

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*:

Paradise Lost and Found Again

Chloé BOFFY

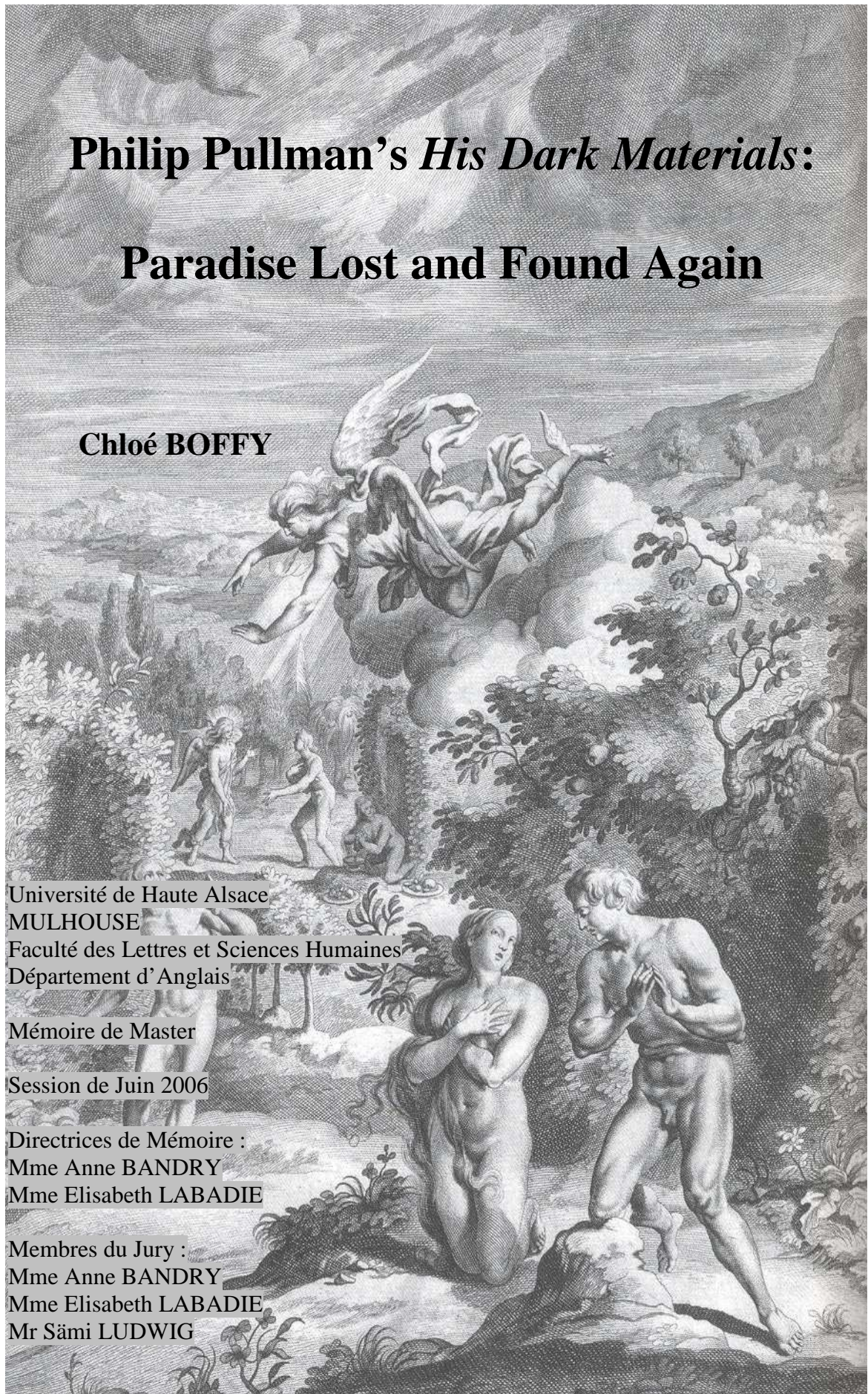
Université de Haute Alsace
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Mémoire de Master

Session de Juin 2006

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“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”
John 8:32¹

¹ *King James Version of the Bible* [Online]. [ref. of May 25, 2006] Available at:
<<http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Jhn/Jhn008.html#32>>

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time a young adolescent studied John Milton's *Paradise Lost* at school and was fascinated by it. Several years later, Philip Pullman – for it was him – wrote his masterpiece entitled *His Dark Materials* after a passage from Milton's poem. This title refers to what Pullman calls "Dust" in his story. But the real source of inspiration for Dust is the scientific term that exists in our world and is called "dark matter."² Of course, dark matter is not Dust. The concept of Dust with a capital D is completely invented by Pullman. It is a materialisation of consciousness. The name "Dust" comes from the Bible: "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19).³ In re-reading *Paradise Lost*, Pullman remarked this quotation, "His dark materials," which echoed his idea of Dust and dark matter.⁴ As Milton's poem was the starting point of his trilogy, Pullman found it a good idea to use the quotation as a title for his trilogy, replacing the original title he had chosen and which was *The Golden Compass*. In the United States, *The Golden Compass* became the title of the first book, instead of *Northern Lights* as Pullman has eventually called it. In my opinion *The Golden Compass* is a better title than *Northern Lights* because it maintains a certain logic in the naming of the books. Entitled *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, each book refers to an object in relation to Dust: Lyra's alethiometer, a kind of compass that can tell the truth, Will's knife which can cut windows between worlds, and Mary's spyglass which enables her to see Dust.

² David COLBERT. *The Magical Worlds of Philip Pullman: A Treasury of Fascinating Facts*, 2006, p. 16.

³ *King James Version of the Bible* [Online]. [ref. of May 25, 2006] Available at: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Gen/Gen003.html>>

⁴ Philip PULLMAN. "The science of fiction" [Online]. [ref. of April 17, 2006] Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/life/lastword/story/0,13228,1290618,00.html>>

Lyra is the young heroine of the story. Her character is probably inspired by William Blake, another poet Pullman admires. Though high born, Lyra is not really paid attention to by the scholars she is in charge of. As the story progresses, she finds herself more and more on her own and becomes eventually a “little girl, lost.”⁵ These three words evoke a poem by Blake called “The Little Girl Lost.”⁶ In the poem, the little girl’s name is Lyca, which resembles Lyra. There are several similarities between Blake’s Lyca and Pullman’s Lyra. Both are wild children, both sleep in a cave at some point...⁷ But Blake did not only inspire the character of Lyra, he had influence on Pullman’s beliefs as well.⁸ Blake was among the first ones who thought that Milton was “of the Devil’s party without knowing it.”⁹ Like Blake, Pullman thinks that Satan is the true hero of *Paradise Lost* and that Original Sin was the best thing that happened to mankind. It is this idea that I will explore in this dissertation.

