read the alethiometer at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*. When she asks why she can no longer read the instrument, the angel Xaphania responds, “You read it by grace. . . but you can regain it through work” (*AS*, 491). As Lyra begins to

³⁹ This brings to mind Blake’s “Net of Religion” (*Urizen*, pl. 27, 22), which restricts the movement of the human spirit.

understand how she is reading the alethiometer, she loses the ability to do it naturally. And since she becomes self-aware when she realizes that she is in love with Will, Dust cannot direct her as if she were a marionette any longer. But unlike the young man, her study and practice will bring her a deeper understanding because she has not only lost the grace with which she got there, but she has forgotten how she gained it in the first place. Lyra has forgotten the details she needs to recreate, and is instead trying find a new way to reach the understanding she once had.

The third story relates even more directly than the first two. Mr. C tells Kleist about a recent visit to a friend in Russia. The friend's sons "were just then busily engaged in practicing their fencing. Especially the older boy, just down from university, prided himself in his skills and one morning when I was in his room offered me a rapier. We fenced; but it happened that I was better than him . . ." (415). The sons take him out back and show him a bear, which they say will best Mr. C. When Mr. C feints, the bear does not react; but when he makes a thrust that would have hit a man, the bear effortlessly deflects it. This is directly mirrored in Lyra's fencing match with Iorek.

When she asks him why she cannot hit him, he explains,

'We see tricks and deceit as plain as arms and legs. We can see in a way humans have forgotten. But you know about this; you can understand the symbol reader.'

'That en's the same, is it?' she said. She was more nervous of the bear now than when she had seen his anger.

'It is the same,' he said. 'Adults can't read it, as I understand. As I am to human fighters, so you are to adults with the symbol reader.'

(GC, 226-227)

Iofur Rankinson, the usurper bear king, loses the natural grace of bears when he starts acting like a human, and Serafina says to Lyra, “Perhaps when bears act like humans they can be tricked” (*GC*, 317). Losing beariness is a loss of grace for Iofur, just as losing childishness is a loss of grace for Kleist’s young friend and for Lyra.

CHAPTER 4

“DUST AS WE ARE, THE IMMORTAL SPIRIT GROWS
 LIKE HARMONY IN MUSIC; THERE IS A DARK
 INSCRUTABLE WORKMANSHIP THAT RECONCILES
 DISCORDANT ELEMENTS . . .”
 --WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, “THE PRELUDE”

Milton’s Holy Sympathies

According to Blake, Milton “wrote in fetters because he was of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (*MHH*, pl. 6), because his depictions of Satan and Hell are so much more detailed and pictorial than his descriptions of Heaven, and because Satan is the main character of *Paradise Lost*. But Milton, while he may have admired the rebel in Satan and accordingly made him a more interesting character, still holds to God’s supreme authority, and the superiority of Heaven. Unlike Blake and Pullman, Milton is telling the Fall story through the traditional biblical lens. Instead of arguing against God, he is trying to “justify the wayes of God to men” (*PL*, I.26). In Milton’s version of the story, God is the one wronged, but He is also the one with the power. Milton also upholds the tradition of Heaven and Paradise as the ultimate objectives for the human soul, Hell as the ultimate punishment, and Earth as a test that combines elements of both Heaven and Hell.

Milton's God has given free will to both the angels and the first parents in the belief that if a being chooses to serve Him, it is more meaningful than blind worship.

Not free, what proof could they have givn
 sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
 Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
 Not what they would? what praise could they
 receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild
 Made passive both, had servd nesessitie,
 Not mee.

(*PL*, III.103-111)

Thus, the decision of the rebel angels to revolt is an even greater insult because they did not have to make that choice. If choosing to serve is greater service, then choosing to rebel is greater rebellion. Satan, Adam, and Eve all choose the wrong things over God, which is why they are cast out of Heaven and Paradise. Satan chooses pride and power over Heavenly delights, and makes his famous assertion that it is "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (*PL*, I.263). Eve chooses her vanity and beauty when she listens to the serpent's flattery. And Adam chooses death with Eve over life with God. The fact that they were given a choice and all chose something else over God makes God the victim in this telling. Each of these characters was capable of choosing God, but did not. By making God the victim, Milton directs the reader's sympathies toward Heaven. If the three transgressors had not been given a choice in the matter, and if God had said that they were destined to

fail from the start, He would have looked like a petty dictator (as He does to Blake and Pullman) and the reader's sympathy would more likely be with Adam and Eve or with Satan.

