

‘Because for Us There Is No Elsewhere’:
Pullman, Anti-Theism, and the Republic of Heaven

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Abstract

This thesis takes a look at the portrayal of religion and organized religion in Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*. It starts off with an overview of criticism which provides an insight into concepts dealt with in the trilogy and also an understanding of the concern among religious communities that the books might have a detrimental impact upon young audiences. Through close textual analysis, this thesis tries to show that in spite of allegations by critics that Pullman is anti-religious or anti-theologian, *His Dark Materials* does not actually criticize religion but rather shows how some religious practices found in organized religion sometimes conflict with humanistic principles. Pullman's trilogy suggests that God is not needed by presenting an alternative way of finding purpose and meaning in the world through Dust, a mysterious cosmic particle with a dualistic nature that emphasizes the connection between spirit and matter. Character traits regarded in religious communities as negative consequences of original sin are seen as infinitely positive in Pullman's trilogy where the physical world is celebrated rather than regarded as sinful. *His Dark Materials* shows how science has replaced the need for religion in many ways, but it still emphasizes the need for mystery in the world. This thesis shows how the trilogy ultimately creates a shift in focus from the intangible to the tangible; from hopes of a future paradise in an uncertain afterlife to creating your own paradise in the definite present.

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Introduction and Literary Criticism

Ever since his publication of *Northern Lights* (published as *The Golden Compass* in the UK) in 1995, and the subsequent publications part of the trilogy called *His Dark Materials*, *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), Philip Pullman has taken a lot of heat from critics claiming that his books are anti-religious, dangerous for children, and a threat to Christianity. In Canada, several Catholic school boards removed Pullman's books from library shelves after the trilogy received a lot of attention following the release of the movie based on the first book, *The Golden Compass*, in December 2007. Canada's Catholic Civil League warned Catholic parents not to let their kids see the movie due to the "strong antireligious content" in the books, setting in motion a concern that "spread to other schools in Ontario and Calgary, Alberta, and crossed the border to Lexington, Kentucky, and Lubbock, Texas" (G. M. E. 20). The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights in the United States later issued a 26-page pamphlet reciting Pullman's views on religion and claiming that his books were written "to promote atheism and denigrate Christianity" (G. M. E. 20).

In "A Christian Response and Reaction to Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Series by Christian Apologists," the author, Anthony Horvath, makes it clear that he considers *HDM* a direct attack on Christianity; that the trilogy represents "Pullman at war" with religion (Horvath 15) and in 2002, the English journalist and author Peter Hitchens went so far as to describe Pullman as being "the most dangerous author in Britain" for penning books that are "moral propaganda." Pullman is by no means the first person to critique religion or even the first to introduce the idea of God being dead; more than a hundred years have passed since the widely quoted statement "God is dead" appeared in *The Gay Science* by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in 1882.

In this thesis, I will first explore criticism devoted to examining the portrayal of religion in *His Dark Materials* before taking a look at what Pullman himself has to say, and then, finally, I will carry out my own analysis. This analysis will touch upon topics already discussed by critics, but also attempt to go into more detail with regard to the way

Pullman's portrayal of religious concepts ultimately shapes the messages contained within his trilogy.

The Church in *His Dark Materials* could arguably refer to many different churches and religions, but some of the terms Pullman uses refer directly to the Catholic Church. We see use of words like "Magisterium" and "Oblation Board" as well as the reference to the Swiss Guard (AS 117-18). The word "Catholic" is only used two times in *HDM*, both in connection with the ex-nun Mary Malone, who had "been brought up as Catholic" (SK 249). When Mary tells Lyra and Will about "the Catholic Church that I used to belong to" (AS 440), she talks about her time as a nun and her reasons for deciding to leave the sisterhood. In his article "Fantasizing It As It Is: Religious Language in Philip Pullman's Trilogy, *His Dark Materials*," David Gooderham focuses especially on this explicit use of "religious or ideological language" (156) and the effects it might have on a young audience. Gooderham says Pullman stands out from other fantasy authors who use religious themes in their writing because he calls religious entities and ideas by religious names, as opposed to, for instance, C. S. Lewis, whom Pullman "hates" for writing literature characterized by "'sneaky,' untruthful indoctrination" (156). Pullman's use of actual institutional terminology paints, according to Gooderham, the church as "a lean, keen, Talibanlike institution – focused ruthlessly on a single end" (158). Furthermore, he also regards the Church in *HDM* as a "distillation and summation of all churches, denominations and sects" and argues that if it were not for the use of quotation marks when describing the church – e.g. as an institution that wants to "control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling" (SK 50) – the trilogy "would be open to the charge of gross propaganda" (158). Though all descriptions of the church are attributed to characters in the books, "the cumulative effect, in the mouths of approved characters like the witches and the scientific researcher, Dr. Malone, is determinative in shaping the ideology of the text" (159).

Gooderham says that the narrative tactic Pullman employs by creating the Magisterium in a fantasy world might protect Pullman from allegations of caricature in the case of adult readers, but he argues that this must "be called into question as liable to lead the young (and naïve of all ages) into confusion of fantasy with actual organizations – with the effect of unproductive posturing on both sides of the ideological divide" (159).

He says that imagery borrowed from Greek mythology as seen, for instance, in descriptions of the Land of the Dead, merely captivates “readers by its intriguing inventions, encourages the more powerful reading experience of imaginative and speculative response” (162). This is something he contrasts with the theological concept, arguing that “the explicit terminology invites at best a rational and critical consideration – from which it must, in this instance, come off rather badly – and at worst a partisan response, depending on the reader’s religious or ideological stance, rather than one which is open and imaginative” (162).

The introduction of the concept of Dust is something Gooderham views as “profoundly [modifying] the ontology implied by the polemical handling of ‘God’ in texts, functioning as a ‘connecting’ metaphor for ‘the plethora of seemingly incompatible elements that make up the universe’” (Gooderham 166). Dust, Gooderham admits, is a clever concept with imaginative power, but keeping in mind that children read the books, he says that “the use of specific terminology and other accoutrements of theological discourse lay themselves open to the charge of confusion, offense and the indoctrination which Pullman so disapproves of in other children’s writers” (166).

As for whether or not Pullman achieves his goal of writing what Gooderham describes as the “Grand Narrative to end all grand narratives, the High Fantasy to end all high fantasies, the Eschaton to end all kingdoms of heaven!” (164), Gooderham says the trilogy ultimately “fails to mark the dawn for the new area” (173) and this is largely due to the recurrent theme of alienation imbedded in the text. He says that evidence of “the old myth biting back” (170) can be seen in the fact that Lyra and Will are in the end separated: “The effect of the *felix culpa* as the tenderest but briefest of encounters is thus, ironically, to expose and foreground the general absence of satisfying intimate relations in the new as in the old era” (171). Instead of creating a new, secular world “tempered by a touch of realism,” Gooderham claims that “it is the longing and anguish of an alienated humanity which reverberates in the ideology of the text” (172).

In “‘And He’s A-Going to Destroy Him’: Religious Subversion in Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” Bernard Schweizer says that the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century were characterized by a sense of uncertainty and a hunger for “‘speculative fiction’ – and particularly for adaptations of Christianity to new

and undreamed-of possibilities” (160). He mentions Theodore Beale, Octavia E. Butler, George MacDonald, and C. S. Lewis as examples of authors writing such fiction before showing how Pullman is distinguished from these. While the above-mentioned authors “stretched and modified biblical teachings in their tales of other worlds and future times, they still affirmed the basic tenets of Christianity. Philip Pullman, on the other hand, chips away at the very basis of Christian doctrine” (160).

Schweizer provides an overview of the history of criticism of *HDM* following the publication of the final installment *The Amber Spyglass* in year 2000. He identifies Alan Jacobs as possibly being the first person to publish an article “condemning the heretical underpinnings of the work” (161). In “The Devil’s Party: Philip Pullman’s Bestselling Fantasy Series Retells the Story of Creation – with Satan as the Hero,” Jacobs argues that “the theological freight of his books... turns out to be a distinct *anti*-theology” (40) and labels Pullman as “antitheologian” for being of the opinion that whether God lives or dies is really not very significant (42). He also contrasts Pullman with two of his biggest inspirations when writing *HDM*, Blake and Milton, who were declared anti-clerics rather than anti-theologians. Later, in September 2001, Cynthia Grenier followed in Jacobs’ footsteps and encouraged Christians and Jews to take notice of the “all-out attack on their faith just underneath the skillful narration and imaginative fantasy that the critics have praised in *His Dark Materials*, catapulting the entire trilogy to the best-seller lists” (Greener).

In October 2002, journalist and author Christopher Hitchens wrote an article where he spoke up in defense of Pullman and said that “Pullman’s daring heresy is to rewrite the Fall as if it were an emancipation, and as if Eve had done us all a huge favor by snatching at the forbidden fruit. Our freedom and happiness depend on that ‘first disobedience.’” He did not fear the effect explicit theological terminology would have on children but instead praised Pullman’s trilogy for its “intimate double effect” which allows both children and adults to enjoy his books. Christopher was a huge fan of *HDM*, and the fact that he found it liberating rather than offensive is deeply contrasted by his brother, Peter Hitchens, who adamantly holds “that children may be influenced by [Pullman’s] books into an atheistical state of mind” which “would be dangerous to the foundations of civilisation” (Peter Hitchens). Peter reaffirmed this opinion in another

article from 2014, three years after his brother's passing and 12 years after the initial article where he labels Pullman as a "dangerous author" and invites people to think of him as the anti-Christ.

Schweizer says that the moment when "Pullman's conventional anti-ecclesiasticism turns into something that is both less familiar and more radical than other religious heresies" (164) is with the revelation that Lord Asriel does not intend to rebel against the Church – "because it was too weak to be worth fighting" (*SK* 46) – but to destroy the Authority Himself. This revelation, according to Schweizer, shows that "the declared aim of the plot is not ecclesiastical reform or even the demolition of the established Church; it is, rather, open warfare against God" (164). He goes on to say that it is difficult to overlook Pullman's resentment of God since he demolishes the major "theistic attributes – namely, God's supposed omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence" (165). While Jacobs argues that "Pullman's echoes of Lewis are thus revisionary gestures, revealing his hatred not only for Lewis but for the Christianity Lewis represents" (41) Schweizer adds to this, saying that "hatred" is the operative word, that "Pullman's attitude can be identified as a species of 'misotheism,' based on the Greek root meaning of 'misos' (hatred) and 'theos' (divinity)" (167). He describes *HDM* as an "imaginative elaboration of an intellectual tradition whose philosophical roots lie in the works of Thomas Paine, Max Stirner, and Friedrich Nietzsche, and whose literary progenitors include Marquis de Sade and Lautréamont" (168).

Despite the claims that Pullman is anti-theologian, Schweizer points out that for Pullman, "God no longer denotes a personified figure in need of iconoclastic destruction but rather a system of ideas, a social construct that has to be attacked from an ideological point of view. Hence, their misotheistic rebellion is really an attempt to dismantle a system of ideas that is premised upon the acceptance of theism" (169). Adults might be able to make a distinction between critique of organized religion and critique of religion or God, but that does not mean that children will be able to do the same. While David Gooderham holds that children should not be reading Pullman's trilogy since its use of explicit religious terminology might lead to "confusion, offense... and indoctrination," Schweizer takes exception to this, arguing that, "Ironically, that would be the case only with readers who are already partisan. The large majority of children, who are spared

religious indoctrination at a young age, would see in Pullman's heresies just story elements, twists of the plot, surprises" (170). Schweizer acknowledges that books have the power to influence minds, but he warns against censorship and encourages people to let "common sense prevail" (171) because in the end, a lot good can come from the positive messages included in Pullman's trilogy.

In "Rediscovering Faith through Science Fiction: Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," Andrew Leet examines how religion has been treated in the science fiction genre. James Gunn said that "science-fiction stories deal with religion in three basic ways: as a social force, as truth under [the] test [of reality], and transcendence... or experience beyond the world of sense" (qtd. in Leet 175). Leet argues that the sheer volume of Pullman's trilogy has allowed him to use all three of the perspectives Gunn mentions, "progressing from basic questioning of organized religion's hierarchical structures in *The Golden Compass* to more complex questioning of religious faith in *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*" (175). Leet says that what Pullman is doing is illustrating what happens when religion turns into religiosity; when "insights into the fundamental nature of the cosmos become naïve oversimplifications of reality... human life and its meaning are devalued, and in their place various individuals and objects, rituals and traditions are invested with ultimate value" (175).

Leet argues that Pullman is not only against religiosity, but also reminds us of what it could mean if the church regained its former power; a frightening prospect because "religious organizations – especially large ones – have tended to resist change by cementing outdated hierarchical structures and regulations and preventing the questioning of anything labeled as doctrine" (176). As examples to illustrate how the church has undermined the individual's rights in the past, he mentions the condemnation of Galileo's astronomical theories in the seventeenth century and the attempted suppression of Darwin's evolutionary theories. Leet holds that the behavior of the Church in *HDM* is reminiscent of these historical examples, but, in the end, the fictional institution Pullman portrays is "actually non-Christian by nature, as there is no mention of a Christ figure or incarnation and there is no sense of the Holy Spirit at work" (176).

Pullman's skepticism of organized religion is undeniable, but Leet points out how *HDM* still includes moral virtues like "prudence, fortitude, justice, and temperance"

(176), virtues Leet refers to as “religious values” exemplified by “the actions of Lyra, her companions, and even the gyptian community” and “absent... in those representing the Church” (177). Pullman has previously explained how his upbringing led to an appreciation for “the language and atmosphere of the Bible and the prayer book,” but he says that when he goes to church today, “I don’t recognize the language. It’s sort of modern and it’s flat and it’s bureaucratic and it’s derivative” (Odean 52). Pullman says he “came to realize that the basis on which these belief systems were founded isn’t there,” but he does not deny that religion has influenced him:

I no longer believe in the God I used to believe in when I was a boy. But I do know the background very well, and I will never escape it. So although I call myself an atheist, I’m certainly a Christian atheist and even more specifically, a Church of England... atheist. And very specifically, a 1662 Book of Common Prayer atheist. I can’t escape these influences on my background, and I would not wish to. (Odean 52)

Though “Christian atheist” might seem like an oxymoron, Leet argues “Pullman defies this argumentation by separating the *formal practice* of religion from the *spirit* of religious faith itself” suggesting that “ultimate interpretation, meaning, and experience should reside at the level of the individual, not at the larger organizational level” (178). Leet says that “organized religion has given little thought to the universe as a whole, choosing instead to focus its energies on earthly conditions and those limited human-oriented constructions of the afterlife, namely, heaven and hell” (178). As an example, he mentions how “Pullman’s afterlife doesn’t fit into the usual dichotomies of heaven and hell” which are more “understandable to the human mind than the problematic middle-of-the-road gray” (179). Pullman’s afterlife is instead characterized by confusion and fear, as opposed to the idea of heaven and hell which provides clarity by building on the theme of a “moral” death (179).

As for the idea of achieving a sinless world by separating humans from their souls, which Pullman regards as unnatural and as compromising free will, Leet links this to how the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard recognized an “anxiety... pervading even

human innocence” and how even “some atheist existentialist thinkers point to this pervasive anxiety as the distinctive mark of human existence” (180). Leet says that though the idea that original sin is “the distinctive mark of human existence” might be scary to some, it is something that makes sense: “Without sin we would not be human and we would have nothing to strive for – ours would be an empty existence” (180).

Adding to the set of critics condemning Pullman’s trilogy for its portrayal of religion, Leet mentions Sarah Lyall who wrote a piece titled “The Man Who Dared Make Religion the Villain” and, like Schweizer, Leet also points out the tendency religious critics have of ignoring the positive messages included in *HDM*: “It is somewhat ironic that the large, complicated issues of *His Dark Materials* hotly debated by religious critics often cause the subtle, yet pervasive themes of faith and openness to mystery evinced by many of Pullman’s characters to be pushed aside” (182). However, Leet says this is not entirely surprising considering the difficulty involved in trying to define the concept of faith. He mentions definitions by James Fowler, Ken McLeod, and Paul Tillich; definitions that are “helpful... [but] aren’t necessarily easy to comprehend” (182) leading the latter to conclude that

Faith is a concept – and a reality – which is difficult to grasp and to describe. Almost every word by which faith has been described... is open to new misinterpretations. This cannot be otherwise, since faith is not a phenomenon beside others, but the central concern in [a person’s] personal life, manifest and hidden at the same time. It is religious and transcends religion, it is universal and concrete, it is infinitely variable and always the same. (Tillich 126).

In the end, since “faith” often signifies something “externally prescribed and regulated,” Leet suggests that a better word for Pullman’s philosophy might be “spirit” which “suggests internal direction” (183). He points out how Lyra’s spirit is fueled by compassion and self-sacrifice and how this strength is guided by what William Blake and his German contemporary Heinrich von Kleist would refer to as innocence. Lyra’s innocence allows her to read the alethiometer by intuition or “grace,” and we see how, as she transitions from youthful innocence into adult experience, she loses this ability but is

told that she can “regain it by work... But your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you” (AS 495). Leet points out how Lyra has to “continue to be open to the spirit within, regardless of what external sources – religious or otherwise – define as authentic truth or faith” and how this is in accordance with contemporary theological teaching since it reaffirms what Pope John XXIII said in his encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*:

God gave each of us an intellect capable of attaining natural truth. If we adhere to this truth, we adhere to God Himself, the author of truth, the lawgiver and rules of our lives. But if we reject this truth, whether out of foolishness, neglect, or malice, we turn our backs on the highest good itself and on the very norm for right living. (§7).

Leet also addresses two of the issues religious critics have taken most offense to in *HDM*. The first is Mary Malone’s assertion that “the Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake” (AS 442), a comment he says is more of a “personal reflection about her former identity as a nun than anything else” (184). Leet explains how this statement reflects the fact that her true vocation was not becoming a nun since it had nothing to do with wanting to help others but wanting to be “holy *and* ... clever” (AS 443). Mary simply believed what the Church told her to believe and did what she was told to do; in other words, she did not experience “freedom of thought or emotional interaction with others” and consequently did not naturally transition from innocence into experience meaning “that which was truly human within her could not fully develop” (184). The second issue critics have taken offense to is, of course, the death of the Authority. Leet points out how the key point here is that the Authority is not actually God, but rather an imposter: “The male angel that Pullman visually creates is only a godlike representation of what mankind has designed for its own purposes and needs, not an actual image, as God is a mystery – in theological terms, defined as something that is beyond normal

understanding” (185), an idea that is closely linked to what Schweizer said about God denoting a system of ideas rather than personified figure.