The plan of this dissertation follows the same leading thread as the trilogy. As Lyra does, we will try and find what the mysterious element that Pullman calls Dust is and what it means for the author and for the Church in the story. We will then discover that Pullman describes the Church of his story as something evil and what he really criticizes through his story. We will see the influence of Milton and Blake on the character of Lord Asriel, Lyra’s father, and his battle against the Church. In the second part we will discuss Pullman’s alternative to religion and ask the question of whether he is really an atheist as almost everybody calls him.

⁵ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, 2003, p. 160.

⁶ David COLBERT. *Op.cit.*, p.39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ William BLAKE. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in THORPE, James, *Milton Criticism: Selection from Four Centuries*, 1962, p. 353.

Chapter 1. *Paradise Lost*

This chapter is named after Milton's epic poem because when Pullman wrote his famous trilogy *His Dark Materials*, he intended to write a version of *Paradise Lost* for teenagers.¹⁰ The title of the trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, comes from a passage of the second book of *Paradise Lost* which is quoted just before the beginning of *Northern Lights*:

*Into this wild abyss,
The womb of nature and perhaps her grave,
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless the almighty maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more worlds(...)*¹¹

According to Nicholas Tucker, the author of *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, the quotation "his dark materials" refers to "the mixture of water, earth, air and fire involved in the creation of the world and now at large in the wild shores of Hell."¹² The story, as we will see later in the second chapter, is in fact a story about creation. But why create something that already exists? Because Pullman thinks that the world we live in is not perfect, that it is decaying and that we deserve something better. It is closer to Hell than to Paradise. In this chapter, we will see what made the world what it is now, the process that made it sadder and sadder, insisting on the part the Church played, according to Pullman.

¹⁰ Claire SQUIRES. *His Dark Materials Trilogy : A Reader's Guide*, 2004, p. 18.

¹¹ John MILTON, *Paradise Lost*, Book II, in DARBISHIRE, Helen, *The Poetical Works of John Milton*, 1958, p. 49.

¹² Nicholas TUCKER. *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, 2004, p. 155.

1.1. Original Sin

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Genesis 2:17¹³

Before tackling the subject of the Church, we have to understand why the Church and its representatives act as they do. We have to understand their reasons before judging. For the Church, the reason why we should live a life of penitence on earth is the sin the first man and woman committed aeons ago, when the world and humankind had just been created. Eve – and Adam – ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and were punished by God. This is why human beings, the offspring of the sinners, are doomed. First of all, we will see what Original Sin means in Pullman’s story and what it implies, and then its everyday manifestation through the creatures Pullman has invented to represent the soul and which are called dæmons.

1.1.1. The appearance of Dust

In Pullman’s trilogy, Original Sin is the origin of the existence of intelligent beings. Every world he has invented has its own version of the story of Original Sin, even though it is not compulsory regarded as sinful. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra the heroine, is told by her father, Lord Asriel, the story of Original Sin:

“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

¹³ *King James Version of the Bible* [Online]. [ref. of May 25, 2006] Available at: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Gen/Gen002.html>

“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be open, and your dæmons shall assume their true form, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

“(…) [Eve] took the fruit thereof and did eat, and gave it also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

“(…) [A]nd they knew good and evil, and they were ashamed, and they sew fig leaves together to cover their nudity…”

(…) “And that was how sin came into the world,” [Lord Asriel] said, “sin and shame and death. It came the moment their dæmons were fixed.”¹⁴

This story is almost word for word the text of the Genesis Chapter Three in the King James Version of the Bible. Pullman has simply added the passage about the dæmon. The eating of the fruit is the cause of the existence of sin on earth, just like Pandora’s opening of the box is the cause of it in Greek mythology. We are told that it is bad, that Eve was wrong, that human beings and particularly women must be punished for that. This belief is even more strongly anchored in the culture of people in Lyra’s fictional world than in ours.

In *The Amber Spyglass*, in the parallel and imaginary world of the *mulefa*, intelligent beings who have evolved in a different way from human beings, we have another vision of the story of Eve, which is much more positive than the vision of the Church:

One day a creature with no name discovered a seedpod and began to play¹⁵, and as she played (….) she saw a snake coiling itself through the hole in a seedpod, and the snake said (….) “What do you know? What do you remember? What do you see ahead?” And she said, “Nothing, nothing, nothing.” So the snake said, “Put your foot through the hole in the seedpod where I was playing, and you will become wise.” So she put a foot in where the snake had been. And the oil entered her blood and helped her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the sraf [Dust]. It was so strange and pleasant that she wanted to share it at once with her kindred. So she and her mate took the seedpods, and they discovered that they knew who they were, they knew they were mulefa

¹⁴ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, 2001, p. 371.

¹⁵ Seedpods and seedpod trees are important elements of the *mulefa*’s evolution and culture. The *mulefa* and the trees live in interaction and cannot survive without each other.

*and not grazers. They gave each other names. They named themselves mulefa.*¹⁶

Here, what the *mulefa* Eve did is considered as a good thing. There is no feeling of shame when the *mulefa* discover that they have become wiser. On the contrary they are happy. They know that they are conscious beings and not animals. They can see the *sraf*, or Dust. And they see that the *sraf* surrounds them, the intelligent beings, and not the animals. When they encounter Mary Malone, the ex-nun and scientist who helps Lyra and leads her to the second Fall, they find her very different from them physically. But they know that she is like them, that she is a conscious being because she attracts the *sraf*: “That is how we knew you were like us and not like the grazers, who don’t have it. Even though you look so bizarre and horrible, you are like us, because you have (...) *sraf*.”¹⁷ Children do not attract Dust as much as adults. They have not reached the same level of consciousness as older people. Pullman compares the young *mulefa*, who do not attract the *sraf*, to animals: “being smaller than the adults, they could not manage the seedpod wheels. The children had to move as the grazers, with all four feet on the ground.”¹⁸ This does not mean that children are animals but that they do not have the maturity of grown-ups. In Lyra’s world, human beings, who are not able to see Dust, know that children have passed from childhood to adulthood thanks to the fact that, at some point, dæmons stop changing. This event marks the moment when they begin to attract Dust a lot more.