However, allowing choice does not take away God's power over any of His creations. He has given them the ability to make choices, but the outcomes of those choices are under God's control. By punishing the three transgressors, God reestablishes Himself as the supreme authority, and the scene of punishment is written with the sympathy firmly on Heaven's side. God's power is even more emphasized by His distance from the actual punishments. God is the one who makes the judgments, but the Son and the angels are the ones who carry them out to Adam and Eve. Meanwhile, Satan and his followers have learned in Book X that even though they are already in Hell, God is powerful enough to punish them further by turning them into serpents.

The Son does not only hand out the punishments for God, He also repairs the damage done by the fall through the Resurrection. In *Paradise Lost*, God says that he will forgive humanity if one of the other heavenly beings will take the sin on as their own, and the Son is the one who offers to sacrifice Himself. God is yet again asserting His power. Even though Adam and Eve have sinned, God's creation is so perfect that it cannot be completely ruined. God is not just a disciplinarian, He also offers hope, which is the last image we are left with when Adam and Eve leave Paradise and "the World was all before them," (*PL*, XII.646). God has asked the angels to show Adam

and Eve visions of the future and they see that while Sin and Death have entered and have polluted Earth with their Hellish aspects, Earth still has qualities similar to those of Paradise. This ending reaffirms Heaven as the ultimate positive because God embodies all things good.

Sympathy for the Devil

William Blake idealized Milton, but he subverted Milton's telling and instead took on his own Satanic point of view. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake states, "Without Contraries is no progression" (*MHH*, pl. 3), and so, unlike for Milton, for Blake there can be no evil without good. The only sin is to attempt not to progress, whether by separating contraries like Urizen or by trying to avoid Experience like Thel (discussed below). God the Father is also suspect for Blake, who sees God as a tyrant opposed to change. As in *Paradise Lost*, God is still the ultimate power in Blake's works, but he is not a likeable power. And so, since God is a tyrant, Blake openly declares his allegiance to Satan's rebel party and writes works that are sympathetic to Hell.

Christ the Son and Satan are conflated as two sides of an ideal God: Christ as the Innocent God of mercy and sacrifice, and Satan as the creative and energetic God of Experience. Satan and Christ are the true heroes because they have managed to escape God's "net of religion" (*Exp*, pl. 27, 22) and work together as two contraries to help the world progress. Because God is working against the natural order while Satan and Christ are working with

it, the co-deities are more effective even though God has the power and is a necessary contrary. God's positive aspect is that through His tyranny, he introduces reason, which is the contrary to Imagination.

Satan and Christ as co-deities can most clearly be explored through the poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. In "The Lamb," a little child explains to a lamb that it is Christ who created them both. Christ as the creator is depicted as "meek," "mild," and "a little child" (*Inn*, pl. 8, 15), and represents all that is positive in Innocence. Christ shows His creations love, pity, and understanding; and His meekness allows Him to sacrifice for them. By being Good, Christ also connects us to Reason, because "Good is the passive that obeys Reason" (*MHH*, pl. 3).

On the other hand, the satanic creator implied in "The Tyger" represents what is positive in Experience: strength, passionate zeal, and an ability to create awe. Neither Satan nor Christ attempt to control their creations, but by being the epitome of the two contraries, inspire devotion. Though Milton argued that Satan could not create, only pervert, Blake's philosophy makes him an ideal creator. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Evil is the active springing from Energy" (*MHH*, pl. 3), or in other words, evil is acting on one's Imagination. Because Satan is able to act on his energies freely, he "dares" (*Exp*, pl. 42, 24) to create the Tyger. But Satan is also dependent on God's reason to give his energy form because, "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (*MHH*, pl. 4).