In the end, Leet is largely of the same opinion as Schweizer and concludes that “Pullman’s questioning of that which is often unquestioned in the realms of organized religion and faith development is neither unnatural nor meant to be corruptive” (186). He makes the interesting observation that the primary theological “movers” in *HDM* are of the female gender, challenging “traditional conceptions of organized religion as a male-dominated community” (185). This is something that Schweizer also points out, saying that though Pullman shows obvious disdain for the Authority and Metatron, he “seems to be receptive to a different kind of deity, notably a female one” (168). Schweizer says that the angel Xaphania is presented as an “entirely benevolent, graceful, and wise deity worthy of religious reverence” (168) something he suggests is an indication of Pullman rejecting patriarchal theological doctrines. The religious scholar Karen Armstrong again gives an account of where these patriarchal theological doctrines stem from: “Even though monotheists would insist that their God transcended gender, he would remain essentially male... In part, this was due to his origins as a tribal god of war. Yet his battle with the goddesses reflects a less positive characteristic of the Axial Age which generally saw a decline in the status of women and the female” (50).

In “Unexpected Allies? Pullman and the Feminist Theologians,” Pat Pinsent argues that a lot of the criticism Pullman has when it comes to organized religion has already been discussed by feminist theologians. In order to clarify what female theologians aim to do, Pinsent mentions an idea introduced by Gerda Lerner: the “androcentric fallacy,” which is the belief among men that their experiences, viewpoint, and ideas represent all of human experience and all of thought. According to Ann Loades, female theologians want to eliminate this fallacy and “rely on themselves for understanding the God they have found to be theirs, though mediated to them by a religious tradition which caused them profound problems as one powerful form of mediating that fallacy” (qtd. in Pinsent 199). This idea of a personal God is very reminiscent of what Leet said about interpretation residing at the level of the individual and also the complexity of the concept of faith. Pinsent emphasizes the importance of rereading the Bible from a female perspective and reevaluating aspects like “the nature of

God and the Church, the interpretation of the Fall narrative in Genesis, and expectations about the afterlife” (200). These are all things discussed in *HDM*, and without claiming that Pullman has been influenced by feminist theology, Pinsent finds it interesting how Pullman and female theologians often share the same views.

Pinsent, like Schweizer and Leet, points out that the Authority in *HDM* is in fact not God, but a figure representing something else. Pinsent believes the “pathetic decline into nothingness of [the Authority] is how Pullman deals with the... death of belief in an omnipotent and omniscient deity” (200) and that the use of words like “paper” and “mystery” included in the death scene signifies how “‘Godness’ has become the province of sterile conjecture rather than of living belief” (200). Pinsent also points out how “Feminist theology... makes much of the figure of Wisdom, personified as female, as an alternative, Bible-based image of God” (201) and that this can be seen in the introduction of the angel Xaphania who, though clearly not omnipotent, is continuously associated with wisdom.

As for interpretations of the Fall story, Pinsent argues that the interpretation of the Fall as positive is something *HDM* has in common with many female theologians. Anne Primavesi is quoted saying that we should be careful to assume that God did not want humans to know good from evil; that if Adam and Eve had not eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, “What a very infantile stupid pair they would have remained” (qtd. in Pinsent 203). Mary Harris Russell explains how “Anyone’s Eve, of course, is an interpretive event, since Genesis 1:3 is a text so filled with contradictions – the two different creation narratives, the mysterious interdiction, and the ambiguities of who is responsible for what” (Russel 213). Primavesi explores alternative interpretations of the Book of Genesis and suggests that the serpent represents wisdom and that it helped people see “the problem of keeping rules of conduct, imposed norms of behavior” (qtd. in Pinsent 203). Pinsent points out the obvious consequence of interpreting the Fall as something positive rather than negative: suddenly, a lot of that which is dedicated to the idea of atonement in the Bible becomes irrelevant, and the idea that we have nothing to atone for is something that is made clear in Pullman’s trilogy.

Pinsent also argues that *HDM* shares views with female theologians regarding beliefs about the afterlife. Pullman’s trilogy is very opposed to the idea that the world we

live in is just a temporary place before we get to enjoy paradise in an afterlife, and Elizabeth Stuart reveals her thoughts on this when she says that, “hope in life after death has been used by Christianity to encourage people into passively accepting situations of oppression in the present” (qtd. in Pinsent 205). Despite the fact that *HDM* emphasizes the importance of appreciating the present and enjoying life because there might not be any afterlife, Pinsent argues that hope for ever-lasting love can still be seen in Lyra’s words to Will when she realizes they cannot stay together:

I’ll be looking for you, Will, every moment, every single moment. And when we do find each other again, we’ll cling together so tight that nothing and no one’ll ever tear us apart. Every atom of me and every atom of you... We’ll live in birds and flowers and dragonflies and pine trees and in clouds and in those little specks of light you see floating in sunbeams... And when they use our atoms to make new lives, they won’t just be able to take one, they’ll have to take two, one of you and one of me, we’ll be joined so tight... (AS 526)

In the end, Pinsent says that Pullman and female theologians share a lot of similar views, but she still holds that “the debunking of religion he has undertaken should ideally be part of a positive process – not just establish the somewhat debatable ‘Republic of Heaven’ but also to revalue the more profound spiritual insights that are already latent within religious and spiritual sources” (209).

Finally, in “Circumventing the Grand Narrative: Dust as an Alternative Theological Vision in Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” Anne-Marie Bird takes a look at the concept of Dust and explores “Pullman’s attempt to construct an alternative theological vision that is particularly attuned to the secular humanistic climate of the twenty-first century” (189). She aligns Pullman’s view on organized religion with that of other nineteenth-century thinkers who declared their independence from God like Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. However, she points out that there is a distinction between these “representatives of modernity” and Pullman since modernity is associated with a general disenchantment with the world whereas *HDM* actually embraces wonder and the supernatural (189). Bird points out how Pullman uses Dust to show how spirit and matter

cannot exist without the other and how this disturbs “the traditional Christian hierarchies... namely, the value-laden binaries of innocence-experience, good-evil, and spirit-matter that lie at the core of the Fall myth” (189).

Dust is according to Bird a paradoxical concept since it is described as an “elementary particle... because you can’t break them down any further: there’s nothing inside them but themselves” (*NL* 368). This is paradoxical since “the profuse and diverse concepts in Dust would make it more of a compound substance,” (190), but describing Dust as an elementary particle is in Bird’s view a way of rejecting “the idea of division and separation as a means of making sense of the world” (191). The idea behind Dust is that spirit and matter are intricately linked, two aspects of the same substance.

Dust as a central point of reference is something Bird finds problematic since the trilogy pulls in two directions by condemning a “system that rules out all forms of ‘otherness’” (193) while simultaneously presenting Dust as an “authorizing presence” (194). The result is, according to Bird, that Pullman has “created a system that renders all phenomena subject to one explanatory discourse; a replacement grand narrative” (194). Bird also argues that Dust cannot be the answer to everything due to its “radical instability” (195). She elaborates by showing how Dust has three different meanings: one physical, one literal, and one metaphorical. The physical meaning is what the Church focuses on: original sin and conscious sexuality; the literal meaning is what we find in the Bible: Dust being dust; and a metaphorical meaning: Dust being linked to consciousness, self-awareness and wisdom. Similarly, Dust also has different names in different worlds: “Dust” in Lyra’s world, “Shadows” or “dark matter” in Will’s world and “*sraf*” in the *mulefa* world.

When “Dust is referred to by other descriptions, such as dark matter... all other options are silenced, or cease to exist, leaving only one meaning in place. These ‘possibility collapses’ are in direct contrast to the way in which Dust generally operates in the texts as a means of disturbing the hierarchical nature of binary opposites” (194). Because of this, Dust does not “accomplish its apparent purpose” since it is “unable to avoid the problem of binary opposites completely, serving, in part, to emphasize the difference between such conceptual opposites as matter and spirit” (195). Bird says that while Dust attempts to deconstruct the hierarchical structure of binary opposites, what it

actually ends up doing is deconstruct itself, something she says is in accordance with Derrida's point that deconstruction is an intermediate activity since "the hierarchy of dual oppositions always reestablishes itself" (qt. in Bird 196).

In the end, Bird considers Dust an insufficient explanation for how everything came to be, a "shifting field of relations in which there is no secure or stable point" (197). She quotes William Butler Yeats saying "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (qt. in Bird 197) as she points out Dust's lack of stability and universal truth. However, she does admit that Dust offers a kind of system, though one "characterized by contingency and uncertainty" (197). She also says that due to "the immense potential for free play of meaning" Dust manages to avoid "any anxiety as to whether the system purports to represent universal 'truth,'" ultimately circumventing "the grand narrative, creating instead an open, more egalitarian vision in which Dust functions as a new focus for people's spirituality, without which... humanity not only lacks purpose and meaning, but equally as important, a sense of wonder and mystery" (197).

As we have seen, there is no shortage of critical analyses of the portrayal of religion in *His Dark Materials*. In response to comments that his trilogy poses a threat to Christianity, Pullman himself has commented that it is not just Christianity he is skeptical of, but all organized religions that abuse their power. In an interview with Susan Roberts, the author of *HDM* says, "It's not just Christianity I'm getting at. The reason that the forms of religion in the books seem to be Christian is because that's the world I'm familiar with" (Roberts). When Pullman was seven or eight years old, his father died in a plane crash in Kenya while "training other pilots to fly a bomber... at the time of the Mau-Mau insurgency... the result of pilot error or mechanical malfunction" (Jukes). This led to Pullman spending a lot of time in his grandfather's household. His grandfather was a clergyman, a Church of England rector, who was a great storyteller and knew all of the stories in the Bible. Pullman describes how he became familiar with the stories in the Bible and how his "Grandpa preached a sermon and of course God existed – one didn't even think of questioning it" (Roberts).

Pullman used to go to church every week ("Philip Pullman: How Wales Inspired His Life and Work"), but as he grew older and spoke to people, listened to their opinions, and read books, he began questioning what he had been told and eventually came to

believe what he believes today. When trying to describe his own beliefs, Pullman says, “I don’t know more than a tiny fragment of what it’s possible to know about this world” (Roberts), and he therefore cannot deny that God might possibly exist. However, when he considers everything he *does* know, he can find no evidence to support God’s existence, so he finds himself “caught between the words ‘atheistic’ and ‘agnostic’” (Roberts). If there is in fact a God, Pullman thinks he has not showed himself on earth, and he argues that people who do believe in God use this as an excuse for behaving extremely badly, so “a belief in a God does not seem to me to result automatically in behaving very well” (Roberts).

When confronted with the question if his books have an anti-religious purpose, Pullman responds that “when you look at organised religion of whatever sort – whether it’s Christianity in all its variants, or whether it’s Islam or some forms of extreme Hinduism – wherever you see organised religion and priesthoods and power, you see cruelty and tyranny and repression. It’s almost a universal law” (Roberts). Despite clear allusions to Christianity and Catholicism in particular, Pullman holds that, words like

‘Magisterium’ and ‘oblation’ are church terms, they are terms of church organisation. These are administrative things. These are bureaucratic things. How can an attack on those be construed as an attack on God? These are human things which human beings have constructed in order to wield power. That’s not a contentious thing to say. That is simply true. These are forms of political organisation and no more than that. (Roberts)

Pullman points out that the church has been “caught with its trousers down” in many ways and that it has been involved in too many scandals, but “this is what happens, always, when you have an organisation whose authority derives from something that may not be questioned” (Barton). In an interview about his book *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*, Pullman said that he hopes to inspire people to read the Bible because “then they will see how many contradictions and inconsistencies there are between the gospels” (Barton). One of the problems with the Bible and religion that Pullman points

out is that people do not actually read the Bible, and if they do, they “will read the bits they like and ignore the bits they don’t understand or don’t like” (Barton).

Although Pullman stresses that *HDM* is “a story, not a treatise, not a sermon or a work of philosophy” (Roberts), the trilogy still undoubtedly conveys a rather biased message when it comes to the Church. However, Pullman points out that it is not religion per se that he is criticizing, but rather organized religion. This goes back to what Leet said about the distinction between the formal practice of religion and the spirit of religion. If we take a look at the term “religion” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we see it defined as “A state of life bound by religious vows; the condition of belonging to a religious order.” This definition is quite similar to the definition of “organized religion” which is “any structured system of faith or worship, esp. one followed by a large number of people, as Christianity, Islam, etc.; such religions collectively” and deviates greatly from the definition of “faith” provided by Tillich. The American philosopher William James distinguished personal religion from organized (or institutional) religion when he said that:

Religion... shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude... in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*. Since the relation may be either moral, physical, or ritual, it is evident that out of religion in the sense in which we take it, theologies, philosophies, and ecclesiastical organizations may secondarily grow. (31)

James says that there are certain characteristics tied to organized religion: “Worship and sacrifice, procedures for working on the dispositions of the deity, theology and ceremony and ecclesiastical organization” (30). CompellingTruth.org defines organized religion as “a faith system with an over-arching structure in place to define doctrine, standardize worship practices, and administrate the organization” (“What Is Organized Religion”) and points out several examples from the Bible to support this definition. For instance, evidence of organizational structure like hierarchy can be seen in particular spiritual leaders being honored above others (*English Standard Version*, Tim. 5:17); administration can be seen in deacons taking over responsibilities previously handled by

teachers (Acts 7:1-7), and teachings can be seen in instructions laid out for use of discipline (Matt. 18:15-20) and the importance of maintaining order during services (Cor. 14:29-40), and so on. CompellingTruth.org says that there are “great benefits to organized religion,” but it can also go wrong, for instance when it “drifts away from God’s expectations and panders to human influence. Most dangerous is the tendency to propagate false doctrine” (“What Is Organized Religion”).

Despite the definition found in the *OED*, it seems as though critics, theologians, and philosophers mostly regard religion as something internal and personal; something in great contrast with organized religion which signifies an external influence. Religion also seems to often be used synonymously with terms like faith and spirit. So, in the end, if we are to settle on a final definition of religion in order to make a clear distinction from organized religion, we might turn to Ursula King’s definition of spirituality:

Spirituality... has to do with an age-old human quest to seek fulfillment, liberation and pointers towards transcendence amidst the welter of human experience... [It] must not be understood as something apart from or as added to life. Rather it is something which permeates all human activities and experiences rather [than] being additional to them, Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individual and society. (qtd in. Pinsent 207)

This thesis will take a close look at the use of religious elements within Pullman’s trilogy in order to show that there is in fact a clear distinction between religion and organized religion in *HDM*. It will show that the depictions of religion and organized religion in the trilogy largely adhere to the definitions above, portraying religion or faith as something internal and personal and organized religion as an external influence. I will also try to outline specifically what it is within organized religion that Pullman disapproves of and what he presents as solutions to these problems.

Religion, the Church, and the Magisterium

Before we draw parallels between *HDM* and the real world in order to figure out what messages the trilogy impresses upon its readers, we should first take a look at the portrayal of religion and organized religion in the fantasy world where the main protagonist, Lyra, grew up.

The Church in Lyra's world is depicted as a powerful institution that goes by the name of the Magisterium. Early on in the first installment of the trilogy, descriptions quickly lead readers to believe that the Magisterium is an institution to be feared. During a conversation between the Master and the Librarian at Jordan College, we learn that "Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church's power over every aspect of life had been absolute" (*NL* 31). Following the death of the pope, the Magisterium arose from a mixture of courts, colleges, and councils. We learn that the College of Bishops had been the most powerful branch within the Church for a large part of a century, but when the story in *HDM* takes place, the Consistorial Court of Discipline has "taken its place as the most active and most feared of all the Church's bodies" (*NL* 31).

The Magisterium's influence on the world becomes clearer when Lord Faa, Lord of the Western Gyptians, outlines politics for Lyra, telling her how Jordan College needs to keep "on the right side of the Church, or it won't survive" (*NL* 128). The Church runs just about everything and opposing it would be perilous. In fact, it is not only those that oppose the Church that fear it; when Fra Pavel, a dedicated member of the church, gives his testimony to the President of the Consistorial Court, his extreme nervousness implies that even those allied with the Church fear it (*AS* 67-68). This fear becomes justified when we learn more about the church's ambitions and practices.

For instance, when Mrs. Coulter manages to capture a witch, she does not hesitate to use torture to secure information on behalf of the Magisterium, exclaiming "Oh, there is more suffering to come. We have a thousand years of experience in this Church of ours. We can draw out your suffering endlessly" (*SK* 38). Perhaps it is not surprisingly that Lord Asriel has a "hatred for priors and monks and nuns" leading to a refusal to let

his daughter be raised by a priory (*NL* 124), as revealed when Lord Faa tells Lyra about her parents' complicated past.

Ruta Skadi, queen of the Lake Lubana clan of witches, says the Church has always tried to “suppress and control every natural impulse” and that she has traveled in the South where the Churches cut off the sexual organs of children: “That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling” (*SK* 50). This is not the only time a reference is made to the practice of castrating children: later, in *Northern Lights*, Lord Asriel asks Lyra if she has heard of the term “castration” and explains: “It means removing the sexual organs of a boy so that he never develops the characteristics of a man. A castrate keeps his high treble voice all his life, which is why the Church allowed it: so useful for Church music” (*NL* 372). The practice of castration is again linked to a new but similar practice which also involves separating a person from a part of themselves: intercision. Intercision is carried out by the Oblation Board, an institution part of – but not “entirely answerable to” (*NL* 30-31) – the Consistorial Court and involves cutting away people's daemons – or souls – so that they may never be subject to Dust. The similarity between castration and intercision is especially striking due to the fact that both practices prevent changes that naturally take place during puberty.

We see evidence of the Magisterium's authoritarian nature when Lee Scoresby, the Texan aeronaut, tries to figure out where Doctor Stanislaus Grumman is and learns that “Every philosophical research establishment, so he'd heard, had to include on its staff a representative of the Magisterium, to act as a censor and suppress the news of any heretical discoveries” (*SK* 124). The Magisterium has a controlling finger in just about everything and will do whatever it takes to maintain its authority – even to the point of hypocrisy. For instance, we learn that all but a few of the alethimeters (a measuring device used for figuring out the truth) were “acquired and destroyed, by order of the Magisterium” (*SK* 35) due to it being operated by Dust – the very thing the Church is trying to destroy; however, that does not stop the Church from using one of the devices in order to get an advantage in the war they are in with the rebel forces. Similarly, though the Church considers witches abominations, they still ally with them as long as it will benefit them in the long run (*AS* 346). The Magisterium is portrayed as an almighty force

that will crush all that stands in its way or that threaten its dominance. Baruch, one of the rebel angels, tells Lord Asriel that God in *HDM* – mostly referred to as the Authority – thinks people have become too independent and the churches too lenient and weak, and that is why he wants to “set up a permanent inquisition in every world, run directly from the Kingdom” (AS 61).