Original Sin can also mean the re-appearance of Dust. In *The Amber Spyglass*, we learn that Dust is falling into an abyss, into nothingness. Lyra is the one who can stop this fall by committing the Sin again. She does it symbolically when she gives Will, her

¹⁶ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 224.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

friend and the new Adam since Lyra is the new Eve, a fruit in the *mulefa*'s world: "she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth. She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant."¹⁹ But what is really considered as a sin, i.e. what makes the Dust stop falling into the abyss, is the moment when Will and Lyra kiss: "All his body thrilled with [love], and he answered her in the same words, kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body and her warm, honey-fragrant hair and her sweet moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit."²⁰ This is far from the description of an innocent kiss between two children. In fact, Will and Lyra are not children anymore from this moment on. They have passed from the innocence of childhood to the state of consciousness of adulthood. They do not kiss like children, they kiss like lovers. Pullman uses the words "hot", "drinking (...) the scent of her body", "moist mouth." This description seems sex tainted, as if Will and Lyra were on the verge of making love – they might make love thereafter, but Pullman chastely draws the curtain on it. "I don't know what they did," he confesses in an interview for the magazine *Third Way*.²¹ When Mary Malone sees the two children or rather young adolescents, she knows what she would see if she used the amber spyglass to see Dust: "they would seem to be made of living gold. They would seem the true image of what human beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance. The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all."²² Lyra has sinned. Consciousness, knowledge, wisdom, and all that characterizes humankind have been saved from oblivion. Moreover it can be noticed that in the different versions of Original Sin Pullman has presented in his trilogy, the sinner is always a woman and the tempter

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 465.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 466.

²¹ Philip PULLMAN. "Heat and Dust" [Online]. [ref. of April 19, 2006] Available at: <http://www.thirdway.org.uk/past/showpage.asp?page=3949>

²² Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, *op.cit.*, p. 470.

always a snake. This gives a universal dimension to the story of Original Sin. When it is Lyra who sins, instead of a snake, her tempter is a woman, Mary Malone. The snake is a phallic symbol. It represents the male. Its “transformation” into a woman in *His Dark Materials* makes more than ever destiny, the evolution of mankind a matter of women. Moreover, the fact that the tempter has the same name as the Holy Virgin, Mary, reinforces the fact that, for Pullman, Original Sin is good, and it suggests that the new world which is appearing at the end of the story has two mothers, for both Eve and Mary are motherly figures. Two mothers gave birth to mankind for a second time, so that human beings can keep on “creating” Dust.

Dust appeared when Original Sin was committed and was saved when the Sin was committed again. It means that people have passed from innocence, i.e. ignorance, to consciousness, i.e. wisdom. Dust indicates a special state of awareness and makes the difference between human beings and animals. Dæmons are made for the same purpose. They are people’s soul, they appear when a conscious being comes to life.

1.1.2. Dæmons

According to a great majority of critics who have written about Philip Pullman, and certainly to a great majority of his readers as well, dæmons are the best invention of the author of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Karen Traviss, in an article about Pullman’s dæmons, writes that “[d]æmons are more than a good fiction device: they answer a need in us, though not always a positive one.”²³ That is why *His Dark Materials*’ readers like dæmons and often wish that they could have one themselves.²⁴ In Pullman’s world, dæmons are what make the difference between human beings and animals. They are like

²³ Karen TRAVISS. “I Gotta Get Me One of Those: Why Dæmons Might Make the World a Better Place,” in YEFFETH, Glenn, *Navigating the Golden Compass*, 2005, p. 82.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Dust. Perhaps they are made of Dust, since they disappear when their human owners die. Like Dust, they are a manifestation of consciousness. Only the creatures which are capable of thinking have dæmons or an equivalent of them, dæmons which are not physical, which are within oneself, as for people from Will's world – i.e. our world, and which attract Dust as much as if they were physical dæmons. On his website, Pullman explains what dæmons are: "I will say that the daemon is that part of you that helps you grow towards wisdom."²⁵ But it is more than that. Dæmons also represent sexual feelings and impulses. There are several clues in the text that show that dæmons are a symbol of sex. First of all, there is the "great taboo" that prevents people from touching another's person dæmon. We can look as well at the descriptions Pullman makes of the dæmons' behaviour. Mrs. Coulter, Lyra's mother, is a very sexy character and the behaviour of her dæmon shows the sexual power she has over men. At the end of *Northern Lights* the seduction game between Marisa Coulter's dæmon, the golden monkey, and Lord Asriel's one, the snow leopard Stelmaria, reflects the seduction game between the two human beings, adding to it the sexual atmosphere that the reader can feel but that the characters do not really show: "And their mouths were fastened together with a powerful greed. Their dæmons were playing fiercely; the snow leopard rolled over on her back, and the golden monkey raked his claws in the soft fur of her neck, and she growled a deep rumble of pleasure."²⁶ The same kind of behaviour can be observed from the golden monkey in *The Subtle Knife*, when Mrs. Coulter seduces Lord Boreal, her rival, before killing him:

[The] dæmon's little black horny hands were stroking [Lord Boreal's] serpent dæmon. Little by little the serpent loosened herself and began to flow along the man's arm toward the monkey. Both the man and the

²⁵ Philip PULLMAN. "Philip-Pullman.com" [Online]. [ref. of March 14, 2006] Available at <http://www.philip-pullman.com/about_the_writing.asp>

²⁶ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, *op.cit.*, p. 396.

woman were holding glasses of wine, and she sipped hers and leaned a little closer to him. (...) The monkey raised her [the serpent] slowly to his face and ran his cheek softly along her emerald skin. Her tongue flicked blackly this way and that, and the man sighed. (...) [Lord Boreal] was finding it hard to resist; his dæmon was twined gently around the monkey's breast, and running her head through and through the long, lustrous fur as his hands moved along her fluid length.²⁷

Here Lord Boreal's serpent dæmon expresses sexual abandon and pleasure. She and Lord Boreal submit to the attraction of Mrs. Coulter and the golden monkey. But the reactions of dæmons are not always reactions of pleasure. At Bolvangar, the place where the children kidnapped by the Church are sent (cf. 1.3.), when a man catches Lyra's dæmon, Pantalaimon, both the girl and the dæmon feel disgusted:

She felt faint, dizzy, sick, disgusted, limp with shock. One of the men was *holding* Pantalaimon. He had seized Lyra's dæmon in his human hands, and poor Pan was shaking, nearly out of his mind with horror and disgust. (...) She *felt* those hands....It wasn't *allowed*....Not *supposed* to touch...Wrong....²⁸

According to Maude Hines, author of "Second Nature: Dæmons and Ideology in *The Golden Compass*," Lyra's dæmon can be assimilated to her body, more precisely to her genital parts. When the man touched Pan he had reached "right inside where no hand had a right to be."²⁹ Hines says: "while [it] refers literally to Lyra's dæmon as her soul or spirit, it also refers metaphorically to her vagina."³⁰ This time the touching of the dæmon can be compared to a rape. No stranger's hand, *a fortiori* no adult's hand has "a right to be" inside her – neither physically by touching her body nor by touching her dæmon –

²⁷ Philip PULLMAN. *The Subtle Knife*, 2001, pp. 310-311.

²⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, *op.cit.*, p. 275.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.275.

³⁰ Maude HINES. "Second Nature: Dæmons and Ideology in *The Golden Compass*," in LENZ, Millicent and SCOTT, Carole, *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*, 2005, p.42.

without her agreement. This is perhaps one of the most flagrant examples that dæmons are a symbol of sex, along with Will Parry's behaviour by the end of *The Amber Spyglass*. When he and Lyra accidentally catch each other's dæmon, they feel a bit embarrassed and excited at the same time: "each of them felt the same little shock of excitement: for Lyra was holding Will's dæmon, (...) and Will was carrying Pantalaimon. They tore their glance away from each other's eyes."³¹ Shyly and chastely they avoid each other's look because they know that what they did is forbidden: "it was a gross violation of manners to touch something so private as someone else's dæmon. It was forbidden not only by politeness, but by something deeper than that – something like shame."³² But the reaction of the two children changes when they become aware of their feelings, when they know that they are in love with each other:

Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean, he moved his hand from Lyra's wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her dæmon.

Lyra gasped. But her surprise was mixed with pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn't protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will's dæmon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew that Will was feeling exactly what she was.³³

What Lyra feels is similar to the sensations provoked by a first sexual experience. It is strange and pleasing at the same time. It is so good that Lyra wants to share it with Will, that is why she strokes Will's dæmon in return, she wants to make Will feel what she does. Moreover, at the time of adolescence, dæmons get fixed, namely they take a definitive shape, and they begin to attract Dust much more than when they were young. According to Pullman this means that it is the end of "innocence," i.e. ignorance. The

³¹ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p.417.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 457.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

children stop being children to become adults, wiser and fully conscious of themselves and of the multiple feelings that come to their grown-up minds and bodies.

If dæmons represent sexual feelings, it is not surprising that the Church wants people to be separated from them. This is why intercision has been invented. In *His Dark Materials* the goal of the Church is to erase sexual feelings, and *a fortiori* Dust, from the surface of the earth. The Church wants to eradicate sin. All that leads to the abuses Pullman denounces in his trilogy.

1.2. The abuses of the Church³⁴

“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
Matthew 5:3³⁵

The Church that Pullman depicts in *His Dark Materials* is a very cruel and pitiless institution. In their reader’s guide *Dark Matters*, Lance Parkin and Mark Jones define this Church, also called the Magisterium, as “[a] religious organisation that exerts absolute power over the lives of individuals in Lyra’s world.”³⁶ It is repressive, and even oppressive. It leaves few liberties to its worshippers. With the discovery of Dust and what it represents, that is to say Original Sin, children become the principal target of the Magisterium, which wants to “save” them from sin before they begin to attract Dust, and to preserve their innocence. Or, as Pullman would say, keep them in a state of ignorance. To reach its goal, the Magisterium uses all the cruellest means. In Lyra’s world, scientists have invented the Maystadt process, which consists in severing children from their

³⁴ In order to avoid any confusion between the Church in the real world and the Church described in Pullman’s story, the latter will be called by its other name, i.e. the Magisterium.

³⁵ *King James Version of the Bible* [Online]. [ref. of May 25, 2006] Available at: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Mat/Mat005.html#3>

³⁶ Lance PARKIN and Mark JONES. *Dark Matters: An Unofficial and Unauthorised Guide to Philip Pullman’s Internationally Bestselling His Dark Materials Trilogy*, 2005, p. 123.

dæmons with a kind of guillotine, so that they will not attract Dust when they grow up. This process, also known as intercision, is very painful both for children and dæmons. Most of them will die because of the shock. Without their dæmons, children are not themselves. They miss this part of their soul which, more than a guardian angel and an advisor, is a real friend. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra cannot see without her dæmon Pantalaimon whether what she is about to do – to set the ghosts free – is good or wrong: “It was so easy to get things wrong; and without her dæmon to guide her, maybe she was wrong about this, too.”³⁷ People severed from their dæmons have no more will, they do not rebel, they do what they are told, like the people at the Bolvangar experimental station – the place where children are sent to be “intercised”: “it wasn’t only imagination the nurse lacked, it was curiosity as well. (...) Her pert neat little dæmon trotted along at her heels just as brisk and blank as she was”³⁸ This is exactly what the Magisterium wants, people cleaned from all sorts of feeling, and especially sexual feelings. Mrs. Coulter explains to Lyra: “Dust is something bad, something wrong, something evil and wicked. Grownups and their dæmons are infected with Dust so deeply that it’s too late for them. They can’t be helped....But a quick operation on children means they’re safe. Dust just won’t to stick to them ever again.”³⁹ She also tries to explain that it is better for children to be separated from their dæmons: “at the age we call puberty, the age you’re coming to very soon, darling, dæmons bring all sorts of troublesome feelings, and that’s what lets Dust in. A quick little operation before that, and you’re never troubled again.”⁴⁰ What she means by “troublesome feelings” is of course sexual desire.

³⁷ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 321.

³⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, op.cit., p. 238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

As Pullman remarks in his novel *The Tiger in the Well*, “[t]here’s nothing like sex for steaming people up.”⁴¹ The Church has always considered sex as something dirty and sinful, in *His Dark Materials’* worlds, as well as in our world. In some religions, principally the Muslim religion, a process similar to intercision already exists, excision. The origin of the word “intercision” is unknown, it seems that Pullman has invented it. But it may have the same root as excision. It has the same result, it suppresses sexual impulses. But excision consists in cutting some genital part, it is a severing of the body. It is *external*, whereas *intercision* is “internal” in a sense, it is a severing of the very soul of the person. Nevertheless there is a slight difference between excision and intercision; excision is more or less accepted, I mean that it is a kind of tradition, it is part of the Muslim culture. Mothers know that their daughters will have to be excised, whereas in Pullman’s books intercision is kept secret. In the story the members of the Oblation Board, a religious organisation which depends on the Magisterium and deals with Dust and intercision, kidnap the children they bring to Bolvangar, and they never speak about what they are doing there. But fortunately, some people know what the Magisterium is really doing. In *The Subtle Knife*, the witch Ruta Skadi explains to the other witches the horrors she has seen committed in the name of the Church all over the world:

I have travelled in the south lands. There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did – not in the same way, but just as horribly. They cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls; they cut them with knives so that they shan’t feel. That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling.⁴²

She describes exactly what excision and castration are. Lord Asriel, Lyra’s father and the leader of the rebellion, also denounces castration in *Northern Lights*: “It means

⁴¹ Philip PULLMAN. *The Tiger in the Well*, 2004, p. 288.