“The Tyger” also establishes Blake as having a Hell-based point of view through its imagery and diction. Instead of having the freedom to create whatever he wants, the creator in the poem is questioned: “On what wings dare he aspire? / What the hand dare seize the fire? / . . . / What immortal hand or eye, / Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?” (*Exp*, pl. 42, 7-24). The word “dare” in these lines implies audacity in the creation of the Tyger. There is also an allusion to the giant forge in Milton’s Hell in the fourth stanza of “The Tyger”

What the hammer? what the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil? what dread grasp,
 Dare its deadly terrors clasp?
(*Exp*, pl. 42, 13-16)

This furnace, along with words like “burning” and “fire” (*Exp*, pl. 42, 1, 6) creates a Hellish atmosphere. However, unlike Milton’s Hell, which is depicted negatively, this Hell conveys strength, bravery, and awe, all of which are positive aspects.

The fact that Blake is writing from the point of view of Hell is also supported by his declared intent at the end of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* to write a “Bible of Hell” (pl. 24). *The Book of Urizen* is the Genesis of this Bible and tells the story of the Creation and the Fall. For Blake, however, these are not two separate events, “the fall occurs at the same moment as the creation”.⁴⁰ The world we live in was created by Urizen as a place where he could separate contraries: “I have sought for a joy without pain, / For a solid

⁴⁰ William Blake, *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, ed. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (New York: Norton, 1979), 140.

without fluctuation” (*Urizen*, pl. 4, 10-11). But as we know, contraries must exist in Blake’s world, and this act of separation is the Fall. Urizen, as Creator and Reason, is Blake’s representation of the Father. Urizen not only creates the world, he also creates sin by naming and forbidding the Seven Deadly Sins. But his worst transgression is the creation of “a Web dark & cold . . . / And all calld it, The Net of Religion” (*Urizen*, pl. 27, 15, 22). In Blake’s eyes, and the eyes of Hell, institutional religion is something that entraps and confines. This is very different from Milton’s ideas of religion as something so big that humans cannot fathom it.⁴¹

In separating himself from the eternals and descending into the void he creates, Urizen also tears himself away from his counterpart, Los. In light of Urizen’s driving desire to separate contraries, this could be seen as God separating himself from Satan. Since Blake is writing from Hell’s point of view, this actually fits well with Milton’s story in which Satan feels that God is alienating the angels by promoting the Son. Los shares many similarities with Milton’s Satan; he is a blacksmith, and forges his own “chains of the mind” (*Urizen*, pl. 10, 25). Milton’s Hell is a huge forge, and when we first see him, Satan is bound in “Adamantine Chains” (*PL*, I.49). Los and Satan both travel through a “void” and have moments of howling grief and rage over their separation from Urizen and Heaven respectively.

⁴¹ Raphael answers Adam’s request for knowledge with the following:

. . . Commission from above
 I have receav’d, to answer thy desire
 Of knowledge *within bounds; beyond abstain*
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope
Things not revealed, which th’ invisible King
 Onely omnicient, *hath suppress in Night.*
 (*PL*, VII.118-123, emphasis added)

Los also fits with Blake's co-deity idea because when Los begins to feel pity for Urizen's children/creations, he separates again, and Enitharmon, "the first female" (*Urizen*, pl. 18, 10) is created. Even though Enitharmon as the first woman is closer to Eve, the fact that she was created from pity also makes her a Christ-like figure. This second separation on Los' part inspires creation just as Urizen's separation from the Eternals does. Los and Enitharmon have a child, Orc, whom they abandon on the top of a mountain because of Los' jealousy. But when the child cries, the dead, including Urizen, are reawakened. This is an example of contraries working together to create progression. Because Los and Enitharmon do not spurn each other as Urizen spurned Los, there is a continuation of life and Urizen is brought closer to the Eternals again, though he is still only awakened enough to go back to his old ways. When contraries work separately, as in the case of Urizen and Los, only a void is created.

And so, if we take *The Book of Urizen* as a guide to contraries, separation and isolation are the worst sins possible. We can also see Blake's reimagined relationship between God, Satan, and Christ. The separation of Urizen and Los mirrors Satan's fall from Heaven in *Paradise Lost*, while Los' second separation creates a Christ figure. The placement of the Satanic figure in the middle of this progression implies the centrality of Hell's point of view to Blake's writing, and the success of Los and Enitharmon's cooperation indicates that it is Satan and Christ who work together as contraries within God's Reason to create progression.