More evidence of the Church being willing to do anything to achieve its goals is seen when Father President McPhail thinks the Church should send someone out to kill Lyra before she has a chance to commit the sin the prophecy predicts she will commit (in effect punishing her for a crime not yet committed) and a man named Father Gomez volunteers to the task since he has done “preemptive penance” every day of his adult life – granting him “absolution in advance” so you can sin “in a state of grace” (AS 72).

Other incidents that shape readers’ impression of the Magisterium include an incident in Trollesund when Lyra decides to help the bear Iorek get his armor back. The armor is stored in a priest’s cellar because the priest’s superstition has led him to believe that it is inhabited by “a spirit... and he’s been a-trying to conjure it out” (NL196). This incident again emphasizes the way the Church wants to separate people from part of themselves seeing as “a bear’s armor is his soul” (NL 196).

One thing that is a subtle, but recurring, theme in *HDM* is pedophilia. For instance, when Lyra runs away from Mrs. Coulter, a man acts a little too interested in her and offers her brandy even though she is only 12 years old (NL 101). Pedophilia is also linked to people who have direct connection with the Church. Will at one point meets a priest named Seymon Borisovitch, a man whose “restless eyes moved over Will’s face and body, taking everything in” (AS 97). As this priest guides Will to a chair, he “strokes his arm” (AS 98) and also “stroked his knee” (AS 98). Similar to the way the man Lyra met, this priest also offers Will, who is far below legal drinking age, alcohol that he brags about as he makes a blatant reference to sex: “Lydia Alexandrovna collected the berries last year, and I distilled the liquor, and here in the bottle is the result, the only place where Otyets Semyon Borisovitch and Lydia Alexandrovna lie together!” (AS 101). The behavior of Borisovitch is very inappropriate as he gets up and close enough to touch his beard against Will’s face before “hugging him tightly and kissing his cheeks, right, left, right again” making him “fight hard to avoid being sick” (AS 102).

The witch Ruta Skadi mentions the Church several times throughout the trilogy, and she seldom has anything positive to say. When she tells her sister witches about her meeting with Lord Asriel, she mentions with disgust “many more hideous cruelties dealt out in the Authority’s name” such as “how they capture witches, in some worlds, and burn them alive” (*SK* 271). We see more evidence of this intolerance against witches when the priest Seymon Borisovitch tells Will that they are “daughters of evil!” and adds:

The church should have put them all to death many years ago. Witches – have nothing to do with them, Will Ivanovitch, you hear me? You know what they will do when you come to the right age? They will try to seduce you. They will use all the soft cunning deceitful ways they have, their flesh, their soft skin, their sweet voices, and they will take your seed – you know what I mean by that – they will drain you and leave you hollow! They will take your future, your children that are to come and leave you nothing. They should be put to death, every one. (*AS* 100-02).

This discrimination against a certain kind of minority is something that is again seen in the case with the rebel angels Balthamos and Baruch. Baruch says “My brother Enoch cast me out, because I... Oh, Balthamos” (*AS* 63). He never specifically says why he was cast out since Lord Asriel interrupts him, but the implication is that it was because he was homosexual. When Baruch says this, he is greatly injured; he is delirious and struggles to separate his own personal afflictions and sufferings from the important message he came there to convey. Lord Asriel seems to understand this and is not interested in hearing about the angel’s personal grief; he knows Baruch is about to die and prompts him to focus on the information he came there to share. We also see evidence of discrimination against women in the way the witches talk about people having hated and feared Eve (*SK* 49) ever since the transgression that took place in the Garden of Eden. At one point, we even see Mrs. Coulter sarcastically telling the Cardinal that “You will have to speak more plainly than that... You forget I am a woman, Your Eminence, and thus not so subtle as a prince of the Church” (*SK* 35). Of course, Mrs. Coulter is one of the cleverest characters

in the whole trilogy, so the comment she makes only serves to point out how the Church regards women as inferior to men and how Mrs. Coulter clearly disagrees.

Now, before we start analyzing Pullman's portrayal of the Magisterium and how this might reflect his opinion on organized religion in the real world, it must be noted that all of this takes place in an entirely different universe. When Lyra travels to Will's world, we learn that her world and his are different; however, despite the fact that Lyra's world has daemons, strange devices like alethiometers, and calls chocolate "chocolatl" and electric "ambaric," they are nevertheless very similar. The idea behind this builds on the many world interpretation of quantum physics, as pointed out by Mary Malone when she examines how the *mulefa* world is different from her own (AS 87). The idea of multiple worlds is also introduced in the synopsis to the trilogy which states that:

NORTHERN LIGHTS forms the first part of a story in three volumes. The first volume is set in a universe like ours, but different in many ways. The second volume, THE SUBTLE KNIFE, moves between three universes: the universe of NORTHERN LIGHTS; the universe we know; and a third universe, which differs from ours in many ways again. The final volume of the trilogy, THE AMBER SPYGLASS, moves between several universes.

The question then becomes whether Pullman has simply created the Magisterium as a fearsome antagonist creating suspense in a story taking place in a fantasy world or if the descriptions of the fictional church actually reflect Pullman's own criticism of organized religion in the real world. Of course, after looking at criticism and interviews with the author himself, we know that the latter is the case, and one important moment that links the church in Lyra's world to our world is when Ruta Skadi mentions "how they capture witches, in some worlds, and burn them alive" (SK 271). Here Ruta Skadi actually refers to a crime not committed in her world, but in ours. The consequence is, of course, that we think about our Bible and are reminded of the fact that it repeatedly condemns witches and witchcraft (*English Standard Version*, Exod. 22:18, Lev. 20:27, Rev. 22:15, etc.). The fact that the Magisterium is fictional and exists in a different universe does not erase the history of the real church and how it can be linked to pretty much every single

negative description of the Magisterium. For instance, homosexuality is condemned in the Bible, and Pullman expresses his disapproval of this by painting Baruch and Balthamos as two beings of the same sex eternally loyal to each other and fiercely in love. We see that after Will's father dies, he barely mourns his death, but when Balthamos loses Baruch, his pain is so intense he has to fly off to mourn his companion again and again, and, at the very end of his life, his last words shows us the extent of his love, "Baruch, my dear, I can do no more. Will and the girl are safe, and everything will be well, but this is the end for me, though truly I died when you did, Baruch, my beloved" (AS 472).

Similarly, the scene between Will and the Russian priest leaves us wondering what Pullman's purpose was for including it in the trilogy. Did this scene add anything important to the story? Did the man have to be a priest? The obvious answer seems to be that Pullman wants to remind us of the way people with connection to the church, perhaps especially Catholic priests, have been associated with pedophilia in the past. Pullman actually explains his view on pedophilia found in religious institutions in an interview:

Now... when you get that sort of authority, in any set-up, the potential for corruption is wide open. And when it comes to looking after children or people who are incapable or helpless, well human beings are tempted. And of course part of the reason it happens is priestly celibacy. They'll deny it and say it's nothing to do with that, but of course it is, of course it is. That's not to say that married men are free from temptation or never given way to it, because of course they have, but the level of frustration and unhappiness and unfulfillment that must build up in a man who's denied one of the most important aspects of his humanity, it'll get bad. (Barton)

Another reference to or criticism of the church is seen in the assassin Father Gomez and the Church forgiving him for a sin not yet committed. This is reminiscent of the way people thought the church had the power to absolve people of their sins, especially through monetary donations. This practice was called indulgence and basically meant that

people could lessen the time they would spend in purgatory by donating money to the Church. Though the situation with Father Gomez has nothing to do with indulgence in the sense of money, it also builds on the idea of the church promising forgiveness after some kind of exchange takes place. His inclusion in the series certainly contributes to creating suspense, but it could also be said to be a critique of the treatment of absolution and redemption by organized religion.

In the end, despite the fact that the Magisterium exists in a different world from our own, there are many ties between the fictional Magisterium and the real church; in fact, the whole plot of Pullman's trilogy is grounded in religious myths. The question then becomes, can a work based on religious myths truly be anti-religious? If we take a look at the three different versions of the Fall of Man found in *His Dark Materials*, the close ties between Pullman's trilogy and Christianity become evident, and we see how virtually every idea Pullman has branches out from The Book of Genesis.

Three Versions of the Fall

At the end of *The Golden Compass*, Lord Asriel tells Lyra how the “Magisterium decided that Dust was the physical evidence for original sin,” (NL 369) and, when he realizes Lyra does not know what “original sin” is, promptly asks her to fetch him the Bible from a shelf. He goes back to the very beginning, telling her the story about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This story is simply a retelling of the story found in the Christian Bible – the only difference is the inclusion of daemons. Lord Asriel explains how Adam and Eve “were naked in the garden, they were like children, their daemons took on any shape they desired” (NL 369). Lord Asriel lists the consequences of disobeying God’s order not to eat of the forbidden fruit as following: “*they saw the true form of their daemons,*” they suddenly saw the difference between themselves and “*all the creatures of the earth and the air*” who had up until that point been their equals, they “*knew good and evil; and they were ashamed, and they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness...*” (NL 370). He concludes by saying that “that was how sin came into the world... sin and shame and death. It came the moment their daemons became fixed” (NL 370). Of course, there is no mention of daemons in the Genesis story found in the Bible, but apart from this the stories are near identical; the consequences of their transgression are the same. If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they would have lived forever, meaning they would not have aged. In Pullman’s world, people’s daemons stop changing when they reach puberty – in other words, when they enter adulthood, so the fact that they “saw the true form of their daemons” is evidence of Adam and Eve aging after they ate of the forbidden fruit, just like the Adam and Eve in our Bible.

This transition from a prelapsarian to a postlapsarian state is characterized by a change from innocence to experience and the emergence of Dust. Lord Asriel points out that Dust was actually first introduced in the Bible when God tells Adam: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return...” (NL 371). This is of course taken directly from the King James version of the Bible (*King James Version*, Gen. 3:19), and Lord Asriel takes the opportunity to remind us of the fact that there are many versions of the Bible and even more translations and interpretations of the original texts.

He mentions that other church scholars have suggested that the actual meaning behind that quote is “not ‘unto dust shalt thou return’ but ‘thou shalt be subject to dust’” (*NL* 371) and this helps illuminate the connection between Dust and original sin.

The Fall story explains how Adam and Eve become aware of things they were previously unaware after eating of the forbidden fruit: suddenly they are embarrassed over their nakedness, gain knowledge of good and evil, and are able to distinguish themselves from other creatures. While these things are portrayed as negative in Christianity, Pullman regards them as positive and attributes them to the fact that Adam and Eve became conscious; self-aware, as seen in the way they realized the true forms of their daemons. Members of the Magisterium and Christians in our world alike might perceive Adam and Eve as two people living perfectly happy lives devoid of hardships and grief, but Lord Asriel thinks eating of the forbidden fruit actually improved their lives. Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve were untainted by original sin, meaning they were unburdened by pain, misery, and death, but Lord Asriel considers the absence of consciousness worse than all of these things. If original sin, Dust, is prevented from settling on a person, Lord Asriel would compare this person to a “*zombi*... It has no will of its own” (*NL* 373).

After Lord Asriel’s talk with Lyra, it becomes evident that one of the central concerns in *HDM* is finding the correct interpretation of the Fall story. The Magisterium has one interpretation (and will not tolerate any other), while Lord Asriel and the rebels have another. Lord Asriel also reveals that there are others when he says that scholars disagree about the meaning behind the word “dust.” As a result of being the first Fall story presented in *HDM* and an almost exact replica of the story found in The King James Bible, the story conveyed from Lord Asriel to Lyra becomes the story with which we inevitably compare the two following Fall stories found in the trilogy.

When Mary Malone enters the *mulefa* world and tries to find out more about Shadows (Dust), she discovers that the *mulefa* know what it is, only they call it something different: *sraf*. When she makes inquiries about *sraf*, her *mulefa* friend, Atal, makes it clear that *sraf* is something that comes to *mulefa* when they have grown up, reminding Mary of what Lyra had said about Dust and also what Shadows told her via the computer screen in her lab before she left her own world: “it had to do with the great change in

human history symbolized in the story of Adam and Eve; with the Temptation, the Fall, and Original Sin” (AS 223). As a consequence of making the connection between *sraf* and original sin, we are unable to listen to Atal’s subsequent narrative without comparing it to the first Fall myth. We also have to acknowledge the use of the word “symbolized” as it emphasizes the importance of there being multiple interpretations of the Fall myth and its consequences, something which is again reinforced when Atal says that the myth relayed to Mary Malone is a “*make-like*” (AS 224): it is supposed to be understood metaphorically.

Atal tells Mary that before *sraf*, the *mulefa* had “*no memory and wakefulness*” (AS 224). She explains how a creature playing with a seedpod spotted a snake coiling itself through the hole in another seedpod. The snake persuades the creature to put its foot through the seedpod with the promise that it will make it wise, and, as it did so, “*oil entered her blood and helped her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the sraf*” (AS 224). She went on to convince her kindred to do the same, and “*they discovered that they knew who they were, they knew they were mulefa and not grazers*” (AS 224) and they proceeded to name themselves and everything else in the world.

It is impossible not to compare this version of the Fall to the version Asriel told Lyra, not only since Mary Malone makes the connection to Adam and Eve shortly before Atal starts telling the story, but because it bears so many similarities. The *mulefa* Fall has a female character who is tempted by a snake and then proceeds to convince others to do as she did, leading to a great change in the psyche. Though this version of the Fall does not directly talk about sex, the imageries with the serpent coiling itself through the hole in a seedpod and the *mulefa* inserting their legs into seedpods certainly have sexual connotations. The difference, of course, is that this Fall story has no God-figure, and neither is there any talk about disobedience or punishment. The snake in Atal’s story seems to have the *mulefa*’s best interest at heart, and the first *mulefa* to become self-aware seems to prefer this new existence over a life of ignorance so she decides to convert the rest of the *mulefa*. This transformation seems entirely positive: suddenly, the *mulefa* had the mental capacity to enter into a happy symbiotic relationship with nature: the *mulefa* saw that the seedpods were “*so hard that they seldom germinated*” so they

realized they could help by riding “*on the wheels to break them*” (AS 225). Though the idea of the *mulefa* having to plant seedpods could arguably be linked back to the idea that the postlapsarian Adam and Eve were burdened with manual labor in order to survive, this is in the *mulefa* version of the Fall seen as source of joy. The *mulefa* enjoy working and love seeing the fruits of their labor.

While a central concern in *HDM* is finding the right interpretation of the Fall story involving Adam and Eve, the fall story told by Atal is not there to be scrutinized and analyzed in order to come up with various interpretations. When Mary questions if the snake in the story really spoke, Atal points out that it is a metaphor. The *mulefa* are not interested in debating whether or not the first *mulefa* should have listened to the snake; for them, the myth is simply a way of explaining how they came to be a unique species in their world – a conscious species, and it promotes a world view that makes it possible to exist in harmony with one another and the environment. The *mulefa*’s approach to their fall myth is very reminiscent of what Lord Asriel told Lyra when she asked if Adam and Eve really ever existed: “think of Adam and Eve like an imaginary number, like the square root of minus one: you can never see any concrete proof that it exists, but if you include it in your equations, you can calculate all manner of things that couldn’t be imagined without it” (NL 370). In other words, the Fall story merely serves as a way of explaining the unexplainable.

The last – and most important and interesting – Fall story found in *HDM* is the one the whole trilogy leads up to. Ever since Dr. Lanselius revealed to Farder Coram that “witches have talked about this child for centuries past... who has a great destiny...” whom without “we shall all die... But she must fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved” (NL 175), we have wondered what role Lyra is destined to play. We are given hints throughout the trilogy, for instance when Mrs. Coulter is torturing a witch and makes her tell her what she knows about the prophecy: “The child who was to come... The witches knew who she was before you did... We found out her name...” (SK 38). As Mrs. Coulter continues the torture, the witch reveals, “She is the one who came before, and you have hated and feared her ever since! Well, now she has come again, and you failed to find her... She

was here on Svalbard – she was with Lord Asriel, and you lost her. She escaped, and she will be –” (*SK* 39).

Of course, the witch never gets to reveal the whole truth behind the prophecy before Serafina Pekkala appears and mercifully puts a knife into her sister’s heart, ending the torture along with her life. Mrs. Coulter, however, manages to get hold of another witch, Lena Feldt, at the end of *The Subtle Knife* whom she tortures into finally revealing what the prophecy says about Lyra: “She will be the mother – she will be life – mother – she will disobey – she will...” What Mrs. Coulter says next makes it seem as though she already knows exactly what the prophecy says about Lyra: “Name her! You are saying everything but the most important thing! Name her!” And Lena Feldt utters the words that once and for all erase any doubt readers might have had about Lyra’s destiny: “Eve! Mother of all! Eve, again! Mother Eve!” (*SK* 313).

Though the last Fall in *HDM* has been in the cards for a long time, given the prophecy, it is prompted by Mary Malone, playing the role of the serpent, when she tells Lyra and Will about a boy she met at a party as a young girl; how he fed her marzipan and how she “fell in love with him just for that, for the gentle way he touched [her] lips with the marzipan” (*AS* 445). Mary remembered feeling shy at that moment, how she started “blushing, and feeling so foolish” and how they moved on to a garden where they shared their first kiss. Mary explains: “I was *aching* – all my body was *aching* for him... and oh, it was more than China, it was paradise” (*AS* 445-46). Though Mary Malone playing the role of the serpent might not have directly tempted Lyra and Will with grand promises of wisdom or becoming God-like, she makes her experience with the boy seem attractive enough for them to want to know what it felt like – to see for themselves if that much joy can be found in something physical. And it is working; as she talks, “Lyra felt something strange happen to her body. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a house she hadn’t known was there, a house that was somehow inside of her, and as she turned the key, she felt other doors opening deep in the darkness, and lights coming on. She sat trembling as Mary went on” (*AS* 445).