⁴² Philip PULLMAN. *The Subtle Knife*, *op.cit.*, p. 50.

removing the sexual organs (...). Some died from the effects of the operation. But the Church wouldn't flinch at the idea of a little cut, you see."⁴³ And he adds cynically that it was "so useful in Church music,"⁴⁴ implying that some young boys were severed for this purpose – the story of the famous castrato Farinelli is a good example. Cutting the sexual organs is certainly one of the cruellest tortures made in the name of the Church. But it is not the only one.

In Lyra's world, the Magisterium does not hesitate to kill. It does not burn witches as it did in our world, but it has invented the preemptive absolution, which allows people to commit sins: it

involved doing penance for a sin not yet committed, intense and fervent penance accompanied by scourging and flagellation (...). When the penance had reached the appropriate level for a particular sin, the penitent was granted absolution in advance (...). It was sometimes necessary to kill people, for example; and it was so much less troubling for the assassin if he could do so in a state of grace.⁴⁵

This is taking to the advantage of the Magisterium the fact that God forgives everything. It takes profit of divine forgiveness in order to break the Ten Commandments with a clear conscience. Like intercision, it is known by a little number of people only. When the Magisterium learns that Lyra will commit Original Sin again, it wants to kill her to prevent a second Fall. They choose Father Gomez, a priest who has "done preemptive penance every day of [his] adult life," to be her murderer.⁴⁶ With preemptive penance and preemptive absolution, murder, the murder of a child, becomes almost a holy act. Father MacPhail, the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline – another subdivision of the Magisterium – exclaims: "How much better for us all if there had been

⁴³ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, op.cit., p.374.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

⁴⁵ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 72.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

a Father Gomez in the Garden of Eden! We would never have left paradise.”⁴⁷ This assertion also illustrates how blind and mad this extremism makes them; had there been a Father Gomez in the Garden of Eden to kill Eve before she ate the fruit, humankind would certainly have remained innocent but it would have died with Adam. In their obsession for the destruction of Dust and Sin, religious leaders come to say things like “Better a world with no Church and no Dust than a world where every day we have to struggle under the hideous burden of sin” when it evokes the possible destruction of the Oblation Board and whatever is connected with Dust, in order to eradicate its existence completely.⁴⁸ With that, Pullman denounces the folly which animates the fundamentalist movements, ready for anything in order to reach their goals. And as we can see it with the civil wars in the Muslim countries, religious fundamentalism is not very far from politics.

In *His Dark Materials*, the Magisterium is closely linked to politics as well. It has almost all the powers and takes the great majority of the decisions. It is the Magisterium which takes political decisions. It controls everything, and especially sciences. All scientific discoveries are subjected to the control of the Magisterium, and if the latter does not approve them, they are condemned as heretical. For example Dust, which is the main preoccupation of the Magisterium at the time the story is set, is the subject of several interpretations but “the Consistorial Court of Discipline can’t allow any other interpretation than the authorized one.”⁴⁹ This is why Lord Asriel has to hide far in the North to pursue his experiments on Dust and on other worlds. His theory about the existence of parallel universes and the possibility to travel across them is of course rejected by the Magisterium. He has “pushed his heretical investigations to the point where it’s positively dangerous to let him live.”⁵⁰ The Magisterium is afraid of him

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁹ Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, op.cit., p. 274.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 273.

because his discoveries may question its teachings and its power over people. Pullman explains his position in an interview: “I think that religions are special cases of the general human tendency to exalt one doctrine above all others – whatever it is, (...) there is a depressing human tendency to say, ‘We have the truth and we’re going to kill you because you don’t believe in it.’”⁵¹ It is this argument that he illustrates in his books by showing an intolerant Church which, for example, does not accept the possibility that Dust could be good. The Church that Pullman condemns is not open to interpretations of facts that contradict the teachings of the Bible, or rather that contradict its own interpretation of the Bible.

History teaches us that this will to convince everybody that there is only one truth, one God, one religion led to atrocities such as murders, mass killings... The Inquisition and its arbitrary trials, the Crusades... All that led to the death of thousands of innocents. But without always going that far, the Church tried to widen its power by converting people to the Christian religion. The first thing white people does when they meet “savage” tribes is to evangelise them, build small churches, indoctrinate them, make them forget their “pagan” rites and teach them to believe in God. Does the Church have the right to tell people what they should think, what they should believe in? Pullman wants to show us that it is wrong through Father Gomez’s decision to stay in the *mulefa*’s world and “to evangelize this world.”⁵² Father Gomez sees himself as a missionary and thinks that the evangelisation of the *mulefa*, that converting “pagan” and “unfaithful” beings to Christianity, would please the Kingdom of Heaven. His idea is that “[t]he first thing to do here would be to convince the four-legged creatures, who seemed to have the rudiment of reason, that their habit of riding on wheels was abominable and Satanic, and contrary to

⁵¹ Philip PULLMAN. “Heat and Dust,” op.cit..

⁵² Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 464.

the will of God. Break them of that, and salvation would follow.”⁵³ What he wants to do is precisely a great step backward for the *mulefa*. For them it means forgetting the knowledge brought by Original Sin. Taking into account that when the *mulefa* Eve used the oil for the first time, she knew what she was, she knew that she was a *mulefa* and not an animal,⁵⁴ forgetting all that would mean a return to an animal state. The *mulefa* may progressively stop being conscious creatures. Fortunately, the Church has become more tolerant with time. Or perhaps it has simply adapted itself to the modern society. With his caricatured Church, Pullman does not want to convince his readers that religion is bad. “[A] story is not an argument.”⁵⁵ He just wants to show that religion, as any totalitarian regime, has its weaknesses, and that one should not follow blindly the laws but act in knowing exactly what he is doing. This is the difference between a childish behaviour and an adult behaviour. Isabelle Smadja makes the same statement in her book *Harry Potter, les raisons d'un succès*: growing up means accessing to autonomy in the strong sense of the term: *nomos*, the law, *auto*, oneself, *autonomy*, obedience to the law prescribed by our own reason and not blind submission to the authority of the established laws.⁵⁶ The passage from childhood to adulthood is symbolized by Dust in Pullman’s trilogy. It is in order to save Dust and enable humankind to keep on growing up that the heroes of *His Dark Materials*, led by Lord Asriel, are fighting.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 464.