In *The Book of Thel*, we see what happens when one refuses to move from Innocence to Experience. Thel is another of the great sinners in Blake's works because she is presented with the chance to gain knowledge and progress, but refuses the offer. A lily, a cloud, and a clod of earth each tries to explain to her why death and change are integral parts of the world, but Thel will not listen. In the end of the poem, the clod of earth sends her down into the world of the dead, where "to her own grave plot she came & there she sat down, / And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit" (*Thel*, pl. 6, 9-10). The voice laments that the senses (presumably Thel's) are far too open, but only receive destruction. The implication is that Thel has taken in the wrong messages from the lessons nature has tried to teach her. Instead of gaining wisdom and progressing on to wisdom about death, Thel uses her lessons to reinforce her own idea that stasis is preferable to change.

In *Lyra*, Pullman fixes the faults Blake presents in Thel, who laments death and wishes that nothing in her valley would ever change. Thel's journey to the World of the Dead is mirrored in Lyra's. But where Thel becomes frightened and "started from her seat & with a shriek / Fled back unhinderd till she came to the vales of Har" (*Thel*, pl. 6, 21-22), Lyra is brave enough to face the challenges the World of the Dead sets before her and is able to improve the conditions she finds there.

The Human Perspective

Unlike Blake and Milton, Pullman does not idealize Heaven *or* Hell. Instead of writing from a supernatural or godly position, he writes from the human perspective. According to David Gooderham, “Pullman’s purpose for his young—and doubtless also adult—readers is to dismantle the grand narrative of the Christian religion and to replace it with an emancipatory and ‘natural’ humanism.”⁴² The Clouded Mountain, in *The Amber Spyglass*, is the Authority’s war machine and home, Pullman’s closest representation of Heaven. There are two stand-ins for Hell: one is the World of the Dead, and the other is Lord Asriel’s Republic of Heaven, where like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, he has gathered all of the beings who wish to rebel against the Authority. None of these religious representations is positive, all three have their flaws. On the other hand, the Mulefa world of *The Amber Spyglass* is presented as an Eden, and part of its perfection is that it is not a supernatural place, it is simply natural. And not only is the natural world idealized, human beings are as well.

The Clouded Mountain is where “the Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty” (*AS*, 31) has lived since the worlds began, but Metatron⁴³ has turned it into a war machine that he will use to “set up a permanent inquisition in every world, run directly

⁴² Gooderham, “Fantasizing It As It Is,” 163.

⁴³ In *His Dark Materials*, Metatron is the regent of the Authority. Since the Authority has become ancient and withdrawn, Metatron rules the Clouded Mountain. According to Baruch, “Metatron was once Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel . . . Enoch had many wives. He was a lover of the flesh . . .” (*AS*, 63). This identity combines several of the references to Metatron in Jewish Gnosticism.

from the Kingdom” (*AS*, 61). The Clouded Mountain seems to represent corrupt religion as a direct result of a corrupt God. Heaven is not an idyllic place of peace and rest; it is a tool of oppression and destruction. Although it is beautiful and bright, the Clouded Mountain is ominous and destructive, which opposes the common view of Heaven as glorious and the site of creation.

Lord Asriel’s Republic of Heaven is in direct opposition to the Clouded Mountain both in the war being fought in *The Amber Spyglass*, and because the Republic of Heaven is one representation of Hell. It closely resembles Milton’s Hell in *Paradise Lost* both physically and ideologically. But the Republic is still a horrifying place that Will and Lyra feel a need to escape. Hell may be closer to the correct ideology, but Lord Asriel’s desire for power and the Republic’s warlike qualities make it just as bad as the Clouded Mountain. Both Heaven and Hell want to impose their ideologies on all sentient beings.

In Pullman’s world, people do not go to Heaven or to Hell when they die. Instead, they go to the World of the Dead, a mix of the Greek underworld and Dante’s Purgatory. This world is the opposite of a place of peace and rest, because according to Roger, “you can’t never sleep properly, you just sort of doze—and [the harpies] come up quiet beside you and whisper all the bad things you ever did when you was alive, so you can’t forget ‘em” (*AS*, 308). The souls in the World of the Dead are not being punished or rewarded; they are just being kept there, languishing in inactivity. This is very Blakean

because in separating the dead into their own world, the Authority has doomed them to an eternity without progression. Lee Scoresby's greatest wish when he is in the World of the Dead is to be set free into the world so that he can find the atoms that used to be his *dæmon* and they can be re-assimilated into the natural world. This natural world is his Heaven, not keeping his soul intact and inactive.