Mary’s story could almost be said to be a Fall story in itself, with its reference to a garden and an internal change as a result of giving in to lust, but Lyra is the one who is destined to play the role of Eve, and after being successfully tempted by Mary we once

again find ourselves in a garden-like setting as she and Will follow a “stream into the wood, walking carefully, saying little, until they were in the very center” (AS 467). Lyra and Will are both children at this point, not yet attracting Dust, and there “was no sign of the daemon-shadows anywhere” (AS 468). They seem to be as close to a state of innocence, as close to the state Adam and Eve were in prior to the fall, as they could possibly be. In fact, descriptions say “They might have been the only people in the world,” (AS 460) and then Lyra feeds Will a little red fruit and suddenly they are kissing (AS 468).

As opposed to the *mulefa* Fall, the Fall caused by Lyra and Will is more open to interpretation simply due to the fact that it could be argued, like for example Gooderham does, that it has negative consequences in addition to positive. Similarities with the original Fall story found in the Bible can easily be seen: Living in a state of innocence in Jordan College, Lyra’s life was characterized by joy and happiness, ignorance of what misery really is, and with a grace that allowed her to read the alethiometer with intuitive knowledge. After falling, Lyra suddenly has to labor to search for the knowledge necessary to read the alethiometer and she knows misery first-hand after being separated from Will. While the first Fall story ends with an expulsion from paradise, the third Fall story in *HDM* likewise ends on a somber note as Lyra and Will are forced to say their goodbyes, but instead of a feeling of hopelessness and meaninglessness, *HDM* adamantly insists that the positive consequences of the Fall far exceed the negative – as I will elaborate on in this next section of my thesis – and we are left with hope as the angel Xaphania, who “could see farther than they could” has “a calm hope in her expression” (AS 498).

The emphasis on there being various interpretations of the Fall myth as well as the *mulefa* approaching it metaphorically does imply that there never was an actual Fall; that the story simply serves as a way of explaining the unexplainable. However, the sheer fact that virtually everything in *HDM* draws inspiration from the Old Testament really makes it difficult to claim that Pullman’s books are anti-religious. In the end, what the trilogy undoubtedly does is deal with what we do know for a fact. Whether or not dealt out as punishment for disobeying, the “symptoms” of original sin are real and tangible and open for interpretation, and the views on these expressed in *HDM* vary drastically from those

traditionally associated with the story found in the Book of Genesis, forcing readers to think critically.

Dust and Daemons, Innocence and Experience, Good and Evil

The consequences of the original Fall story embody several important concepts and ideas dealt with in-depth in Pullman's trilogy with the introduction of the concept of Dust. Dust is presented differently by the two opposing forces in *His Dark Materials*: the Church and the Rebellion. Like the Church in our world, the Church in Lyra's world is occupied with the idea the Fall of Man and earning redemption for our sins. The Magisterium is seeking a way to rid the world of original sin so that humans can go back to the state of grace Adam and Eve were in prior to the Fall. To the Church, Dust is "physical evidence of original sin" (NL 369) since it basically embodies the consequences of the original Fall.

Instead of repenting and worshipping God in hopes of being redeemed for their inherited sin, the members of the Magisterium believe to have found another way of ridding people of the taint of original sin. The Magisterium has set up a facility on Svalbard called Bolvangar run by the General Oblation Board, known by Lyra as the Gobblers. The Gobblers conduct experiments on kidnapped children where the goal is to sever them from their Daemons so that they will no longer attract Dust. The reason why they conduct these experiments on children is that children do not attract Dust until they reach the age when their daemons no longer change shape – around puberty. The Magisterium believes that if they can sever the tie between a child and its daemon before it reaches puberty, the child will never be tainted by original sin.

Those that oppose the Church do not explain the existence of Dust as the consequence of Adam and Eve disobeying God's orders not to eat of the forbidden fruit, but Dust still is still described as having the same functions. Mary Malone describes Dust as being "particles of consciousness" (SK 88), that have been around since the Big Bang. The angel Balthamos reveals that "Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself" (AS 31) and Mary explains how the human brain "became the ideal vehicle for this amplification process" (SK 238) through evolution: suddenly people became conscious.

Mary Malone used to be a nun, and after she stopped believing in God she found that the thing she missed the most was "the sense that the whole universe was alive, and

that everything was to connected to everything else by threads of meaning” (AS 451). In the absence of a God, Mary explains how she felt lost “in a universe without purpose”; that even in moments when she did find evidence of purpose or meaning “it was impossible to find a connection because there was no God” (AS 451). Dust is presented as a remedy to this, but there is one problem: in “a great exorable flood,” Dust is “pouring out of the world, out of all the worlds, into some ultimate emptiness” (AS 452). The worst outcome from this is that “all conscious life would come to an end... Thought, imagination, feeling, would all wither and blow away, leaving nothing but a brutish automatism” (AS 453).

Dust is a lot more complicated than simply being that which makes beings self-aware and conscious. The angel Xaphania explains that, “Dust is not a constant. There’s not a fixed quantity that has always been the same. Conscious beings make Dust – they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on” (AS 496). In Christian theology, we are told about the tripartite viewpoint that holds that people consist of three different components: body, soul, and spirit. Many of the ideas in *HDM* are built on the same doctrine, except Pullman separates people into body, daemon and Dust. Though no one explains this to Lyra and Will, they are able to deduce on their own that there must be a third part to people, another part in addition to the body and the soul because, “I can think about my body and I can think about my daemon – so there must be another part, to do the thinking!” (AS 166). This is actually something Mary Malone specifically mentions when she says that “You know... the church – the Catholic Church that I used to belong to – wouldn’t use the word *daemon*, but St. Paul talks about spirit *and* soul *and* body. So the idea of three parts in human nature isn’t so strange” (AS 440). I will get back to the idea of daemons later, but for now I will focus on what Xaphania says about Dust since it brings up an important idea tied to the relationship between matter and spirit.

Mary discovers that as Dust leaves the world, the “wind, moon, clouds, leaves, grass, all those lovely things were crying out and hurling themselves into the struggle to keep the shadow particles in this universe, which they so enriched. Matter *loved* Dust. It didn’t want to see it go” (AS 454). Mary concludes that the absence of God does not mean the absence of meaning or purpose; these things can be found in the dualistic nature

of Dust. The idea is that beings need to revel in the world around them, enjoy the beauty found in nature, learn, explore, and that way create Dust. This will ensure that people remain conscious and avoid being turned into mindless robots that never stop to enjoy beauty or ponder about curiosities. *HDM* insists that the spiritual and the physical irrevocably intertwine, and this is a view very different from the one associated with Christian teachings. The Bible teaches you that you are made of three distinct components: the body, soul, and spirit. When you die, your body will deteriorate and become part of the earth while soul will go on to a different place depending on your relationship with God and how you spent your life. It teaches you to live your life according to the rules set before you by God and you must do this in a world full of sinful temptations. This is very well seen in Romans 7:14-24 which states: “For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members” (*Standard English Version*).

Pullman raises the idea that there might not be any afterlife, which means people would be missing out on a lot of enjoyment for no reason at all. We see how when Mary decides to renounce her vows as a nun, she asks the questions, “Will anyone be better off if I go straight back to the hotel and say my prayers and confess to the priest and promise never to fall into temptation again? Will anyone be better for making me miserable?” She decides that the answer is no, because “There’s no one to fret, no one to condemn, no one to bless me for being a good girl, no one to punish me for being wicked. Heaven was empty” (*AS* 446). Though *HDM* does not in the end say with absolute certainty that God and heaven do not exist – even Mary is not entirely convinced, though the lack of evidence is enough to convince her not to live her life in shackles – the message is still clear: matter *matters*.

In *His Dark Materials*, Dust in all its complexity explains how everything began, with everything evolving from matter beginning to understand itself, but we have seen that some critics like Anne-Marie Bird think this explanation is insufficient. Due to Dust being described as coming “from the stars” and can be found everywhere (*AS* 275), Anne-Marie Bird argues that Dust is a pantheistic principle (192) but she holds that due to its “radical instability” it cannot be the answer to everything. However, even Bird

agrees that what it does do is provide a new focus for people's spirituality which brings meaning and purpose to people's lives. Dust shifts focus from the intangible to the tangible; from hopes for a future paradise in an uncertain afterlife to creating your own paradise in the definite present.

Pullman's trilogy celebrates the physical world and this is not only seen in the link between Dust and matter, but also in the connection between the body and soul which is given special emphasis due to souls being personified in the shape of daemons. People are linked to their daemons through some invisible bond which prevents them from being more than a few yards apart. Throughout the trilogy, we are always trying to figure out what precisely daemons represent, and even though we are told they are souls, we are left wondering what exactly that means. Since daemons are always present in *HDM*, we grow to care for them, to regard them as important entities before we even consider their purpose. Daemons are people's friends, their consciences, and their physical shapes are representative of people's characters and personalities; they in the end encompass a celebration of the life force and everything that makes us who we are. Daemons also serve as symbol of another aspect of the physical world: sexuality and physical relationships between people.

For instance, at the end of *Northern Lights*, we see how while Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are kissing, their daemons are intimately touching. We also see how Mrs. Coulter's monkey daemon touches Sir Charles Latrom inside a tent at the end of *The Subtle Knife*: how he lets out a contented sigh as "the daemon slipped slowly off his arm and let her weight into the golden monkey's hands" (*SK* 310). We see how the monkey runs his hands along the serpent daemon, "squeezing just a little, lifting, stroking as Sir Charles sighed with pleasure" (*SK* 310) and how he finds it hard to resist Mrs. Coulter as "his daemon was twined gently around the monkey's breast" (*SK* 310). The imagery in this scene as Mrs. Coulter tries to seduce Sir Charles into disclosing sensitive information is very sexual, and it is also in deep contrast to a different scene which involves touching of daemons. While at Bolvangar, Lyra experiences one of the men at Bolvangar seize hold of her daemon. Lyra is described feeling "as if an alien hand had reached right inside where no hand had a right to be, and wrenched at something deep and precious," rendering her "faint, dizzy, sick, disgusted, limp with shock" (*NL* 274). In the end, Lyra is

left feeling that “It wasn’t allowed... Not supposed to touch... Wrong...” (NL 275). In her article “Daemons and Ideology in *His Dark Materials*,” Maude Hines says that “Attention to the sexual connotations of touching daemons in the rest of the trilogy reveals that while ‘right inside where no hand had a right to be’ refers literally to Lyra’s daemon as her soul or spirit, it also refers metaphorically to her vagina” (42). She points out how the fact that other adults at Bolvangar do not react to this man’s violation shows how they are “horribly unnatural” and also how “surprisingly unnatural the taboo is to them in spite its physical impact on Lyra” (42) since they have been conditioned out of it. She also points out how the “real unnaturalness resides in Lyra’s age (molestation) and unwillingness (rape); we learn later that the taboo against seeing consensual sexuality as natural resides with the unnatural Church” (Hines 42).

Although the idea that touching another’s daemon is wrong is initially presented through Lyra, whose perception of things as the main protagonist we are inclined to adopt especially considering her traumatic experience at Bolvangar, we eventually see that the taboo attached to daemons must be linked back to the Church and its denunciation of natural sexual impulses. This can be seen especially well when Mrs. Coulter intervenes and saves Lyra from intercision and tries to explain away the situation by saying that puberty brings with it “all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings” (NL 283), emphasizing the link between daemons and sexual feelings and how this should be eliminated. Of course, Lyra knows that Mrs. Coulter is lying: “Oh, the wicked liar, oh, the shameless untruths she was telling!” (NL 283), and we see how the idea ultimately conveyed in *HDM* is that physical intimacy, touching another person’s daemon, can be a positive thing. For instance, when Lyra and Will accidentally pick up each other’s daemon they are described experiencing a “shock of excitement” (AS 419). Similarly, at one point Will, “Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean... moved his hand from Lyra’s wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her daemon” and her reaction is undoubtedly positive:

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 daemon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur she knew that Will was feeling exactly what she was. (AS 503)

However, daemons are more complex than being just symbols of sexuality. The easiest way to see what it means to have a daemon might be to see what it means to *not* have one. When Lyra sees a "severed child," the alethiometer first leads her to believe that she will find a ghost in the fish house (NL 210). Similarly, at Bolvangar, Lyra notes how the nurses that had had their daemons cut away lacked both imagination and curiosity; they just moved about like puppets, indifferent to the world (NL 238). The message that comes across is that the physical and the spiritual go hand in hand – one cannot function without the other.

The tendency to favor spirit over matter communicates the fear that people will go through life without enjoying it. This is something that is clearly seen in daemon-less people being compared to zombies, but also in the scene where Lyra is being kept asleep after Mrs. Coulter forces her to drink a tea that is drugged. In her dream, Lyra tells her dead friend Roger: *"I'm just trying to wake up – I'm so afraid of sleeping all my life and then dying – I want to wake up first! I wouldn't care if it was just for an hour, as long as I was completely alive and awake. I don't know if this is real or not, even"* (AS 54). Lyra's fear of dreaming her life away has to be linked back to the idea that people should appreciate life while they are alive; that no matter how old you are, it is never too late to "wake up" and truly notice the world we live in. This is again emphasized with the introduction of the malevolent creatures referred to as Specters. Specters come from the void between worlds and are created every time the Subtle Knife is being used. These creatures feed on Dust and are consequently only a threat to adults while children cannot even see them. The result of being attacked by a Specter and having it consume your daemon is very similar to intercision: you lose your consciousness, curiosity, imagination, and everything that makes you human; in other words, you become indifferent to the world. It is important to note the way Specters are created: by opening a portal to another world; in other words, if you do not appreciate the world you are in and yearn to be somewhere else.

The introduction of Dust challenges some of the most important traditional Christian hierarchies such as the binaries spirit versus matter, but also ideas like good versus evil. Evil, of course, is a relative term. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Alfred Sharpe compares good and evil to light and darkness and says that: “darkness is nothing but the absence of light”; in other words, evil is nothing but the absence of goodness. However, all this really suggests is that good and evil are mutually exclusive; it does not really help us distinguish one from the other. Mary Malone might have provided a clearer definition when she says that,

I stopped believing there was a power of good and a power of evil that were outside us. And I came to believe that good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are. All we can say is that this is a good deed, because it helps someone, or that’s an evil one, because it hurts them. People are too complicated to have simple labels. (AS 448)

Some critics, such as Rodney J. Decker, accuse Pullman of borrowing “values from a theistic worldview that have no organic connection with the fantasy world that he has created” (Decker 18) in order to make his world work. In response to this accusation, Pullman is quoted saying, “What on earth gives Christians the right to assume that love and self-sacrifice have to be called Christian virtues? They are virtues, full stop” (qt. in Decker 20). Pullman is adamant in his opinion that people can do good things without being inspired by God. He says that we are capable of sympathy and empathy not because of religion, but because “we’re alive and conscious and able to imagine another’s suffering” (qt. in Decker 21). Decker rejects the idea that people are good due to “ordinary human decency... accumulated human wisdom” (Decker 21) due to the fact that people have various opinions as to what decency actually is; in other words, Decker holds that we need God as a moral compass. *HDM* encourages people to be good instead of cruel, to be patient, cheerful, and keep open minds, but Decker cannot fathom why anyone who does not believe in God would want to. Decker poses the question “what basis is there in Pullman’s worldview for altruism?” (Decker 22). He makes it clear that he opposes Pullman’s claim that people are capable of goodness without religious

inspiration, but he never pauses to consider if religion – or, more accurately, organized religion – itself has ever been at the root of cruelties committed up through history: organized religion enforcing laws against homosexuals, discriminating against women, etching into people’s minds that they are sinners and going to hell for following their hearts even when really it hurts no one, and so on. Pullman’s philosophy is that the definition for what good and what is can only be found within every person’s heart.

Clearly, there are disagreements regarding the definition of good and evil as well as their origins. As the story unfolds and Lyra and Will are about to make the transition from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to experience, several questions are raised pertaining to the question of good and evil. In the beginning of *Northern Lights*, Lyra is 12 years old and her youthful innocence is obvious. She has a curious side to her that she satisfies by going on adventurous excursions with her friend Roger, a rebellious nature that leads her to challenge the authority of adults, and a playful creativity which is reflected in her participation in an elaborate game where the children of different colleges wage war against one another (*NL* 35-36). Lyra is happy with the way things are and skeptical to change, as seen in the way she wants her daemon, Pantalaimon, to never settle form (*NL* 167). This quality of her life seems good, so who could blame the Church for wanting to preserve it? As time goes by, however, we see increasing evidence of Lyra’s inevitable transition into adulthood. When Lyra is taking a bath at Mrs. Coulter’s place, Pantalaimon has to avert his eyes for the first time. This is reminiscent of Adam and Eve experiencing shame over seeing nakedness for the first time after having eaten of the forbidden fruit. The transition into adulthood is not instant, however. We see that when she meets Will in Cittàgazze and he is only wearing underpants, neither of the children feel any shame or self-consciousness, and when Lyra studies his naked shoulders, there is nothing sexual about it; it is all innocent (*SK* 23).

As we follow Lyra and Will on their adventures and examine their differences and similarities, we get an idea of what Pullman thinks innocence actually entails – or perhaps more accurately does *not* entail. For instance, Will pays for things as he moves about, while Lyra thinks it is silly and even jokes that if he acts like a grown up, the Specters will take him (*SK* 63). Though stealing is a sin according to the Ten Commandments, Pullman implies that stealing has nothing to do with innocence but rather simply how we

have been raised. We see this again and again throughout the trilogy: Will acting responsibly and cautiously while Lyra acts more carelessly and spontaneously; clearly, responsibility is not an inherently adult trait and neither does it have anything to do with innocence or experience.

Dust in *HDM* is the manifestation of original sin, so the implication is that children are innocent until they reach puberty and start to attract Dust. Pullman complicates this idea by showing how children in the first installment of the trilogy are seen stealing food, drinking alcohol, and smoking (*NL* 54). Children are at times seen acting like predators, driven into a sort of animal-like state that shocks Lyra, who cannot quite believe that children would want to kill someone (*SK* 234).

At one point, Sir Charles mentions Will's connection to a murder and says that, "It's a moot point whether a child of that age is capable of murder, of course, but he has certainly killed someone" (*SK* 243). Though children have yet to be touched by Dust, they are still capable of committing acts of what is considered "evil." But are they really acts of evil if they are committed unknowingly? Similarly, if we flip this around, we are forced to consider whether acts of goodness are really good if we have no knowledge of evil. Knowledge of good and evil is in *HDM* described as something inevitable and desirable, and so are many of the other consequences part of making the transition from childhood into adulthood. We see for instance how Lyra later acknowledges that swimming naked with Will would be quite different than swimming naked "in the river Cherwell with all the other Oxford children" (*AS* 436), and in spite of her previous wish for Pantalaimon to never stop changing, when he does settle form into a pine marten, she finds that she did not "mind so much now" (*AS* 502). Though growing up has opened Lyra's eyes to the fact that the world might not always be as innocent as she thought it was, she has also become more consciously aware of the world and also the consequences of the choices people make.