⁵⁴ Cf. 1.1.1.

⁵⁵ Philip PULLMAN. In MILTON, John, *Paradise Lost*, 2005, p. 8.

⁵⁶ “[G]randir c’est accéder à l’autonomie au sens fort du terme: *nomos*, la loi, *auto*, soi-même, *autonomie*, obéissance à la loi prescrite par notre propre raison et non soumission aveugle à l’autorité des lois instaurées.” Isabelle SMADJA. *Harry Potter, les raisons d'un succès*, 2001, p. 126.

1.3. Lord Asriel's battle and the importance of growing up

Lord Asriel is the most ambiguous character of Pullman's trilogy. He appears sometimes as a hero and sometimes as a villain. If we take *His Dark Materials* as a modern version of *Paradise Lost*, Asriel is often seen as the Satan figure because he is the one who wants to defeat the Authority, i.e. God.⁵⁷ In fact, as Pullman explains in "Heat and Dust," the real Satan figure is the scientist and ex-nun Mary Malone, whose role is to "play the serpent."⁵⁸ Lord Asriel's goal is hard to define. In *Northern Lights* he says that he wants to destroy Dust, but later on we learn that his real ambition is to destroy the Authority Himself.⁵⁹ To Lyra he explains: "Human beings can't see anything without wanting to destroy it (...). That's original sin. And I'm going to destroy it. Death is going to die."⁶⁰ This short sentence, "Death is going to die," makes Asriel resemble Lord Voldemort in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. Actually Voldemort's aim is to triumph over death: "I, who have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality. You know my goal – to conquer death."⁶¹ This common point with Rowling's famous Dark Lord makes Lord Asriel less likeable. Lord Asriel also shares some physical aspects with Voldemort. Both of them are handsome and impressive, they inspire respect. When he was young, Lord Voldemort, who was still known as Tom Riddle, used to be a very attractive boy: "His was the most handsome face and he looked the most relaxed of all the boys."⁶² In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, Voldemort seduces an old lady to try and steal her two precious relics: "'I'd be glad to

⁵⁷ Burton HATLEN. "Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman's Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*," in LENZ, Millicent and SCOTT, Carole, *op.cit.*, p. 87.

⁵⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Subtle Knife*, *op.cit.*, p. 250.

⁵⁹ "We could find the source of Dust and stifle it forever!" Philip PULLMAN. *The Golden Compass (Northern Lights)*, *op.cit.*, p. 396; "He's a-going to find the Authority and kill Him." Philip PULLMAN. *The Subtle Knife*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

⁶⁰ Philip PULLMAN. *Northern Lights*, *op.cit.*, p. 377.

⁶¹ J.K. ROWLING. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 2000, p. 708.

⁶² J.K. ROWLING. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, 2005, p.346.

see anything Miss Hepzibah shows me,' said Voldemort quietly, and Hepzibah gave another girlish giggle. (...) [Voldemort's] greedy expression was curiously mirrored on Hepzibah's face, except that her tiny eyes were fixed upon Voldemort's handsome features."⁶³ When we encounter Lord Asriel in *Northern Lights*, he is described as "a tall man with powerful shoulders, a fierce dark face, and eyes that seemed to flash and glitter with savage laughter. It was a face to be dominated by or to fight: never a face to patronize and pity."⁶⁴ Moreover, none of them hesitates to kill to reach his goal. In order to create Horcruxes, magical objects that contain a part of the soul and that can prevent from dying, Voldemort kills several people: "Killing rips the soul apart. The wizard intent upon creating a Horcrux would use the damage to his advantage."⁶⁵ And Lord Asriel will sacrifice young Roger Parslow, the friend Lyra tried to save, because he needs the power generated by the process of intercision to build a bridge leading to other worlds.⁶⁶ But Voldemort is the more selfish of them. Voldemort wants immortality for himself alone, whereas Asriel, in pursuing his personal aim, will serve the interests of the whole mankind.

Lord Asriel is completing "a war fought in Heaven aeons ago."⁶⁷ This is where the influence of Milton and *Paradise Lost* intervenes. For David Colbert, author of the *Magical Worlds* books, *Paradise Lost* is "a story about an ambitious villain, a cunning plan to rule the world, and a great battle to settle the fate of humankind."⁶⁸ This summary can be applied to *His Dark Materials* as well. Except that in *His Dark Materials* the

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 407-408.

⁶⁴ Philip PULLMAN. *Northern Lights*, op.cit., p.13.

⁶⁵ J.K. ROWLING. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, op.cit., p.465.

⁶⁶ "There was something else that happened when they made the cut (...). The energy that links body and daemon is immensely powerful."; "[Roger's] body, suddenly limp in hers; and high above, the greatest wonder. At the moment he felt still, the vault of heaven, star-studded, profound, was pierced as if by a spear. A jet of light, a jet of pure energy released like an arrow from a great bow, shot upward from the spot where Lord Asriel had joined Roger's daemon." Philip PULLMAN. *Northern Lights*, op.cit., pp. 375 and 393.

⁶⁷ Lance PARKIN and Mark JONES. Op.cit., p.93.

⁶⁸ David COLBERT. Op.cit., p. 6.

“villain”, Lord Asriel, is not really a villain. Like William Blake and other Romantics authors such as Byron and Shelley, Pullman sees Satan as the true hero of *Paradise Lost*, because Satan enables Adam and Eve, and thus mankind, to be free.⁶⁹ There is a little contradiction here because for Pullman Mary Malone is the Satan figure, but at the same time this role can be fulfilled by Asriel. Thus we have two Satans in *His Dark Materials*. It is obvious that with his personality, Asriel cannot play the role that Mary Malone plays in the story. He is a leader, a warrior, not a mentor, not even a kind person. Lyra does not trust him enough for him to be the tempter. Moreover, dividing Satan into two characters can be a means for Pullman to distinguish his own story from *Paradise Lost*, to show that his story is not simply a re-telling of Milton’s poem but a re-reading. As Pullman explains in the introduction he has written for a re-edition of *Paradise Lost*: “there are many ways of telling the same story (...). Inevitably, the storyteller’s own preoccupations become visible in the emphasis and the colouring they give to this or that aspect of the tale.”⁷⁰ Pullman chose to put the emphasis on the Fall. In the Genesis, a serpent makes Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. It is not made clear that this serpent is the Devil:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? (...) And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.⁷¹

But people are used to take it for granted that the Devil, disguised as a serpent, tempted

⁶⁹ Burton HATLEN. *Op.cit.*, p 86.