Lee Scoresby gets his wish when Lyra and Will arrive to release the dead back into the physical world. It is significant that the world they cut into from the World of the Dead is the Mulefa world. This is the actual Heaven of *His Dark Materials*; it is idyllic and happy. This happiness seems to stem from a symbiotic connection to the natural world and a positive outlook on knowledge. The Mulefa live in harmony with nature and with one another, they are extremely intelligent and know all the details of the plants and animals under their care, which brings to mind Adam and Eve in the garden. The Mulefa also seem to have a more reliable way to pass on history, it is passed down orally and every one of them knows it in its entirety. Because they understand their history, they have a better sense of who they are. Mulefa are also the only creatures we meet who see Dust with the naked eye, implying that they see wisdom more easily than most beings.⁴⁴ There is still evil in this world in the form of the Tualapi, huge birds that raid Mulefa settlements, but they are a necessary contrary to the Mulefa so that they do not stagnate in perfection.

⁴⁴ Shohet, "Reading Dark Materials," 31.

Burton Hatlen also suggests that the conclusion of the battle between the Republic of Heaven and the Kingdom of Heaven represents a way to bring the focus of the book onto the mortal world:

In *The Amber Spyglass*, at the very moment (or so it would seem) that Lyra and Will release God from his crystal cabinet, allowing him to dissolve into the cosmos, Lord Asriel, our Satan figure, and Mrs. Coulter are wrestling with Metatron, the angel who has claimed for himself the authority of God. Mrs. Coulter has, of course, been an ambiguous figure throughout the trilogy, sometimes an opportunistic agent of the Church, sometimes a devoted mother to Lyra. But at the decisive moment of the battle, she chooses Lyra over everything else and hurls herself at Asriel and Metatron, sending all three of them down into the abyss. “God” and “Satan” thus perish together, leaving us with the human, Lyra and Will.⁴⁵

The Mulefa are an enlightened example of an ideal society because they love knowledge and the physical world, but they must change and progress in order to continue as the ideal. The Mulefa are not the only example of mortals as the ones whose role and point of view are the most important to put at the forefront of the Fall story; Lyra, Will, and Mary are the main actors in this Fall story, and they are all humans. Pullman tells the Fall story so that the mortals are the main actors who change the way supernatural forces act on the world. By making the ideal setting in the trilogy a mortal, physical world, and by destroying “God” and “Satan” to establish humanity as the inheritors of the earth, Pullman is establishing his viewpoint as sympathetic to the physical and the human. By taking this point of view, he emphasizes the secular humanist themes of the trilogy.

⁴⁵ Hatlen, “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” 91.

Free Will

Beyond the textual similarities and the shared plot (albeit from different viewpoints), the unifying principle in *Paradise Lost*, Blake's works, and *His Dark Materials* is the similar philosophies based around power and free will that the works present. The authors have a slightly different view of how these concepts interact, and these differences are exacerbated by their divergent theologies, but the idea of free will is of high thematic importance to all three authors. This section will demonstrate the similarities and differences in how each author defines free will and describes its history from its origins to what happens when it is suppressed.

In *Paradise Lost*, God says that He has given the angels and humans free will because

Not free, what proof could they have givn
 sincere
 Of true allegiance, constant Faith or Love,
 Where onely what they needs must do, appeard,
 Not what they would? what praise could they
 receive?
 What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
 When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
 Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild
 Made passive both, had servd nesessitie,
 Not mee.

(*PL*, III.103-111)

Free will may have caused Satan's fall, but it is a necessary component to serving God. If free will were ever taken away, God would not have any true servants, He would only have mindless followers. Therefore, the only way to

have free will is to have religion, is opposite to how Blake and Pullman feel.