The way Pullman portrays adulthood and experience as preferable to childhood and innocence is not surprising considering the way he has spoken about the *Narnia* books by C. S. Lewis in the past. Pullman has not only called Lewis' books propaganda and described them as being "monumentally disparaging of girls and women... [and] blatantly racist" (Ezard), he has also criticized Lewis for instilling in the minds of readers

the idea that growing up is terrible and wrong. As an example, he mentions how at the end of *The Last Battle*, Susan is not allowed to enter the stable – obviously representing salvation – due to the fact that she is growing up. He mentions how one character says, “She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up” (*Lewis* 134-35). To Pullman, this is evidence of Lewis having “very weird unconscious feelings about sexuality” (Roberts). Pullman points out that growing up is inevitable and Susan is simply going through what everyone else has gone through since the dawn of time, and he considers this “an inevitable, important, valuable and cherishable stage that we go through,” something we should “welcome and celebrate... rather than to turn from it in fear and loathing” (Roberts).

HDM focuses a lot on the binaries matter versus spirit, innocence versus experience, and good versus evil, and we see how Pullman first presents the traditional Christian views on these binaries before showing us that it is possible to have different interpretations. While Decker accuses Pullman of borrowing values rooted in Christianity, values that cannot exist in the absence of God, Pullman claims that virtues are not Christian virtues just because they are mentioned in the Bible. Pullman believes humans are capable of dealing with these binaries without needing God to tell us what is right and wrong. Pullman wants to emphasize the value of human beings and sees them as being equipped with everything it takes to make right decisions simply because they are intelligent, conscious beings capable of reflecting on their own existence and others. Pullman does not view God as responsible for acts of goodness or acts of evil the result of interference from Satan. The fact that the characters in *HDM* are imperfect characters with potential for both good and evil makes the choices they make all the more important, drawing attention away from religion and over to the individual.

The idea that humans are creatures of great complexity equipped with everything needed to deal with the world around us is something Lisa Hopkins touches upon in her essay “*His Dark Materials* and the Structure of the Human.” Hopkins says that Pullman “has the number three on the brain” (50) and lists dozens of examples from the trilogy where the number three comes up. For instance, we see how Baruch has three things he needs to tell Lord Asriel before he dies, how Mary thinks there are three criteria for “peoplehood,” how the trees in the *mulefa* world began to sicken three hundred years ago,

how Mrs. Coulter has visited the College of St. Jerome three times before, and so on (Hopkins 51). The conclusion Hopkin in the end reaches emphasizes Pullman's portrayal of human structure:

A stress on tripling is, I think, valuable not only to the style but also to the ultimate message of Pullman's project, and its value can, I would suggest, be traced to the fact that while Pullman's project of portraying humans as three-sided may be in line with Christian orthodoxy in the relatively minor respect cited by Mary Malone, it fundamentally cuts against it in a much more major one. Christianity has asked its followers to believe in a trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Pullman tells his readers that they *are* a trinity. (Hopkins 55)

Pullman's trilogy evokes the idea that human beings are complete the way they are; they do not need to look to God for guidance but are able to figure out solutions to problems and distinguish right from wrong all by themselves.

Satanic Character Traits in *His Dark Materials*

Pullman has said in interviews that *His Dark Materials* was meant to be a “*Paradise Lost* in three volumes, for teenagers” (Thorpe). Milton’s epic inspired the title of Pullman’s trilogy (“Unless th’ Almighty Maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more Worlds” (2.916)) and Pullman also includes lines from the poem as epigraphs to many of the chapters in *His Dark Materials*. It would be near impossible to discuss religion in the trilogy without at least mentioning Milton’s hugely influential epic; however, since *Paradise Lost* runs more than ten thousand lines of verse and has attracted bookshelves of criticism, the focus in this section of my thesis will be on a specific topic: satanic traits found among characters in *HDM*. The portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* has been widely discussed ever since the poem’s publication. In fact, in an article from 1976, John M. Steadman wrote that, “The validity of [Satan’s] title as hero has been the oldest, and possibly most persistent, of many controversies over *Paradise Lost*” (253).

Paradise Lost tells the story of the War in Heaven, the Creation, and the Fall of Man. In spite of the fact that Milton was a Protestant Christian who stated in his poem that his goal was to “justify the wayes of God to men” (1.26), William Blake argued that Milton was actually “of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (35), an opinion that has been supported by many other critics. John Dennis said that “The Devil is properly [Milton’s] Hero, because he bests the better” and that the “most delightful and most admirable [part of the poem] relates to the Rebellion and Fall of these Evil Angels, and their dismal Condition upon their Fall, and their Consult for the recovery of their native Mansions, and their Original Glory” (qt. in Shawcross 128-29). William Hazlitt said that Satan is “the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty” (qt. in Thorpe 107-09). John Dryden also believed Milton’s hero was Satan, but he thought Milton would have had a “better plea” as a heroic poet “if the Devil had not been his hero” (Dryden 84).

Some critics who disagreed with the notion that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost* include Richard Blackmore, Voltaire, Jonathan Richardson, and Samuel Johnson (Shawcross 227-28). C. S. Lewis also defended Milton, stating that “it is the reader, not Milton, who admires Satan” (Ruth 5). Stanley Fish argued that *Paradise Lost* was meant

to let readers experience the Fall with Adam and if “the reader then finds Satan attractive and God distant and unloving, he is, just as Adam was, still separated from God by his own sin” (qt. in Ruth 5).

The idea Fish brings up is actually something Lauren Shohet talks about in her essay “Reading Dark Materials” where she compares Lyra’s hiding in the closet in the beginning of *Northern Lights* with the *Narnia* books but argues that instead of simply reproducing canonical moments, like C. S. Lewis does, Pullman only uses “tradition as a starting point” before shifting “the terms of intertextual engagement from reproduction to transformation” (24). We see how while trying to make herself comfortable in the closet, Lyra is warned by Pantalaimon that “If you get too comfortable you’ll go to sleep” (*NL* 19). The idea is that *HDM* aims to make its audience more consciously aware readers and Shohet claims that the series of identifications and revelations in *Northern Lights* magnify “the readerly process of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*” (24). *Paradise Lost* entices readers into sympathizing and identifying with Satan only to realize that they have fallen for their “misdirected sympathies – that is, through listening to Satan’s arguments, like Eve in the garden” (24). Similarly, *Northern Lights* uses this same process of “enticing initial readerly assent to a character’s errant desires (here, Lord Asriel’s), followed by the reader’s shocked recognition of the path she has pursued” (Shohet 25). The fact that Lyra replies to Pantalaimon’s comment by saying that “If I do, it’s your job to wake me up” (*NL* 19) is an indication that a person’s daemon or soul is what enables us to think critically about any input we are subjected to.

Much time has been spent scrutinizing Satan in *PL*, and while some critics might view him as a hero, he might be considered a villain by others; an action perceived as brave and selfless by one critic might be seen as cowardly and selfish by another. Not only do people disagree when it comes to Satan’s intentions, ambitions, and motivation, there are also, unsurprisingly, many disagreements when it comes to defining good or evil. For instance, some might agree with the definition of good found in *PL*, which is living according to the seven virtues created by God and listed to Adam by the angel Michael, while others might favor Mary Malone’s opinion that something “is a good deed, because it helps someone, or that’s an evil one, because it hurts them” (*AS* 448). Considering this, I will try not to focus so much on defining certain traits as good and

others as evil, but will instead simply look for traits in characters in *HDM* that are reminiscent of Satan in *PL* seen from the perspectives of both pro-Satan and anti-Satan critics.

Considering the fact that *HDM* includes not one but three Fall stories and the fact that there is a definite Eve character, the trilogy inevitably needs a Satan-character. In addition to initially wanting to write a *PL* for teenagers, Pullman has also explicitly stated “I am of the Devil’s party and I know it” (de Bertodano), so the natural assumption is that any Satan-figure in *HDM* will be depicted as a hero in order to further emphasize his view on the Fall and its consequences. In the end, I believe that studying traits in Pullman’s characters in search for an exclusive Satan-figure is important as it greatly affects Pullman’s view on what it truly means to be human.

The most obvious candidate for a Satan-figure in *HDM* is perhaps Lord Asriel, simply because he does precisely what Satan did in *PL*: wage a war against God. Satan and Lord Asriel do, however, have different motives for their rebellions: in *Paradise Lost*, Satan initially objects to God’s favoritism toward his son while Lord Asriel seeks to free mankind from the rule of a tyrannical God. In fact, the God in *HDM* – the Authority – has no son, and while Satan seeks power and would rather “reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n” (1.263), Lord Asriel’s ambition is never to rule.

In his thesis *Intertextuality between Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials and John Milton’s Paradise Lost*, Bibiche van Heumen draws parallels between Lord Asriel’s idea of a Republic of Heaven and the idea of “Paradise within thee” found in Milton’s poem (12.587). Van Heumen says that “In *His Dark Materials*, each person has their own responsibility to make the most of life” while “In Milton’s epic, it is consistently emphasized that a ‘Paradise within thee’ can only be accomplished by obeying God’s commands” (17). Though the two ideas clearly are not meant in the exact same way, they do both touch upon the notion that we are the cause of our own happiness and suffering. Pullman warns against the dangers of wasting your life preparing for an afterlife since now is all we have got; that people should do what makes them happy and not what they are told to do in fear of spending all of eternity in a hell that might not exist. Milton creates the idea that Heaven and Hell are states of mind instead of places, and shows how you can live your life according to seven virtues (12.582-4) and achieve an inner Heaven

or do like Satan and indulge in sin to create an inner Hell (4.75). Though both the idea of the Republic of Heaven and “Paradise within thee” are connected to how people should live their lives in order to be happy, they are also complete opposites since the first tells you to do what feels right while the other tells you to do what God commands.

The idea of the Republic of Heaven also links Lord Asriel to Satan in a different way. The Republic of Heaven will be discussed in greater depth at the end of this thesis, but shortly put it represents a perfect society devoid of hierarchies or regulations put forward by oppressive institutions like the Church. Lord Asriel wants to realize the Republic of Heaven in the newly discovered, previously uninhabited world in which he establishes the headquarters for the rebellion, but there is one flaw: people who stay outside of the world in which they were born experience that their health slowly deteriorates until they die. Will’s father, who has experienced this first-hand, explains, “we have to build the Republic of Heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere” and that is why “Lord Asriel’s enterprise will fail in the end” (AS 364). In other words, Lord Asriel’s ultimate mission is doomed to fail from the start, and this is something he has in common with Satan. Satan’s ambition to defeat God in Heaven is futile for the simple reason that God is omniscient and omnipotent.

We see that both Lord Asriel and Satan have in common that their goals are futile, but Satan is the only one who acknowledges this. For instance, though he argues that angels are “self-begot, self-rai’d” (5.860) and that God is an angel like the rest of them (1.245-49), we see that he knows that is not the case when he says God “deservd no such return / From me, whom he created what I was” (4.42-3). Satan even acknowledges the existence of destiny and that God controls it when he says, “O had his powerful Destiny ordaind” (4.58).

Satan and Lord Asriel also bear physical similarities. Satan is described as being large, strong, and powerful (1.271-330), while Lord Asriel “was a tall man with powerful shoulders, a fierce dark face, and eyes that seemed to flash and glitter with savage laughter... All his movements were large and perfectly balanced” (NL 13). Lord Asriel is also a man “involved in high politics, in secret exploration, in distant warfare” (NL 6). These are all descriptions reminiscent of Satan in *PL*. Satan is very much concerned with how things are run in Heaven; he does not agree with the hierarchical structure under

God's rule, and he resents the favoritism God shows toward his son. In order to achieve change, he persuades a third of the angels to wage war against God. In this war, Satan shows his skill and expertise when it comes to war strategy and his bravery as he fights alongside his followers against the angels loyal to God. After losing the war and falling from Heaven, Satan is seen as an explorer when he "Puts on swift wings, and towards the Gates of Hell / Explores his solitary flight" (2.631-32) as he undertakes the mission to solitarily travel to a new world prophesied to be created.

Several critics such as Martin Evans, Rodger Martin, and Barbara Lewalski have linked Satan's intruding on Eden to colonization and imperialism. Lewalski says that the "poem examines contemporary political issues of exploration and colonization, representing Satan as an explorer bent on conquest and the colonization of Eden" (xxiii). Lord Asriel is also associated with the idea of exploration as he makes travels around the world and even cross-worlds. The difference, however, is that he has no ambitions of conquering or colonizing any place. In fact, King Ogunwe reveals when he is talking to Lyra's mother, "He [Lord Asriel] led us here because this world is empty. Empty of conscious life, that is. We are not colonialists, Mrs. Coulter. We haven't come to conquer, but to build" (AS 210).

Hell is in *PL* described as a "fiery Gulfe" (1.52), and descriptions of the world in which Lord Asriel establishes the headquarters for the rebellion similarly paint it as a hot, previously uninhabited place: "A lake of molten sulphur extended the length of an immense canyon, mephitic vapors sudden gusts and belches" (AS 55). Satan convenes his council of followers in Hell and uses his charisma and eloquence to successfully convince his followers not to accept defeat:

He spake: and to confirm his words, out-flew
Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumin'd hell: highly they rag'd
Against the Highest, and fierce with grasped arms
Clash'd on thir sounding Shields the din of war,
Hurling defiance toward the vault of Heav'n (1.663-669).

Lord Asriel is similarly described as a man with a “haughty and imperious nature” capable of “arguing forcefully and eloquently” (*NL* 360). While Lord Asriel is imprisoned on Svalbard, he manages to convince the armored bears to let him “choose his own dwelling place” and has the bears design the accommodation he wants by bribing them with gold and subjecting the bear king Iofur Raknison to a combination of bullying and flattery (*NL* 360). The fact that bears are cunning creatures impossible to trick (*NL* 226) is further testament to Lord Asriel’s eloquence and powers of persuasion and manipulation.

Just as Satan is the head of a council comprised of fallen angels such as Beelzebub, Belial, Mammon, and Moloch, Lord Asriel is also offered advice from a council comprised of the leader of the Gallivespians, Lord Roke; the angel Xaphania; and the Afric King Ogunwe. In addition to being highly respected leaders, they are also both seen as being inventive. Satan, along with his followers, manages to create gunpowder and build a cannon to aid them in their fight:

They found, they mingl'd, and with suttel Art,
Concocted and adusted they reduc'd
To blackest grain, and into store convey'd:
Part hidd'n veins diggd up (nor hath this Earth
Entrails unlike) of Mineral and Stone,
Whereof to found thir Engins and thir Balls
Of missive ruin; part incentive reed
Provide, pernicious with one touch to fire. (6.513-20).

Similarly, Lord Asriel constructs an invention called the “intention craft,” a flying machine operated by a person’s intentions (*AS* 214-15) to help them fight the Authority and his forces. They also have in common that their rebellions suffer similar outcomes: The last we see of Lord Asriel is when he and Mrs. Coulter fight the angel Metatron and pull him down with them into the abyss (*AS* 410), an event very reminiscent of the conclusion to the War in Haven when Satan is cast down into Hell.

Though Lord Asriel and Satan clearly have things in common, it would be too simple to say that Lord Asriel is solely a representation of Satan as seen from a Blakean interpretation of Milton's epic poem, which is what we would expect considering Pullman's stance when it comes to religion. Lord Asriel is cunning, eloquent, brave and strong, but to label him as the hero of *HDM* would be injudicious. Lord Asriel inhibits character traits that might just as well portray him as a villain. In fact, at times descriptions of Lord Asriel are reminiscent of the character proposed as the villain of *PL* by some Romantics: God himself. From the very beginning, Lord Asriel seems to be very much in control of everything that is going on. Ruta Skadi seems to hold Lord Asriel in almost worship-like admiration, presenting him as this omniscient and omnipotent being to the other witches, one who "commands time, he makes it run fast or slow according to his will" and who "was preparing for this war before we were born... even though he is so much younger" (*SK* 269). God in *HDM* is of course not portrayed at all like an omniscient and omnipotent being but rather as an ancient, manipulative fraud gone mad. We see for instance how the Authority reacts upon seeing the intention craft: "The aged being gestured shakily... cackled and muttered to himself, plucking incessantly at his beard, and then threw back his head and uttered a howl of such anguish Mrs Coulter had to cover her ears" (*AS* 397). Shortly after, Lyra and Will find the Authority "terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner" (*AS* 411) of his crystal litter following an attack from the cliff-ghasts.

Since the Church is painted in such an unflattering way from the very beginning, we automatically build up a dislike toward Lord Asriel since we learn that he shares the same ambition as the Church when he admits to Lyra that he is "going to destroy [Dust]" (*NL* 375) This is something he later repeats to Mrs. Coulter: "We could find the source of Dust and stifle it forever" (*NL* 394). We eventually learn that Lord Asriel lied about wanting to destroy Dust when Mrs. Coulter says "You said: Come with me, and we'll destroy Dust forever. You remember saying that? But you didn't mean it. You meant the very opposite" (*AS* 382), and it becomes clear that Lord Asriel fights against the Church and is thus on the same side as Lyra. Van Heumen points out that the reader eventually "sympathises with Asriel, as we are led to believe that his mission to destroy the

Authority is a just cause. Also, Asriel does not seek to replace him [the Authority]" (van Heumen 29).

It is still difficult to view him in a positive light since he murders a character readers get to know and care for as Lyra's best friend. Niomi Wood refers to Lord Asriel's killing of Roger and makes the point that "Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter desire power above all and will stop at nothing to achieve their ends" (252). While Lord Asriel himself thinks the end justifies the means, Lyra thinks what her parents are doing is "too cruel. No matter how important it was to find out about original sin... Nothing justified that" (*NL* 374). Lyra does not stop to ponder complexities tied to the binaries good versus evil; she simply feels deep down when something is wrong, strengthening the reader's dislike for Lord Asriel. In fact, Lord Asriel is a character with whom it is very difficult to sympathize in general since we are never let in on his thoughts or feelings.