⁷⁰ Philip PULLMAN. In MILTON, John, *Paradise Lost*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

⁷¹ *King James Version of the Bible* [Online]. [ref. of April 22, 2006] Available at: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Gen/Gen003.html>

Eve. Milton does as well. In his poem, Satan tempts Eve because he wants to free her and Adam from God. He claims:

[k]nowledge forbidden?
(...) can it be sin to know,
Can it be death? And do they only stand
By ignorance, is that their happy state,
The proof of their obedience and their faith?⁷²

Of course, Milton did not intend his Satan to be a hero. Gregory Maguire reminds us that “Milton’s work (...) is driven by devotion.”⁷³ In the argument of Book II, Milton specifies that Satan “confirms himself in evil.”⁷⁴ It is the way Milton made Satan justify himself that made Satan an ambiguous entity – just as Lord Asriel is ambiguous in *His Dark Materials*. If one reads *Paradise Lost* with a strong Christian background, like C.S. Lewis for instance, who wrote *A Preface to Paradise Lost*,⁷⁵ he will see Satan as the villain, because it is what he has been taught. A person who has never heard the story of Adam, Eve and the Fall may react differently. In his introduction to *Paradise Lost*, Pullman confides an anecdote about a semi-literate old man being read Milton’s poem, which he did not know. The man exclaimed: “By God! I know not what the outcome may be, but this Lucifer is a damned fine fellow, and I hope he may win!”⁷⁶ Just after this anecdote, Pullman writes that it is exactly what he thinks himself.⁷⁷ It is with this idea in mind that he wrote his masterpiece. Though Asriel may be cruel and selfish, in wanting to destroy the Authority he helps Lyra and allows the Fall to take place for the second time. Throughout the story, Asriel and Marisa Coulter do not show real parental feelings for Lyra. It is when they sacrifice themselves to kill Metatron, the Lord Regent, that they

⁷² John MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, 2005, p. 120.

⁷³ Gregory MAGUIRE. “Pull Up a Chair,” in YEFFETH, Glenn, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

⁷⁴ John MILTON. *Paradise Lost*, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

⁷⁵ C.S. LEWIS. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, 1967.

⁷⁶ Philip PULLMAN. In MILTON, John, *Paradise Lost*, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

play their role of parents in protecting Lyra and allowing her to grow up: “ ‘But [Metatron]’s only an angel, after all, even if he was once a man. And we can wrestle with him and bring him to the edge of the gulf, and we’ll both go down with him...’ [Mrs. Coulter says]. [Lord Asriel] kissed her, saying, ‘Yes. Lyra will be safe, and the Kingdom will be powerless against her.’ ”⁷⁸ The necessity of growing up is the real meaning of the trilogy. “[M]y story resolved itself into an account of the necessity of growing up, and a refusal to lament the loss of innocence. (...) [I]f we are going to do any good in the world, we have to leave childhood behind,” Pullman asserts.⁷⁹ Leaving childhood behind is exactly what Lyra has to do in order to save her world and the others. Dust stops falling into the abyss the moment she and Will kiss, the moment they stop being children. And at the end of the story she chooses to go back to her world rather than staying with Will. This corresponds to Bruno Bettelheim’s idea that growing up implies to choose according to the “reality principle” rather than the “pleasure principle,” that is to say making reasonable choices.⁸⁰ The choice Lyra makes shows that she is more mature than at the beginning of the story.⁸¹ Moreover in *His Dark Materials*, as in most of stories of this kind, the parents of Will and of Lyra are not present as true parents in the story. Will’s mother is mentally disordered – the boy has to be her father in a sense – and his father, John Parry, has disappeared during an expedition in the North. Lyra’s parents are supposed to be dead. In reality, Will and Lyra are no orphans. They will learn who their parents are but lose them before the end of the story. Lyra’s parents, Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter, die in a rather spectacular way: “Lyra’s mother stood and found her footing and leapt with all her heart, to hurl herself against the angel and her dæmon and her dying

⁷⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, *op.cit.*, p. 406.

⁷⁹ Philip PULLMAN. In MILTON, John, *Paradise Lost*, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

⁸⁰ Bruno BETTELHEIM. *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, 1977, p. 42.

⁸¹ It can be notice that in George Lucas’s *Star Wars*, Anakin Skywalker makes the opposite choice and the consequences are dramatic: Anakin chooses his personal interest rather than the interest of mankind, he falls onto the dark side of the Force, becomes Darth Vader and cannot live as Anakin anymore.

lover, and seize those beating wings, and bear them all down together into the abyss.”⁸² And Will’s father is killed by a witch just after they have recognized each other.⁸³ The parents withdraw to leave the place to their children. This is reinforced by the fact that Will has to “take up [his father’s] mantle.”⁸⁴ When his father dies, Will does it symbolically and literally by continuing his father’s mission and putting his father’s cloak on his shoulder: “He unfastened the bronze buckle at the dead man’s throat and swung the canvas pack over his shoulder before wrapping the cloak around himself.”⁸⁵ As the story progresses Will and Lyra become emancipated, they liberate themselves from the dependence on their parents. The absence of the parents is necessary in a *Bildungsroman*, a story about growing up, because it forces the hero to become mature earlier and quicker than the other children, so that the reader can see the progression between the limits of the story.

In Pullman’s story, growing up also means to free oneself from what Freud calls the religious illusion.⁸⁶ In *Harry Potter, les raisons d’un succès*, Isabelle Smadja explains that maturity implies the acceptance of our mortality.⁸⁷ This is what Pullman means when he writes that “for us there is no elsewhere.”⁸⁸ One must forget the illusion created by the Church that we will live forever in Heaven. In living in order to deserve an eternal life, one forgets to live for life’s sake. For Bettelheim the beliefs in gods to solve the big questions of the universe are “childish projections.”⁸⁹ “[R]ich as the Bible is in stories, not even during the most religious of times were these stories sufficient for meeting all

⁸² Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 409.

⁸³ “And there came just the first flicker of something else to both of them. But in that same moment, as the lantern light flared over John Parry’s face, something shot down from the turbid sky, and he fell back dead before he could say a word, an arrow in his failing heart.” Philip PULLMAN, *The Subtle Knife*, op.cit., p. 321.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁸⁶ Isabelle SMADJA. Op.cit., p. 107.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.107.

⁸⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 363.