It could be argued that Satan gets Eve to sin by taking away her free will. God has handed down his order not to eat the fruit, but Adam and Eve still have the choice not to eat it. God does not actively influence this choice one way or the other, but Satan does and by exerting this influence over Eve's choice, he takes away some of her free will. By convincing her to make the same choice he made, he is also convincing her to turn away from God. Eve, in turn, imposes on Adam's free will by cajoling him into taking the apple just as Satan flattered her into taking it. In *Paradise Lost*, the ultimate and most dismaying consequence of losing free will is that the loss corrupts the way God is worshiped. Though the poem is set before the rise of organized religion, the message is still that true worship is only possible if free will is exercised. Blake and Pullman expand this idea to depict the loss of free will as the way religion becomes corrupt.

It is difficult to say whether free will ever existed for humans in Blake's *The Book of Urizen*. There is not much time between the time Los creates them and the time Urizen creates "The Net of Religion" (*Urizen*, pl. 27, 22), which takes away any free will they may have had. In Blake's world, religion is not just corrupted by the loss of free will; religion IS the loss of free will. Humankind then "form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them / The eternal laws of God" (*Urizen*, pl. 28, 6-7). The verb "call'd" is important in

this situation. It implies that these laws are not actually God's, and that they are imposing even more restrictions on themselves in the name of religion.

According to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the concept of contraries, in order to progress, and perhaps discover the true desires of God, we must escape religion and reclaim (or create) free will. Since religion is so restrictive, free will could be considered its contrary, and so if there is religion without free will there is stagnation. "The Garden of Love" is an example of this stagnation. In it, the speaker tries to return to the Garden of Love only to find that it has been replaced by a chapel, a graveyard, and priests who are "binding with briars [the speaker's] joys and desires" (*Exp.*, pl. 44, 12). The joys and desires here represent free will because joy and desire are two things that drive us to follow our own choices. Because the speaker's desires are bound by religion, he has no free will and he is not able to restore the garden to its original beauty, even in his mind. The only way for him to reclaim the garden would be to drive out the priests and free his "joys and desires."

However, even though the history of free will is different in Blake's works than it is in Milton's, the consequences of its loss are the same. When free will is lost, those who are supposed to be good can no longer stand up to corruption. In Blake's poem "The Little Boy Lost," a priest rouses an entire town against a little boy when the child observes that:

Naught loves another as itself
 Nor venerates another so.
 Nor is it possible to Thought
 A greater than itself to know:

And Father, how can I love you,

Or any of my brothers more?
 I love you like the little bird
 That picks up crumbs around the door.
 (*Exp.*, pl. 50, 1-8)

The priest declares this blasphemy and the townspeople “burn’d [the little boy] in a holy place” (*Exp.*, pl. 50, 21). The priest, like Eve, is both having his free will imposed upon and imposing on the free will of others. “The Net of Religion” (*Urizen*, pl. 27, 22) restricts the priest and the laws man has made dictate what he must do. Though the priest is the one committing the abominable act of killing a child, he is not given a choice in the matter because he must follow the laws. In the same way, the priest has taken away the free will of the townspeople and even the boy’s parents do not have the agency to stop their child’s murder. As the voice of religion (both the “laws” and the “net”), the priest spreads the restriction of free will to the rest of the town. It is also interesting that the young boy was burned because he is “One who sets reason up for to judge / Of our most holy Mystery” (*Exp.*, pl. 50, 15-16). As we already know, according to Milton, “reason is also choice” (*PL*, III.108). By killing the boy, the priest and the townspeople are attempting to destroy a representative of reason and free will in the name of religion.

Even Kleist touches on free will in “The Puppet Theatre.” The puppets, who are the epitome of grace, have no free will; all of their movements are controlled by the puppeteer. The puppeteer only controls the puppets’ center of gravity, but all of their other limbs are dependent on the movements of that center. For the puppets, the puppeteer is God, and though he can only control one aspect of their movement, that one aspect controls the

rest of their lives, just as religion can control all aspects of a person's life.

Taking this metaphor one step further, it can be inferred that in Kleist's mind, true grace only occurs when one gives oneself over totally to external forces.

However, he also says in the essay that humans can never reach the level of grace the puppets possess, presumably because humans have free will.