Satan, on the other hand, is beyond doubt the most complex emotional character in *PL*. When Satan is around others, he appears strong and confident, attributes he shares with Lord Asriel, but there is another side to Satan, one that we never get to see with Lord Asriel which distinguishes the two characters from each other. In *PL*, we get to see Satan's internal struggles. *PL* tells us exactly why Satan revolts and we learn about all of his pain and suffering, all of his doubts and insecurities. Regardless of whether you consider Satan a villain or a hero, there is no doubt that he experiences emotions. When he prepares to enter the snake in the Garden of Eden, he expresses "inward grief" (4.97). Likewise, when he studies Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he admires their beauty at great length and we see that he is both jealous and sad:

O Hell! what doe mine eyes with grief behold,
Into our room of bliss thus high advanc't
Creatures of other mould, earth-born perhaps,
Not Spirits, yet to heav'nly Spirits bright
Little inferior; whom my thoughts pursue
With wonder, and could love, so lively shines
In them Divine resemblance, and such grace
The hand that formd them on thir shape hath pourd. (4.358-65).

In spite of all his courage and strength, Satan is at times presented as vulnerable and *human*. We can both sympathize and empathize with him, and this is greatly different from Lord Asriel who is always very mysterious and cold, a man with eyes on the prize who cares little about those who might get hurt in the process of achieving his goals. Burton Hatlen even refers to Lord Asriel as a “Nietzschean *übermensch*, willing to go beyond good and evil in quest of his goals” (88). Contrastingly, Satan acknowledges the agony suffered by his followers thanks to him and seems to feel bad for them, as seen when he facing his followers and “cast / Signs of remorse and passion” (1.604-05).

Apart from Lord Asriel’s shock upon first seeing Lyra on Svalbard (“*I did not send for you!*” (NL 362)), indicating that he does not want to sacrifice his own daughter in order to open the portal to a new world, Lord Asriel shows nothing but contempt toward his daughter, calling her a “wretched child,” an “ordinary English girl, not very clever,” “impulsive, dishonest, greedy... perfectly ordinary, distinguished by nothing,” “a foul-mouthed, ignorant little brat with dirty fingernails” (AS 200). At the very beginning of the first installment of the trilogy, Lord Asriel roughly seizes hold of Lyra after she saves his life, threatens to break her arm, and then tells her to hide in the wardrobe with a promise to make her wish she were dead if she does not keep quiet (NL 14). Lord Asriel seems to be a selfish and entirely unsympathetic character, never batting an eyelash when people around him get hurt or die. Though Mrs. Coulter clearly sacrifices her own life so that her daughter may live, Lord Asriel sacrifices his life so that he can achieve his goal of defeating the Authority and ensuring that Dust remains in the world. This is, of course, admittedly admirable, but it still does not take away from the fact that he is a distant and cold character difficult to sympathize with in the same way you might sympathize with Satan in *PL*.

Readers expecting Pullman – being “of the Devil’s party” and wanting to write a *Paradise Lost* for children – to include a Satan-figure painted in an unquestionably positive light will find that Lord Asriel does not fit this profile. Lord Asriel is undeniably an admirable and important character when it comes to defeating the evil Authority, preserving Dust, and saving Lyra’s life, but he is definitely not a character portrayed in a way as to appear especially appealing to readers. Lord Asriel exhibits traits that are

traditionally considered good and bad, so, in light of this, it might be worthwhile trying to find a character in *HDM* representing a more obvious Satan-figure.

Mary Malone is linked to Satan when we are told by Dust that she “must play the serpent” (*SK* 249). It should be noted that Satan is never mentioned in the Book of Genesis, so the link between the devil and the serpent has to be traced back to *PL* where Satan comes across a sleeping serpent in the Garden of Eden and “in at his Mouth / The Devil entered” (9.187-88). In contrast with Lord Asriel, we actually get to know Mary Malone through her actions and access to her thoughts, especially during the time she spends time in the *mulefa* world. When she stumbles across this strange new species, we see how she treats them with respect and politeness. She becomes part of their community and tries to help out in any way she can. When she helps them make nets, she realizes that being human gives her an anatomical advantage, being able to do the job on her own, but she also realizes “how it cut her off from others” (*AS* 128). She does not regard herself as a superior species but instead seeks to learn from those around her, earning her a strengthened appreciation for community and team work. We see that when the tualapi attack the *mulefa*, she instantly offers to help them rebuild (*AS* 131).

Descriptions of Mary Malone thus far are not very reminiscent of Satan, but as we join her on a journey that is both physical and spiritual, we watch as she grows as a person and becomes an increasingly round and complex character that has common qualities with Satan – some more obvious than others. Mary enters a new world and observes its inhabitants, reminiscent of Satan entering Eden and observing Adam and Eve. Mary’s first instinct as she meets the *mulefa* is to learn more about them “with a cheerful heart” (*AS* 125). She becomes a sort of proponent of knowledge and she even has a university career and has finished a doctorate.

Knowledge is something that is treated differently in *PL* compared to *HDM*. The perception of knowledge in *PL* can be seen in Adam’s conversations with Raphael. We see that Adam is curious to know more about the earth, the stars, and God. Raphael happily answers questions he has, but he says there is that which “surmounts the reach / Of human sense” and may be “not lawful to reveal” (5.570-02). In other words, curiosity is encouraged, but only to a certain extent. Satan is never portrayed as someone who is especially curious or an avid learner, and calling him a supporter of knowledge simply

because he encourages Eve to eat of the Tree of Knowledge would be an exaggeration. However, no matter how we view Satan and his intentions, he is at least undeniably linked to the concept of knowledge in a crucial way.

When Adam tells the Raphael “I am happier then I know” (8.282), it could be interpreted in different ways. One interpretation is that his happiness is greater than the limits of his knowledge allow him to fully grasp, but you could also look at it in a different way. If we consider that eating the forbidden fruit brought on knowledge of good and evil and Adam is yet to gain this knowledge, the comment could hint at the idea that Adam experiences what it feels to be good without knowing what “good” is or why he feels that way. Of course, critics disagree when it comes to what it actually means that eating of the fruit brought with it knowledge of good and evil. For instance, Michael Lieb argues that Adam and Eve could not have envisioned the consequences of disobeying God since they had no knowledge of evil or death. Ira Clark, however, says that the climax of the poem “depends on Eve and Adam’s having a competent sense of knowledge” (201). However, in spite of Satan’s promise that the fruit will confer knowledge of good and evil, there seems to be no doubt in *PL* that you can experience good without being aware of evil. If we turn to Pullman’s idea that eating of the fruit brought on consciousness and then try to make sense of the prelapsarian Adam and his inexplicable happiness, we might try to imagine ourselves in Adam’s position.

We humans might experience being happy without quite knowing why, but usually we are able to deduce why we are happy or why we are sad. We are able to do this because we are conscious, self-aware beings. The assumption then, if we are working from the premise that he does not know why he is happy, is that he lacks consciousness. This would of course make sense if we consider the effects of Dust or original sin in *HDM*, and we see something that might support this theory when Adam and Eve eat from the Tree of Knowledge, sleep together and promptly fall asleep, leading to them having “conscious dreams” (9.1050). Eve also touches upon the idea of the importance of consciousness when she justifies eating of the forbidden fruit to herself: “For good unknown, sure is not had, or had / And yet unknown, is as not had at all. / In plain then, what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?” (9.756-59). What Eve is saying hints at the idea that good does not exist if we do not have knowledge of it,

begging the question what consequences there are to fear from disobeying if we have no knowledge of them. It is of course very contestable whether self-awareness was one of the consequences of eating of the forbidden fruit, but Pullman certainly makes it out to be one of them, and he depicts it as something good with the alternative being living life as a zombie wandering about indifferent to the world. *HDM* shows how the knowledge, consciousness, and an awareness of good and evil are intertwined and infinitely positive as this enables people to choose to be good out of their own free will. However, that does not mean that *PL* does not advocate free will: as Andrew Leet points out, any doubt about “Milton’s message concerning free will... is dispelled by the hopeful ending of *Paradise Lost*, where freedom of choice remains the penultimate thought” (181):

Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide;
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way. (12.645-50)

On the topic of knowledge, we see Mary mention how much joy she felt being a nun and being connected to God, but she also reveals how being nun with a university degree made her “pleased with [herself]... Too much. [She] was holy *and* clever” (*AS* 443). The way she says this makes it seem like the two are incompatible; as if she possesses something that other people of the Church do not. That seems to be the case with Satan as well. He seems to exhibit an awareness of things that other angels are ignorant of, and this makes him feel proud, different, and superior but also miserable and jealous. Again, we are brought back to the idea of consciousness, but here we are given the impression that it is a burden that Mary Malone and Satan both share.

Another thing Mary and Satan have in common is inventiveness. Just as Satan uses his creativity and wisdom to invent gunpowder and the cannon, Mary invents a tool that allows her to see Dust (*AS* 230). An even clearer similarity is seen when Mary is told that she must play the role of the serpent and she makes her way to a garden where the portal to a different world is hidden inside a tent. The tent is guarded by a security guard

that she has to deceive in order to get past. In order to do so, Mary uses a fake ID and pretends to be “Dr. Olive Payne” (*SK* 253). This scene can be linked to Satan when he disguises himself as (or rather possesses) a serpent in the Garden of Eden. Lastly, the thing that most obviously links the two characters is the fact that they initiate a sort of temptation scene. Satan tempts Eve into eating from the fruit on the Tree of Knowledge in several ways: by promising her knowledge, by telling her that she will be God’s equal, and also by appealing to her vanity, saying that it is not enough that Adam is the only one around to admire her beauty.

but here

In this enclosure wild, these Beasts among,
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern
Half what in thee is fair, one man except,
Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train. (9.542-548).

Whether or not eating of the forbidden fruit actually brought Eve any wisdom, or knowledge of good and evil, is, as already established, contestable. One thing is certain, though, and that is that Satan tells lies when he tempts Eve. Satan’s goal when he approaches Eve is not to better the lives of the inhabitants of the Garden of Eden but to thwart God. He makes it seem as though nothing bad will come of eating the fruit, but in the end there is no question that the Fall in *PL* is supposed to be seen as a negative thing. Some critics, including Pullman, might argue that the Fall was positive, while others might argue that the fall was not necessary in order to gain this knowledge; that this knowledge might have been acquired in a different way. On the topic of manual labor being one of the consequences of the Fall, it is worth noting that *PL* actually points out work as one of the defining features that distinguishes humans from other animals:

Man hath his daily work of body and mind
Appointed, which declares his Dignitie,

And the regard of Heav'n on all his waies;
While other Animals unactive range,
And of thir doings God takes no account. (4.618-22)

No matter how we view the Fall, the indisputable consequences are that Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, turned mortal, and were forced to experience suffering for the first time. Both the temptation scene and interpretations of the consequences of falling differ greatly from *PL* to *HDM*.

Mary knows that she must play the role of the serpent, but when we get to the temptation scene in *HDM*, the impression is that she is not necessarily aware of what she is doing. She seems to be simply recounting a story of her past, unaware of the influence it will have on those listening. When Mary takes Lyra and Will for a walk just before the temptation scene, she comments, ostensibly as a harmless side note, that “Snakes are important here. The people look after them and try not to hurt them” (AS 439). Mary does not elaborate on this, but the comment seems to convey that the *mulefa* revere snakes for awaking them from the deep slumber of ignorance. It might very well be that the *mulefa* would agree with what Primavesi said about the serpent being a symbol of wisdom that emphasized the problems tied to unquestionably keeping rules of conduct.

Mary tells Lyra and Will about a time she was in a garden and flirted with an Italian man. She brings up the idea of “China” (AS 444) which serves as a metaphor for something that is pleasant and exciting but also forbidden: physical attraction to another person. Mary explains how she as a nun could travel to all other places in the world but never to China, meaning that there are a lot of other pleasures in the world but she had to resist the temptation to engage in physical relations with others. This can be easily linked back to the idea of free will. Mary Malone shows how free will does not truly exist if China is always off-limit, and free will is something van Heumen argues Satan values highly; as seen, for instance, when he mentions “All is not lost, the unconquerable will” (1.106). However, van Heumen points out the possibility that “unconquerable will” rather “denotes the concept of heroic will power than the theological notion of free will” (van 22). Still, it is emphasized that Satan *chose* to fall when he decided to wage a war against God: “Such I created all th’ Ethereal Powers / And Spirits, both them who stood and them

who failed; / Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell” (3.100-02). Mary’s talk of China appeals to Lyra and Will’s curiosity, building on something they have imagined but never fully experienced. This is similar to the way Satan tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden – Eden is full of joys, but Satan puts focus on the one thing she cannot have and the potential wonders it might bring. Something that makes this comparison clearer is when Lyra and Will touch each other’s daemons, an act considered very taboo and unthinkable (and clearly sexual) – and an act that is easily linked back to the forbidden fruit and the idea of going to China.

Mary explains how a taste of marzipan reminded her of a boy she met in a garden as a child and how and how she fell in love with him for the “gentle way he touched [her] lips with marzipan” (AS 445). The way Mary talks about falling for temptation as a child makes her seem a bit like an Eve-figure, but if we focus on the effect her story has on Lyra we could compare it to how Satan claimed that he ate of the Tree of Knowledge and not only survived but also learned how to talk (9.764-65): Mary reveals that she has already gone to China and is, by all appearances, better for it. Lyra responds to the story immediately and she “found herself breathing faster. She had never been on a roller-coaster, or anything like one, but if she had, she would have recognized the sensations in her breast: they were exciting and frightening at the same time, and she had not the slightest idea why” (AS 445).

Lyra realizes that there are pleasures in the world that she has yet to discover and experience and is eager to do just that. Mary continues talking about how she spent time with the boy; how she “was *aching* – all her body was *aching* for him” (AS 446), and she could tell he felt the same. She describes in seductive details how they end up sharing a kiss and how it was “more than China, it was paradise” (AS 446). She shares her contemplation if she should spend the rest of her life without ever experiencing that feeling of happiness again and she questions God’s existence and if there is any point from depriving herself of joy; if anyone in the end benefits from making her miserable (AS 446). Of course, she in the end decides to renounce her vows as a nun and go to China because God might not actually exist (AS 446).

There are things that differentiate Mary from Satan when it comes to the temptation scenes. For instance, Satan knows the negative consequences of disobeying

God but does not tell Adam and Eve. Mary expresses her conviction that there is no one to dish out punishment for indiscretions, but it is never presented as unquestionable fact. In spite of the seductive nature of her story, it does not have a happy ending: she marries neither the Italian man nor the man she lived with for four years, and as for the boy she met as a child, she only got to meet him half a dozen times and then he moved away. In spite of the dreamy atmosphere conjured up as she takes a trip down memory lane, we are in the end brought back to a harsh reality, and this seems particularly important here since it portrays Mary as honest instead of a liar like Satan. Lyra and Will do, after all, experience China, but they, too, end up separated. However, that does not mean that it was not all worth it in the end.

In spite of the dissimilarities, Lord Asriel and Mary Malone are definitely the closest candidates for a Satan figure in *HDM*, especially if you look for a Satan figure seen from a Romantic perspective. If you focus more exclusively on negative qualities, we find more obvious comparisons if we turn our gaze to minor characters. For instance, Sir Charles Latrom, first seen at Mrs. Coulter's cocktail party under the name of Lord Boreal, a scheming and conniving character described as "an elderly man in a pale suit" (*SK* 78) who has a sweet smell about him. When Lyra and Latrom first meet in Will's world, the latter asks if Lyra would like to meet an acquaintance of his. We are told that "she was very nearly tempted. But then out came that little dark tongue point, as quick as a snake's, flick-moisten, and she shook her head" (*SK* 79). Both the word "tempted" and "snake" is easily linked back to Satan, and we later see that Latrom is eloquent, persuasive, and very manipulative. It is also curious how Sir Charles Latrom's last name is the word "mortal" spelled backward – considering Satan's role in mankind becoming mortal. Latrom's daemon is also a serpent, as we see when Will catches a glimpse of it emerging from the cuff of Latrom's jacket, flicking its tongue, when Lyra and Will visit him in order to ask for the alethiometer back after Latrom stole it (*SK* 164).

Latrom is far from the only liar in *HDM*. The main protagonist herself, Lyra, might be the biggest liar of them all – perhaps unsurprisingly considering her name's resemblance to the word "liar." Lyra is seen lying from the very beginning of the first installment of the trilogy when she tells Lord Asriel about a rook that she and Roger found and nursed back to health (*NL* 39). Later, when she recounts the same story to Mrs.

Coulter, she says that they caught the rook and roasted it (*NL* 67). Later, when Lyra tells the story in the Land of the Dead, we learn that the story she told Lord Asriel is the true story, otherwise the harpies would have attacked her for lying. Lyra is seen lying again and again throughout the trilogy: spinning tales about her parents (*NL* 131-32), pretending that her name is Lizzie Brooks (*NL* 234), and so on. Her skill at lying later leads Iorek Byrnison to rename her Lyra Silvertongue – instead of Lyra Belacqua – after she manages to trick the bear king Iofur Raknison into believing that she is a daemon. Satan is of course also a master liar and manipulator, as seen for instance after he talks to Eve: “He ended, and his words replete with guile / Into her heart too easie entrance won” (9.733-34).

We even have a rebel angel who could be compared to Satan in the sense that she, too, started a rebellion against God: Xaphania. The comparison is, however, a bit far-fetched since, according to Balthamos, the Authority banished her because she was “wiser than he was” and discovered that the Authority was in fact not the creator (*AS* 32). It is possible to list other characters that have common traits with Satan. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to find a character that does *not* have something in common with Satan, and that in the end seems to be the important point that Pullman is trying to make. There is no perfect representation of Satan in *HDM* whether we look for a Satan-hero or a Satan-villain, but instead Satanic attributes seem to be dispersed among most, if not all, characters found in the trilogy. Even Lyra, who is meant to be a clear representation of Eve, has lying as her perhaps most defining character trait.

The fact that Pullman opts *not* to include a Romantic Satan character in his trilogy as a way to further promote his view on religion and God could be interpreted as a way of portraying a somewhat subjective picture in order to let the audience decide for itself. However, this seems unlikely considering Pullman’s highly biased portrayal of the Church and the Authority. In fact, Pullman has openly admitted to what he calls an “artistic flaw,” that is his tendency to portray people connected to the Church as bad characters with very few redeeming qualities, saying that “If you want to hit someone, hit ‘em hard! Don’t come at it equivocally and with all sorts of qualifications” (Thorpe).

The conclusion instead seems to be that although Pullman wanted to write a *Paradise Lost* for teenagers, he does not present us with a simple retelling of the story in

the poem with an obvious Satan figure seen as a hero in order to further criticize religious institutions. *HDM* does overall communicate the idea that the Fall was a good thing. It is not, however, simply an allegory of the Miltonic narrative seen from a Blakean point of view but a complete recasting of the Fall story. Satanic traits are spread out among characters in the trilogy, creating a picture that comes off as being more realistic while also prompting readers to really think for themselves. By not portraying characters in *HDM* as inherently good or inherently evil, Pullman makes the point that due to free will, people have potential for both good and evil, and that this is in fact a positive thing.

Free Will, Destiny, and Prophecy

As we have seen, Pullman's negative reputation among religious communities can largely be explained by his interpretation of many important concepts tied to religion in *HDM*. Though *HDM* does not deny the existence of God outright, the introduction of Dust certainly suggests that the world was not made by God and that there is no such thing as "Christian virtues"; virtues are virtues regardless of your religious convictions and can be found within everyone. Everyone has the capacity for good and evil, and how we choose to live our lives and treat others is up to the individual. This has to be linked back to one of the most central topics on the discussion of religion: free will. Free will also has to be tied back to the ideas of prophecy and destiny, two concepts that are frequently referred to in Pullman's trilogy. The ideas of free will, prophecy, and destiny are essential when it comes to *HDM* since they touch upon the idea that events might be governed by some higher power; that God might exist. This must be looked at seeing as *HDM* largely conveys the idea that God does not exist and neither is God needed in the world.

The ideas of prophecy and destiny come up very early on in the first installment of the *HDM* trilogy. When the Master of Jordan College and the Librarian are sitting in the Master's study, it is revealed that Lyra "has a part to play in all this, and a major one. The irony is that she must do it all without realizing what she is doing." The Master says that, in the end, "she will be the betrayer" (*NL* 33), establishing the idea that Lyra's fate is sealed. Dr. Lanselius also talks about this prophecy when he reveals that witches have talked about Lyra for centuries and that without her, all shall die, and that she must "fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing" (*NL* 175).

Since readers are alerted to the fact that Lyra will commit a great betrayal, we are throughout the trilogy continuously trying to figure out what this betrayal might be. The first possibility we encounter is when Lyra, pretending to be a daemon, tricks the bear king Iofur Raknison into fighting her friend Iorek Byrnison only to have second thoughts when she compares their armor and realizes that she might have made a huge mistake that might get Iorek killed. Fortunately, everything works out in the end as Iorek comes off victorious and it becomes clear that this cannot be the betrayal prophesized to take place. At the end of *Northern Lights*, we encounter a second possibility as Lyra rescues her

friend Roger from Bolvangar only to unwittingly lead him to his death as he is sacrificed by Lord Asriel in order to open the portal to a different world. Although Lyra obviously did not mean for Roger to get killed, readers might finish the first installment of the trilogy thinking the great betrayal to have taken place and the prophecy fulfilled, especially considering the fact that Lyra realizes her mistake in a chapter named “Betrayal” (*NL* 377), and it is not until we get to *The Amber Spyglass* that we realize that the prophecy refers to something quite different and involves a conscious choice made by Lyra. The great betrayal refers to Lyra abandoning Pantalaimon, her daemon, when she enters the Land of the Dead, and we are explicitly told that “thus 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). In the end, the consequence of prophecies being fulfilled is that we have to question whether free will actually exists or if all events are governed by destiny.

Another reference to destiny is seen when Lyra is thrown into a prison on Svalbard and becomes acquainted with man named Jotham Santelia who talks about “grand purposes abroad” and that the “universe is full of purposes you know. Everything happens for a reason” (*NL* 328). Though this might just be the talk of a crazy man (and he does indeed seem crazy), this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to solid evidence of predestination in the *HDM* trilogy. For instance, when Lee Scoresby is in the forest with Grumman, the shaman reveals that, “We must leave the forest at once, Mr. Scoresby. They are going to burn it” (*SK* 295). Grumman not only knows that the Imperial soldiers will burn the forest, he also knows how they will do it, and Lee Scoresby does not question his words, but instead simply says “You can see that, can you?”, implying that Grumman can foresee the future. There are others who can do the same, like Serafina Pekkala who can “see a little ahead” (*AS* 478) and even “the oldest of all cliff-ghasts” who foresees that the “greatest battle ever known is coming soon” and that it “would be a close fight, but Lord Asriel would win” (*SK* 272).

The most essential question in the trilogy is whether or not Lyra will fulfill her destiny to commit the second Fall, but there are many other things tied to free will worth looking at as well. For instance, Lyra meets a sailor who tells her that “when your daemon settles, you’ll know what sort of person you are” (*NL* 167). Lyra is skeptical of

this and asks, “But suppose your daemon settles in a shape you don’t like?” The sailor simply replies that people must “learn to be satisfied with what they are” (*NL* 167). There is a positive message in what the sailor is saying: that people should be who they are and not try to be someone else; but, on the other hand, he is also saying that you have no say in what kind of person you become. The fact that people’s daemons stop changing around puberty does not only tell a person more about themselves – it also makes it easier for others to figure out what kind of person you are. Hines points out how “While not all people with dog daemons are necessarily servants, the fact that all servants have dog daemons belies the infinite possibility the daemon represents before puberty” (39). This seems to touch upon the idea that children are blank slates, so to speak; that there is a window of opportunity for change that closes once people grow up. Hines also points out that the “interpretive quality of daemons recalls earlier European and American responses to anxieties about ‘true’ character that proliferated in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth centuries” (39). The idea that daemons might reflect a person’s personality is something Hines links back to “Fantasies of reading the body” which “persist today in a multiplicity of discriminatory practices against people with visible disabilities and racist, sexist, and ageist practices” (39).

This is also something that is touched upon when Will tells his father’s ghost that he was wrong when he said that his son was a warrior: “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* 419) and his father is proud and says “well done,” because Will has realized something important. Will acknowledges that we might be genetically predisposed for certain things (and our daemons might reflect this), but, in the end, he argues that we have free will to choose what we will do with our lives. He reiterates his opinion when Xaphania tells him and Lyra that the angels will close all windows to other worlds so Will does not spend his life looking for an opening because he has more important things to do, once again hinting at the idea of destiny, but Will does not want to hear it. He wants to decide his own fate, and Xaphania’s response is, “Then you have already taken the first steps toward wisdom” (*AS* 500).

In spite of having characters who argue strongly for the existence of free will, the tendency events have of unfolding according to predictions suggest that destiny is a real

phenomenon in *HDM*. However, there are things in the trilogy that complicate this. For instance, when Lyra and Will travel to the suburb of the Land of the Dead, they learn that “the moment you’re born, your death comes into the world with you, and it’s your death that takes you out” (AS 261). They learn that a person’s death “goes everywhere with ‘em, all their life long, right close by” and that people “got to wait till our death tells us it’s time” (AS 260). This communicates the idea that deaths are scheduled ahead of time; however, it is worth noting that the living sometimes come to the suburb of the Land of the Dead by mistake, and then they have to wait in a holding area until they die.

Now, despite evidence of destiny in *HDM*, the example with the Land of the Dead could be seen as an indication of how it is flawed – and this is in a way necessary since otherwise one could argue that the story in *HDM* would have unfolded the way it did regardless of anything that happened throughout the series. We would then be left wondering if there was any point to Lord Asriel and the rebel forces standing up to the Church or anything else that happened in the trilogy.

While talking to Serafina Pekkala, Lee Scoresby, a character who is an adamant advocator of free will, argues that “Flying is just a job to me, and I’m just a technician. I might as well be adjusting valves in a gas engine or wiring up anbaric circuits. But I chose it, you see. It was my own free choice” (NL 224). It is revealed later, however, that Lee was lying. Becoming an aeronaut was not a coincidence or a choice made out of necessity in order to make a living; he took to the sky because it was his calling and because it brought him happiness, but he chose to lie about it in order to emphasize how he thinks free will is important: “He’d said once to Serafina Pekkala that he didn’t care for flying, that it was only a job; but he hadn’t meant it. Soaring upward, with a fair wind behind and a new world in front – what could be better in this life?” (NL 307). Scoresby again expresses his opinion when he asks “Where’s my free will, if you please? [...] Are you telling me that [Lyra’s] just some kind of clockwork toy wound up and set going on a course she can’t change?”

The story in *HDM* seems to be influenced by both destiny and free will; events are scheduled ahead of time but still subject to change due to people having free will. The main struggle is between the Church, who wants to maintain destiny, and Lord Asriel and his forces who want to eliminate it in order to allow people to be in control of their lives.

The struggle between destiny and free will could perhaps best be seen by examining Dust. A clear definition of “destiny” in *HDM* could possibly be seen when Serafina Pekkala describes a world without free will as universes “nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life” (*NL* 308). This description is similar to the way people who have had their daemons cut away are described, meaning people who no longer attract Dust. Since free will is tied to Dust and Lyra will put an end to destiny by preserving Dust, the implication seems to be that destiny and Dust are opposites. Dust allows people to forge their own path, while the absence of Dust will force people into following whatever path is laid out in front of them – their destiny, which, in *HDM*, consequently becomes a very negatively charged word.

The existence of the alethiometer has been mentioned by critics as a device that complicates the idea of destiny and free will since it, in the process of telling the truth, reveals prophecies about the future. Decker points out how the alethiometer’s always telling the truth raises a “philosophical problem for Pullman’s worldview” (Decker 17). He says that the problem with the alethiometer is that you can ask it any question and it will tell you the truth, meaning the device must be operated by an omniscience presence. Decker says that, in *HDM*, there is “no omniscient god and those claiming the title (the Authority and the Regent) are clearly finite” (Decker 17). I believe that by examining what we are told about the alethiometer, it becomes clear that it presents no more complications to the story than any prophecy or character able to foretell the future.

When Mary Malone interacts with Dust in her laboratory, we learn that Shadows, Dust, and dark matter are the same thing. Mary Malone poses several questions, including: “Are you the same as Lyra’s Dust?” and “what are you?” (*SK* 248). The answer to the first question is “Yes” and the answer to the second question is “Angels” (*SK* 248). Whether through the computer screen in laboratory or through an alethiometer, angels are what aid Lyra and Mary on their journey. Mary is told where to go and given instructions for what to do on her journey (*SK* 250). Similarly, the alethiometer repeatedly tells Lyra what to do: for instance, when Lyra is in Will’s world, the alethiometer tells her “*You must concern yourself with the boy. Your task is to help him find his father. Put your mind to that.*” At this point, Lyra is “beginning to sense... that [the alethiometer] had moods, like a person” (*SK* 80). Later, when Lyra asks the

alethiometer how she can get rid of the spies, she is told not to, “because your lives depend on them” (AS 238). It becomes clear that Dust is not impartial: it has its own agenda.

The reason why Decker rejects Dust as an omniscient source is that it is used “by both sides of the struggle”: as a consequence, “It remains an enigma” that “might be allowed to stand as a simple fantasy device which requires no justification or explanation except for the fact that it is used consciously as a symbol for truth” (Decker 18). I believe there is a simple explanation for why Dust aids Lyra while it simultaneously provides useful and truthful information to the Magisterium through the alethiometer in their possession. We learn that the alethiometer is operated by Dust, but Dust serves as an umbrella term for all conscious life, including that which more specifically operates the alethiometer: angels. As we know, angels are split into two groups: those that support the Authority and those that support Lord Asriel. The simple solution to Decker’s problem is that that Lyra’s alethiometer is operated by the rebel angels while the alethiometer in the hands of members of the Magisterium is operated of angels loyal to the Authority.

While Decker thinks the alethiometer has to be controlled by an omniscient being like God, I would argue that if events are determined ahead of time, all those capable of foretelling the future could be said to be omniscient in a way – though certainly in various degrees, if it is possible to say that without completely debasing the meaning of the word. While for instance Serafina Pekkala can see a little ahead, angels seem to see everything that will happen if events are allowed to unfold without the intervention of free will; that is, if Dust leaves the world. We find evidence to support this theory when we look at Fra Pavel’s comment that “Please, remember – the alethiometer does not *forecast*; it says, ‘If certain things come about, *then* the consequences will be –‘ and so on” (AS 68).

It might seem counterproductive for angels to want to rid the world of the substance from which they are created, but by removing Dust from conscious beings like humans and *mulefa*, angels would make them subject to the will of the Authority precisely the way Metatron wants, since it would eliminate their free will. We already know that Metatron wants to achieve more control by setting “up a permanent inquisition in every world, run directly from the Kingdom” (AS 61). Of course, this has to be linked

back the practice of intercision carried out by one of the Magisterium's institutions. The General Oblation Board separates children from their daemons in order to prevent Dust from settling on them, only they refer to it as original sin, and one essential consequence of this is loss of free will, as seen for instance when Mrs. Coulter describes her daemonless bodyguards: "they've undergone intercision. They have no daemons, so they have no fear and no imagination and no free will, and they'll fight till they're torn apart" (*SK* 199). The Church's denunciation of Dust and desire to strip people of their free will is again emphasized by the fact that the angel Metatron seeks to capture Lyra and Will's daemons so that he can control them. Lord Asriel reveals, "If he captures their daemons, the children will have to follow; and if he can control those two children, the future is his, forever" (*AS* 379).

What it all comes down to in the end, the whole purpose Pullman has for including these concepts in his trilogy, is the idea that humans are better off if they are allowed to control their own lives without being told what to do or what not to do by religious institutions. If we simply think about the Magisterium as trying to rid the world of original sin, the institution might initially not seem so bad, but Pullman forces readers to think about this critically by offering different interpretations as to the actual repercussions of this. It is also important to note that in the process of trying to find God in *HDM*, we quickly see that the Authority does not fit the profile. He is not an omnipotent being that created the world and all life in it. It seems pretty clear that the decrepit, old, addled angel posing as God does not control the future; he and his followers simply want to strip people of free will and consequently their ability to shape the course of the future. In other words, people become subject to destiny, and destiny again becomes something controlled by the Authority and his followers since they would be the only conscious beings left.

According to Christian theology, God created humans with free will, and this is not consistent with the Authority in *HDM* wanting to take it away. If we look at it this way, the Authority instead has to be regarded as the embodiment of everything Pullman regards as negative when it comes to organized religion: the way institutions enforce all sorts of rules designed to control people's lives while also justifying all sorts of discrimination. If people are forced to follow these rules without having any say in how

to live their lives, the future becomes predictable. This is what Pullman fears: a future with dull, mindless people devoid of spontaneity, creativity, curiosity, or any appreciation for all of the wonders the world has to offer. Pullman wants nothing to do with such a world and instead paints a picture of an entirely different world; one that – contrarily to what some religious people might believe – does not spiral into chaos; for instance, like Decker who believes humans need religion in order have virtues. The world Pullman envisions once the “curious prophecy about [Lyra]” is fulfilled which will “bring about the end of destiny” (NL 308) is the establishment of The Republic of Heaven, and this world is brimming with potential due to free will. In fact, the passage in *Paradise Lost* from which Pullman found the title to his trilogy could arguably be seen as being reminiscent of this world:

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 thus 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. (2.910-19)

In his essay “*His Dark Materials, a Challenge to Tolkien and Lewis*,” Burton Hatlen points out how this passage brings up ideas dealt with in *HDM* such as free will and Christian hierarchies like the binaries good versus evil:

We stand here not at a moment of fixed certainties but of maximum potentiality. We are looking out at Chaos, which comes in some fashion “before” God Himself. In Chaos, light and darkness, male and female (note that Chaos has a “womb” and is “pregnant”) have not yet been sorted out and classified as “good”

and “evil.” Out of this clash of opposites, not only our world but many worlds (and indeed, is it not possible that each of us has her own world?) may come. Pullman, like Blake and many other later readers of Milton, wants to recover this moment of infinite possibility, not the world for which Christians like Lewis long, in which Good and Evil stand against one another as clearly defined alternatives and implacable enemies. (Hatlen 87)

Conclusion and the Republic of Heaven

Pullman maintains that *HDM* is a story and not a sermon of sorts designed to convey some kind of message. However, as Richard Poole put it, “Stories are not just stories: they can make things happen,” and the importance and power of story-telling is itself a very central theme in the trilogy, as seen especially in how the only way to escape the Land of the Dead is by telling the harpies true stories. The importance of stories is also very well reflected in the *mulefa* people who, lacking opposable thumbs and thus being unable to write, keep their history alive through stories told by generation to generation. Andrew Marr points out the importance of stories when he says that, “For those of us without religious faith, there are awful questions to be faced about living well in a world that we are still struggling to understand. We, too, need stories about moral choices, about love and a life’s priorities” (Marr). This is something Pullman also emphasizes in his article “The Republic of Heaven” when he says that the Bible is more than just “a collection of laws and genealogies”; if it were, it would not have had the effect it has had on generations and generations. Pullman says that, “What seized the mind and captured the heart were the *stories* it contains.”

Pullman’s trilogy undoubtedly has the power to influence people’s perceptions and opinions, and this is something Richard Poole attributes to the fact that “the view of the world and of human belief-systems which it conveys is anything but value-free.” It might be true that Pullman did not write *His Dark Materials* to communicate a “message,” but he still acknowledged its powers of persuasion in his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech when he said that “all stories teach, whether the storyteller intends them to or not. They teach the world we create. They teach the morality we live by. They teach it much more effectively than moral precepts and instructions.” However, there has to be a distinction between learning through stories and imposing a certain kind of ideology upon impressionable readers like Gooderham suggests, one that spreads “confusion, offense and... indoctrination” (165).

The goal in this thesis has been to show that, while *HDM* cannot be categorized as anti-religious, the trilogy is certainly greatly critical of any form of authority that abuses its power and robs people of their freedom. If we adhere to the definition of religion

mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, “Religion... shall mean for us *the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude... in relation to whatever they may consider the divine*” (James 31), there is nothing in *HDM* that discourages people from having their own beliefs or values as long as it does not negatively affect others. We see for instance how Serafina Pekkala and her witch clan have religious convictions that do not require them to interfere with the lives of others and how this is seen as something positive. In fact, when they do interfere, it is to put an end to such practices; specifically the Magisterium’s kidnapping children and conducting experiments on them due to their own convictions about Dust and original sin. The focus of Pullman’s denunciation is thus not religion itself, but, as Leet said, what happens when religion turns to religiosity.