Humans cannot stop having free will, so they will inevitably lose their natural grace. Kleist states this as pure fact and does not place a moral judgment on it, but for Pullman that loss of grace is a necessary part of growing up, and leaves room for earned grace which is superior to natural grace.

Pullman takes a middle ground between Milton's idea of free will and Blake's, but this middle ground leans toward Blake's idea. The Authority may not have set out to suppress free will, but it does not matter, because Metatron is in charge now, and his goal is "to intervene more directly in human affairs . . . to set up a permanent inquisition in every world" (*AS*, 61). Pullman takes Milton's view that suppressing free will was not Heaven's original goal, but he also posits that religion has become corrupt at its highest level, and that free will is based in wisdom and Dust, not religion.

Pullman's world is different from Milton's in many ways, but one of the most crucial is that for Pullman, the Fall is not just fortunate⁴⁶ but positive. For Milton, the Fall is fortunate only in that it brings about the resurrection, a positive event. Pullman, on the other hand, sees the Fall itself as salvation.

⁴⁶ Defined as: "Allusively, the Fall of Man or the sin of Adam as resulting in the blessedness of the Redemption" in *The Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com>, s.v. "felix culpa (n)."

The difference between the two views of the Fall involves free will. Milton's Fall was based in a loss of free will, and Pullman's Fall is brought about by free will. Lyra makes her choice based on the knowledge that she has gained. No one tells her which choice she *should* make, she simply weighs the new knowledge Mary gives her against the feelings she is already aware of and makes her own choice. This is an ideal use of free will, and in the universe of *His Dark Materials*, it saves the world. Pullman's ideals at this point seem more in line with Blake's: the use of free will can free the world from the oppression of corrupt religion.

One of the many aspects of Dæmons is that they represent a person's free will, and one of the aspects of Dust is that it is knowledge and self-awareness, which are essential to free will. Cutting people from their dæmons removes their free will, and could be considered a metaphor for what happens when people blindly follow religion. Cutting people from their dæmons also leaves them as haunting shells, and many of the children who go through the process die. Thus Pullman and Blake are similar in that those who suffer most at the hands of the corrupted church in their works are children.

CONCLUSION: READING TRUTH

There are many ways in which working with *His Dark Materials* is like reading Lyra's alethiometer. The plot itself centers on interpretation, but instead of interpreting or reading a text, Lyra is reading the alethiometer. Shelley King describes the readership of the trilogy as similar to the readership of the alethiometer:

The interpretive process is figured in *The Golden Compass* in two ways: first, through readers, and second, through the dual "text" being read; the alethiometer, which is the subject of reading within the novel, and the text of the novel itself. Only two categories of reader can interpret the symbolic language of the instrument: Lyra, an intuitive child who instinctively possesses the necessary skills for understanding, and a body of trained Scholars who, with the aid of years of study supplemented by books of critical commentary produced by previous Scholars, can come to a difficult conscious reading of the alethiometer. This pairing is duplicated, of course, in Pullman's own readership of engaged child readers and literary critics, who similarly come to the text with differing modes of engagement. It is important to note here that Pullman's text validates both approaches.⁴⁷

The readership of the trilogy is a set of contraries that Pullman recombines to create his work. By writing a story with both young adult themes like growing up and learning to sacrifice, and adult themes like the existence of

⁴⁷ Shelley King, "'Without Lyra we would understand neither the New nor the Old Testament': Exegesis, Allegory, and Reading *The Golden Compass*" in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 107.

God and the importance of protecting knowledge and wisdom from corrupt totalitarian regimes (especially religious ones), Pullman has created a work that transcends age boundaries. And like the alethiometer, readers of different ages have different ways of reading.

The other two instruments can be seen as representative of the plots of the books that share their names, though neither is as applicable to the whole trilogy as the alethiometer. In *The Subtle Knife*, moving between worlds becomes simple and happens frequently, unlike in *The Golden Compass*. *The Golden Compass* (and the alethiometer) can provide knowledge of other worlds, but the knife allows characters to get there. *The Amber Spyglass* is both the third book and the device that Mary uses to see Dust clearly. When Mary can see the Dust clearly, she can also see patterns in it. *The Amber Spyglass* does the same thing for the reader by clarifying and laying out the patterns that have been building throughout the trilogy. The spyglass shows Mary what must happen just as the careful reader can find all the clues necessary in *The Amber Spyglass* to see what must happen at the end.