The final installment of the *HDM* trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, ends with Lyra telling Pantalaimon that they have to build the Republic of Heaven. It is never really properly explained what the Republic of Heaven is; all we know is that it is something Lord Asriel and his forces want to build and that Will’s father said it has to be built “where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere” (AS 364). The idea behind this new world is elaborated on in Pullman’s article “The Republic of Heaven” where he warns against a “thoroughgoing hatred of the physical world” and the belief that “this world is just a clumsy copy of a perfect original we can’t see because it’s somewhere else.” We see this in *HDM* where we are encouraged not to treat life like a temporary state before we, if we live according to God’s will, get to experience paradise in Heaven, because there might not be any God or any afterlife. Alan Jacobs touched on this when he identified Pullman’s “*truly* anti-theological point” as being the idea “that whether God lives or dies is not in the long run a very significant matter” (42). This is connected to Mary’s realization that she does not need God in order to find meaning in life or to feel connected with the world. Pullman explains how this new world-view is viable because “We’re not isolated units of self-interest in a world where there is no such thing as society; we cannot live so” (“The Republic of Heaven”).

Pullman uses his article to address some of the most central concerns when it comes to transitioning from the Kingdom of Heaven to the Republic of Heaven, including questions like “Where did we come from?” and “Why are we here?” As an answer to the first question, Pullman says “a republican myth must accept the overwhelmingly

powerful evidence for evolution by natural selection.” We see how Mary Malone frequently refers to evolution, for instance when she enters the *mulefa* world: “clearly in this world evolution had favored enormous trees and large creatures with a diamond-framed skeleton” (AS 87). As an answer to the second question, Pullman says that there might not be any grand purpose behind our existence, but the fact that we are conscious beings enables us to take control of our destinies, and that according to Pullman gives us meaning: “So a myth of the Republic of Heaven would explain what our true purpose is. Our purpose is to understand and to help others to understand, to explore, to speculate, to imagine. And that purpose has a moral force” (“The Republic of Heaven”).

Pullman’s article gives a good account of the idea behind the Republic of Heaven, especially dealing with the biggest concerns one might have at the prospect of living in a world without God. However, if we want more details on what this world would look like, we have to go back and examine what the trilogy points out as being *wrong* with the world. Lord Asriel, as the Authority’s biggest adversary, loathed the Church, and the world he envisioned with the Republic of Heaven was a world where people’s lives were not controlled by the Magisterium. In order to establish a detailed and accurate picture of the Republic of Heaven, we need to look at everything hitherto discussed in this thesis.

One important thing that would characterize the Republic of Heaven is equality. Several kinds of discrimination are dealt with in *HDM*, and most of them can be linked back to organized religion in one way or another. Gender discrimination is something that is important in Pullman’s trilogy, even if it is something that is dealt with in a somewhat subtle manner that might not immediately grab the attention of every casual reader. The Bible includes myriad instances that describe women as being inferior to men. For instance, the Bible tells us that Eve was created from Adam’s rib (*English Standard Version*, Gen. 2:22), that women are the property of men (Cor. 11:7-9), that women cannot speak in churches (Cor. 14:34-5), that women should submit themselves to the will of men (Col. 3:18), and so on. Pullman challenges this in many ways in his trilogy.

The protagonist in *HDM* is a female, and even though she plays the role of the second Eve, the fact that the Fall is described as something positive ensures that Lyra is perceived as a heroine rather than the sinner responsible for death and woe entering the world. In fact, though *HDM* lacks the presence of a certain central Christian character,

Jesus, the behavior of Lyra is in some ways reminiscent of that of the son of God; the way she sacrifices herself for the dead and the way she is an avid story-teller, like Jesus, who did most of his teaching through stories. Of course, the implications of having a female heroine and savior have not gone unnoticed by critics. Pat Pinsent notes that: “Additionally [Pullman’s] representation of Lyra as the most significant character in the establishment of the ‘Republic of Heaven’ is consonant with the renewed understanding of the female role in a religious context, which is central to feminist theologians’ readings of both biblical text and the history of the Christian Church” (200). She also points out Lyra’s visit to the Land of the Dead as being reminiscent of “‘the harrowing of hell,’ a key scene of the medieval Mystery plays, in which Christ, between his death and resurrection, was able to release from limbo the souls of those who had died before his coming” (204). Bernard Schweizer likewise draws focus to Pullman’s positive portrayal of female characters: how “witches are powerful and dignified characters” and how Xaphania is the “only positive god figure in the trilogy” (168-69).

A different kind of discrimination that is dealt with in *HDM* is homosexuality. The Bible repeatedly classifies homosexuality as a sin, Leviticus 18:22 perhaps being the most quoted: “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (*English Standard Version*). In Pullman’s trilogy we become acquainted with the angels Baruch and Balthamos who fight on Lord Asriel’s side against the Church. The relationship between the two male angels is not depicted as something abominable but rather something beautiful and genuine, and this conveys Pullman’s views on the Church’s attitude to and treatment of homosexuals up through history and today. We also have the curious phenomenon of people having daemons that are the same sex as oneself, like Bernie Johansen, the kitchen servant at Jordan College. Of course, we cannot say for certain that Bernie is homosexual, but Pullman has admitted that it is a possibility: “Occasionally, no doubt, people do have a demon of the same sex; that might indicate homosexuality, or it might indicate some other sort of gift or quality, such as second sight. I do not know. But I don’t have to know everything about what I write” (“Interview with Philip Pullman”). Descriptions of Bernie being a “solitary man” could hint at his sexuality, and his kindness is for instance seen in how he tried to console Lyra when her friend was kidnapped (*NL* 125).

There is also evidence of discrimination against people of different beliefs and ethnicities in *HDM*. We hear about witches being prosecuted and we see how people who try to live their lives outside of the control of the Church, like the gyptians, are regarded as second class citizens, emphasized, for instance, in the way people do not seem to care if gyptian kids are taken by the Gobblers. We also see how the second Father Gomez arrives in the *mulefa* world, he immediately judges the *mulefa* for their behavior, and decides “that their habit of riding on wheels was abominable and Satanic, and contrary to the will of God. Break them of that, and salvation would follow” (AS 467). This has to be linked back to forced conversion that has taken place in the past, like the Spanish Inquisition and the Crusades. We have to compare Father Gomez’ meeting with a new world to Lord Asriel who wanted to establish the Republic of Heaven in an uninhabited world since his goal is not to conquer or colonize. *HDM* promotes respect and tolerance, and we see how people can work together and in harmony across worlds, races, sexual orientations, and beliefs – Lord Asriel’s forces range from Africans and ancient witches to tiny Gallivespians and homosexual angels.

The *mulefa* world not only shows how it is possible to arrive at a new location with a sort of xenophobic attitude and an impulse to conquer and change (like Father Gomez) or with benevolent curiosity and an eagerness to learn (like Mary Malone), it also becomes a sort of model for what a perfect world would look like. The *mulefa* are a peaceful people who work together to carry out any tasks that must be done throughout the day. When Mary arrives in their world, the *mulefa* find her a bit odd, but that does not stop them from immediately including her in their community, feed her, teach her, and even carry her around. They have no preconceptions about Mary and they are curious to know more about her without judging her for her differences. Another characteristic of the *mulefa* people is their concern for the environment; the symbiotic relationship they have with nature around them seen especially with the seedpods. When Sattamax tells Mary about the *mulefa* people, he describes a world characterized by harmony for most of the thirty-three thousand years their race have existed (the amount of years consciousness has existed according to the trilogy), how they have “taken care of the earth. Everything balanced. The trees prospered, the grazers were healthy, and even if once in a while the tualapi came, our numbers and theirs remained constant” (AS 233).

However, three hundred years ago, the trees began to sicken for the first time in *mulefa* memory. Mary Malone knows that “Three hundred years ago, the Royal Society was set up; the first true scientific society in her world. Newton was making his discoveries about optics and gravitation” (AS 367). We know of course that portals made by the subtle knife caused Dust to leave the world (AS 453), but I have been unable to find any explicit or detailed theories for the real-life implications of this. If we keep everything *HDM* discusses in mind and take a look at an overview of time periods, we see that this was around the Age of Enlightenment and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. I will not go into too close detail of historical events since this would be deviating way off topic, but I will briefly point out a few observations made in trying to figure out why Pullman chose to specify when Dust started leaving the world.

If we consider what *HDM* conveys when it comes to knowledge and focus on the individual, it seems odd that Dust would start to leave the world during the Age of Enlightenment, a time during which focus was on reason and individualism. However, although Pullman’s trilogy promotes science, it also communicates an important message when it comes to environmental developments. The Industrial Revolution was characterized by a shift in focus over to factories and machinery, and with the introduction of new technologies people became increasingly alienated from nature. This can be linked back to how *HDM* warns against never pausing to appreciate the wonders found in the world we live in. Pollution was also taking its toll on the environment during this period and, similarly, we clearly see that Dust leaving the world has an impact on the environment in the *mulefa* world. We also see descriptions of gray and forlorn environments as the main characters in *HDM* visit different worlds: for instance, on her journey to the north, Serafina notices “unseasonal crackings of ice and stirrings in the soil” throwing animals “into panic” (SK 43). Will actually specifically points out global warming in his (our) world when Lyra asks him if it is hot where he comes from: “Not normally. But the climate’s been changing. The summers are hotter than they used to be. They say people have been interfering with the atmosphere by putting chemicals in it, and the weather’s going out of control” (SK 307). Similarly, we certainly see evidence of climate change when Iorek and the other polar bears have to migrate due to the ice disappearing from the lands. Of course, Pullman is not saying that religious institutions

are to blame for climate change and global warming, but we have to link this back to the idea that there is a hatred toward the physical world; that the tendency to focus on the intangible and spiritual like the concept of heaven has led to a neglect of the environment. The conclusion is that if there is to be any hope of building a Republic of Heaven, people need to do a better job taking care of our world.

HDM conveys the idea that we need to enjoy the present and everything life has to offer. We need to take the time to appreciate our surroundings and wonder about and explore the world. When it comes to the three parts that make up humans, Will makes the observation that “the best part is the body... That’s what Baruch and Balthamos told me. Angels wish they had bodies. They told me that angels can’t understand why *we* don’t enjoy the world more. It would be sort of ecstasy for them to have our flesh and our senses” (AS 440). Sexual consummation is celebrated, as seen in the way Dust stops leaving the world after Lyra and Will have sex and “seem the true image of what human beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance” (AS 473). That being said, that does not mean that the world envisioned by the Republic of Heaven is devoid of imagination or creativity; these things are encouraged, but they have to be grounded in reality. Lyra’s story-telling is an excellent example of having a healthy imagination that reinforces the appreciation for the physical instead of separating you from it. The importance of stories being connected with reality is emphasized in the Land of the Dead with the harpies only wanting to hear *true* stories. Pullman writes in “The Republic of Heaven” that, “Am I saying that there is no fantasy in the republic of Heaven? That everything must be sober and drab, with a sort of earnest sociological realism? Not at all. If the republic doesn’t include fantasy, it won’t be worth living in” (Republic of Heaven). The point is that there needs to be a balance, a point where reality and fiction connect. As an example, Pullman compares Richard Wagner’s *Ring* with J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, saying that “Wagner’s gods and heroes are exactly like human beings, on a grand scale: every human virtue and every human temptation is there. Tolkien leaves a good half of them out. No one in Middle-earth has any sexual relations at all; how children arrive must be a complete mystery to them” (“The Republic of Heaven”). Pullman feels a lot of admiration for Tolkien and his writing and has said in an interview that, “What I remember from Tolkien was that here was a book full of the most

tremendous excitement, with a narrative skill that left me breathless, and which continues to teach, I think, three very interesting things about the quest story, which is the basis of *The Lord of the Rings*” (qt. in Hatlen 77). Pullman does not elaborate on what these three things are, but on the topic of his relationship to Tolkien, he adds in a different interview:

Tolkien also said didn't he – he was accused of escapism? and he said, this is a sort of proud banner. He said well if we are in prison it's the right thing to escape from it. He was like Lewis a sort of thoroughgoing Platonist in that he saw this world, this physical universe as a fallen state created no doubt by God but marked and weakened and spoiled by sin and his imagined world was so much more truthful and full of beauty and what have you. Well I passionately disagree with this. The physical world is our home, this is where we live, we're not creatures from somewhere else or in exile. This is our home and we have to make our homes here and understand that we are physical too, we are material creatures, we are born and we will die. (qt. in Hatlen 78).

Though Pullman's trilogy clearly involves fantasy, Pullman makes the point that he only uses fantasy as a device to support and embody the real subject matters of the story. In fact, already in 1998, shortly after the release of *The Subtle Knife*, Pullman said in an interview with *Achuka* that *HDM* “is not fantasy but stark realism, and my reason for [saying this] is to emphasise what I think is an important aspect of the story, namely the fact that it is realistic, in psychological terms.”

Pullman's trilogy aims to strengthen our appreciation for everything that makes us who we are – our consciousness, our free will, our capability for good and evil. *HDM* celebrates the Fall and uses the concept of Dust to introduce the idea that the consequences of the transgression that might have taken place in the Garden of Eden were actually positive. *HDM* encourages us to not spend our lives longing for paradise not only because such a place might not exist, but also because the state we are in now is actually preferable to the state Adam and Eve were in prior to the Fall. In Pullman's trilogy, one of the consequences of original sin is consciousness, and people who lack consciousness are compared to zombies. Additionally, *HDM* makes the point that

everyone has capacity for good and evil; children are not innocent just because they are young but are seen pillaging, fighting, and even trying to murder in Cittàgazze. Innocence is also not something that is glorified in Pullman's trilogy; instead of yearning for and working toward a higher form of innocence, experience is celebrated and loss of innocence is portrayed as that which makes us truly human. *HDM* makes us question if good can exist without evil, or if a person can be good if he has no alternative. True goodness in *HDM* is having the potential for both good and evil but choosing to do good out of your own free will; not from fear of what you might face in an afterlife. As an example, we have Mrs. Coulter who is seen as a horrible woman with few redeeming qualities. When the regent Metatron looks at her, he describes seeing:

Corruption and envy and lust for power. Cruelty and coldness. A vicious, probing curiosity. Pure, poisonous, toxic malice. You have never from your earliest years shown a shred of compassion or sympathy or kindness without calculating how it would return to your advantage. You have tortured and killed without regret or hesitation; you have betrayed and intrigued and gloried in your treachery. You are a cess-pit of moral filth. (AS 399)

However, as the story draws to a close, Mrs. Coulter has a change of heart and ends up sacrificing herself out of love for her daughter. This decision is important because she goes against the Authority and the Church with whom she has been allied and commits an entirely altruistic act completely independent of Church rules or promises of paradise in an afterlife, showing that religious inspiration is not required to do the right thing or to be good.

Pullman's trilogy is not anti-religious; *HDM* is a story based on the Fall story in the Bible which used theological language and ideas to point out how some religious practices found in organized religion sometimes conflict with humanistic principles. Instead of saying that Pullman's use of theological language makes him antitheologian, like Gooderham does, I tend to agree more with Andrew Marr when he says, "The furniture is looted from the churches, even if the imagination that scatters and rearranges it is that of an intensely intelligent, moralising atheist (at least, as a reader, I assume so)."

Pullman's message is not that religion is inherently bad – in fact, the epigraphs to six of the chapters in the trilogy were taken from the Bible. *HDM* does not encourage people from using the positive messages found in religion, but it does challenge the idea that virtues like patience, sympathy, kindness and so on are *Christian* virtues. Pullman does not think you need God as a moral compass or as incentive to be good.

Gooderham thinks *His Dark Materials* leaves readers with a feeling of anguish, hopelessness, and alienation, but I would say that in spite of Lyra and Will's separation at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, we are left with hope as Lyra plans to go study at St. Sophia's College so that she might "learn consciously what [she] could once do by intuition" (AS 519). This kind of conscious knowledge and understanding is something we remember Xaphania referred to as being "deeper and fuller than grace that comes free" and also something that becomes permanently yours since you have worked for it and earned it. This to me does not seem to reverberate of "longing and anguish of an alienated humanity" as Gooderham said, but rather hope for a *new* – emphasized by the fact that St. Sophia's College is "not as old as Jordan" and is run by a headmistress who is a "clever young woman, energetic, imaginative, kindly" (AS 519) – kind of mentality that does away with old, outdated ways of thinking and focuses on the here and now and how we can make the best of the time we have on this earth. While some critics regard the death of the Authority as the height of blasphemy, a closer look reveals that the angel masquerading as God simply serves as a symbol or metaphor for an outdated set of beliefs, a construction by mankind designed to serve its own purposes and needs. This is seen especially in the way the Authority is described as "having no will of his own, and responding to simple kindness like a flower to the sun" (AS 411). The Authority is old and decrepit and leaves the world with a "sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief" (AS 412) and this further emphasizes how the ideas he represents have been kept alive way beyond their expiration point. Pullman encourages people to think for themselves instead of, like Mary did, following the Church blindly and letting it control your life. The importance of thinking for yourself is contrasted with the Church's unwillingness to change and adapt and accept actual proof provided through science, as seen in the way the Church wants to censor and suppress scientific discoveries that contradict their teachings. We see how this clutching on to old ideas borders on delusion with the monk

in the Land of the Dead who “with dark, zealous eyes” argues that “This is Heaven, truly!” even though they are in what seems more like a prison or concentration camp than anything else

However, in the end it is important to note that *His Dark Materials* does not deny the need for “Heaven,” that is something to believe in (hence the Republic of Heaven), but it takes something promised and imagined and turns it into something tangible and attainable. Ultimately, I believe Marr encapsulates what *HDM* attempts to get across while simultaneously affirming its success in doing so when he says “What he gives me and what excites me is the sense that a post-Christian world can be as intensely filled with pity, the search for goodness, and an acute awareness of evil, as any religious universe.” As Schweizer and Leet both pointed out, it is very odd how religious critics completely ignore all of the positive messages contained in *HDM*. The Republic of Heaven is riddled with what religious people might call *Christian* virtues, yet many critics calling Pullman anti-religious do not even acknowledge them, making it seem like believing in God is much more important than living according to what God is supposed to represent. The very end of *The Amber Spyglass* is dedicated to emphasizing the importance that we do not put ourselves first, are “cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient, and we’ve got to study and think, and work hard” (AS 522); none of which are things that go against traditional Christian teaching. Lyra’s conversation with her daemon at the end of the trilogy encapsulates Pullman’s ultimate hope that people fully appreciate the fact that they are living, conscious beings of infinite potential, reminding the reader that “where we are is always the most important place” (AS 522).

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