The characters who use these instruments represent different concepts that are important to the trilogy's themes, and these concepts fit with the roles their instruments enable them to play. The alethiometer tells Lyra truths, but does not usually explain them, and as the listener, Lyra is representative of language. The knife allows Will to move himself and others from place to place, and thereby moves the plot along. His role as the doer, as well as his name, ties Will to human agency and action. Mary uses the spyglass to see

Dust and its interactions with the world, by seeing and understanding what is going on, Mary becomes the interpreter.

The complication of plot and characterization in *His Dark Materials* lends itself to several coexisting interpretations. This is another way in which reading the trilogy is like reading the alethiometer. There are many layers of meaning for each of the metaphorical characters and devices, especially dæmons and Dust, and each of these layers interacts differently with the other metaphors to create a new interpretation. For example, identifying Dust as self-awareness gives a different tone to the Fall than if Dust was simply knowledge. Self-awareness is an important interpretation because it makes Dust personal to everyone and links it to dæmons, which have a layer of meaning that indicates personality. However, knowledge is also an important interpretation because it affects all sentient beings in all worlds, and this makes saving Dust incredibly urgent.

When writing *His Dark Materials*, Pullman seems to have taken Blake's theory of contraries to heart. By looking at *Paradise Lost* and Blake's works as contraries, and forcing those contraries to coexist in the same work, Pullman has advanced the philosophies of the canon one step further. But even in its connections to Milton and Blake, the trilogy is similar to the alethiometer because the reader has to know what she is looking for before he or she can find it.

As Lyra finds in an incident with the "spy-fly," sometimes the alethiometer will tell her something she cannot understand without

background knowledge. While she is traveling with the Gyptians, their wise man, Farder Coram, helps Lyra learn to read the alethiometer by directing her natural ability. At one point, she asks the alethiometer what Mrs. Coulter is doing, but cannot figure out the answer. Very soon afterwards, it becomes clear that Mrs. Coulter was sending a mechanical insect to spy on and possibly attack Lyra. When Farder Coram explains the origins of this device, the parts of the alethiometer's answer that were unclear become clear. Lyra needs Farder Coram's background knowledge about the spy-fly in order to understand what the alethiometer was trying to tell her. Likewise, readers need background knowledge to understand aspects of *His Dark Materials*. If a reader has knowledge of Milton and Blake's works, she will make connections and see themes that other readers may miss.

The textual allusions in the trilogy are one thing an uninitiated reader would miss. The scenes and characters can stand on their own, but they are made more interesting and thematically significant if they can be connected to similar scenes and characters in Milton and Blake. By separating the pitiful and the grandiose elements of Milton's Hell, Pullman is able to create two Hells: the Republic of Heaven for the gloriously warlike rebels, and the World of the Dead as an inescapable place of eternal punishment. He also takes Milton's descriptions of Heaven at war and uses them to recreate the Kingdom of Heaven as no more than a totalitarian war machine. The allusions to Milton's descriptions of Paradise lead us to see the beauty that only exists in the physical mortal world. Meanwhile, the iconographic

characters from Blake's poetry are made (for the most part) human and relatable. Many of these characters demonstrate the parent-child relationships that are such an important theme in both Blake and Pullman's works.

A reader's familiarity with the philosophical and theological ideas set forth in Milton and Blake's poetry, leads to a deeper understanding of Pullman's ideas. By looking at the ways in which Milton and Blake's divergent theologies actually support the same power structure, and the ways in which Blake interprets that power structure as corrupt, it is easier to understand how Pullman uses this corruption to undermine that power structure and create a new one. By taking the power of creation away from God, Pullman also takes away His inherent power over the world.

The main reason that reading the trilogy is like reading the alethiometer is the complexity and layers of interpretation it encourages. This study has barely scratched the surface of what can be said about *His Dark Materials*. If I were to continue this project I would expand both halves and look deeper into the trilogy's plot and metaphors as well as explore more fully a number of outside inspirations upon Pullman, in particular Greek and Roman mythology.

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