⁸⁹ Bruno BETTELHEIM. Op.cit., p. 51.

the psychic needs of man,” he explains.⁹⁰ Pullman may have read Freud and Bettelheim or not, but it is obvious that he has the same ideas. Like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the two Satan figures in *His Dark Materials*, Lord Asriel and Mary Malone, fight to free mankind from its dependence on God, which represents parental oppression, and give it access to knowledge, that is to say maturity.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.53.

Chapter 2. Paradise found again

This chapter is entitled “Paradise *found again*” rather than “Paradise *regained*” after Milton’s sequel to *Paradise Lost* because “found again” suggests a more active search for Heaven than “regained.” In the Bible, Jesus Christ comes and suffers to redeem humankind. God forgives their sins. Pullman’s idea is that people have to create Heaven and work hard to deserve it and not wait for divine intervention because we have no proof that God exists. On his official website he admits: “there may well be a God somewhere, hiding away. Actually, if he is keeping out of sight, it's because he's ashamed of his followers and all the cruelty and ignorance they're responsible for promoting in his name. If I were him, I'd want nothing to do with them.”⁹¹ Human beings are the only ones capable of building Heaven and they must build it here on Earth, because we do not know what comes after, there may be nothing. But before creating the Republic of Heaven, we have to ask ourselves what it should be like, what would make our lives better.

2.1. The Republic of Heaven

He [John Parry] meant the Kingdom was over, the Kingdom of Heaven, it was all finished. (...) [W]e’ve got to study and think and work hard, all of us, in all our different worlds, and then we’ll build (...) [t]he Republic of Heaven.⁹²

By the end of the story, the heroes of *His Dark Materials* have become more mature. They have lost their childish illusions, especially the one of immortality by

⁹¹ Philip PULLMAN. “Philip-Pullman.com,” op.cit..

⁹² Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 518.

destroying the Kingdom of Heaven. This is necessary for their development according to Freud.⁹³ But this does not mean that Will and Lyra must be left on their own in the world. They still are very young, they still need some guidelines. This is why they will have adults to guide them and help them become full grown-ups. For Will, this mentor is Mary Malone because she is the only one in his world who has passed through the same experiences. She will also become his tutor and thus offer him a real home, which he cannot have with his own mother. Lyra turns to a woman scholar who can teach her how to read the alethiometer again. Both Will and Lyra have to build the Republic of Heaven, “a realm where authority is democratised, so what were once the king’s responsibilities become our own.”⁹⁴ Pullman never tells exactly what the Republic of Heaven could be like, and the authors who wrote about *His Dark Materials* did not really examine the question in detail. Dave Hodgson’s “A New Eve: Evolution of Sustainability across Many World” seems to be the only article directly related to the Republic of Heaven, and it mostly deals with natural selection. The question to ask is how may the Republic of Heaven be like? What is it? In which way is it different from the Kingdom of Heaven and how is that to be perceived?

Pullman gives a clue of what the Republic of Heaven may be like through the *mulefa*’s world, which seems to be an idealistic world. It is, in my opinion, the closest image of what Pullman wants for human beings. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary Malone observes that the *mulefa* “could discuss without quarrelling and cooperate without getting in each other’s way.”⁹⁵ They live in harmony with each other. Mutual help, which initially results from their physical abilities or inabilities,⁹⁶ is an important element of

⁹³ Isabelle SMADJA. *Op.cit.*, p. 107.

⁹⁴ David BOULTON. “The republic of children” [Online]. [ref. of April 23, 2006] Available at: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,2763,930278,00.html>>

⁹⁵ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, *op.cit.*, p. 365.

⁹⁶ The *mulefa* have no arms, only one trunk they can use as such, so they need the help of a peer to do some simple tasks, such as making knots.

their culture. The *mulefa* also live in interdependence with nature. They care for their environment, even if this word is not directly mentioned. They live thanks to and for the seedpod trees. What Pullman wants to draw his readers' attention on through the *mulefa*, is the need for people to take care of their environment as well as of one another. He wishes what Dave Hodgson describes as "a new population of humans with responsibilities for a vast biological empire of behavioural and ecological goodness."⁹⁷

In his article " 'And He's A-Going to Destroy Him': Religious Subversion in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," Bernard Schweitzer summarizes well what Pullman seems to want for the world:

gender equality (Lyra becomes the saviour), tolerance of sexual orientation (there are homosexual angels), affirmation of sex (the salvation at the end of the book is keyed into sexual consummation), celebration of the life force (the dæmons are a symbol of animal vitality), tolerance toward other races and ethnicities (the book's multicultural agenda is reinforced by its elaboration of multiple worlds), and anti-imperialism (one of the story's collective heroes, the *mulefa*, are threatened by foreign invaders).⁹⁸

What would also be different in Pullman's Republic of Heaven is the status of women. In our world, women had to "fight" to gain the freedom and rights that they have now, and they still are not on an equal level with men. In the Republic of Heaven women would have a better status right from the beginning. In the world as we know it, men rule because they claimed themselves the stronger sex, because Eve, a woman, ate the fruit and they accused her of all the evils on earth. If the sin is eventually not a sin, Eve would be a heroine and women would rule the world because mankind would be free thanks to a woman. This is a very feminist vision of the world. Actually Pullman can be called a

⁹⁷ Dave HODGSON. "A New Eve: Evolution of Sustainability across Many Worlds," in YEFFETH, Glenn, *op.cit.*, p. 155.

⁹⁸ Bernard SCHWEITZER. " 'And He's A-Going to Destroy Him': Religious Subversion in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," in YEFFETH, Glenn, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

feminist. He has already given his point of view about women's emancipation in the *Sally Lockhart* series. His heroine, Sally, is a woman who breaks the conventions of her time; she has her own office and a traditionally masculine job, she lives with two unmarried men and had a child without being married herself. Moreover she smokes occasionally, has a small collection of guns – she is relatively good at shooting – and does not hesitate to kill when she feels that it is the only solution, that it is the best thing to do: “if the only way to save Harriet was to kill that man, I wouldn't think twice about it. I'd pull the trigger cheerfully,” she says when a man wants to take her daughter Harriet away from her.⁹⁹ It is uncommon for a woman of the Victorian time: “[l]adies didn't behave like this. They didn't carry guns; they didn't display passion.”¹⁰⁰ In several myths and beliefs, women play a part in the evolution of humankind – the so-called Sin; Eve, a woman, ate the fruit. In the Greek mythology, Pandora, a woman again, opened the box, liberating all the evils, and allowed mankind the knowledge of good and evil. In Pullman's trilogy, it is always a woman who commits the “Sin” in every version of the Original Sin that he creates for his worlds, and the rebel angel, Xaphania, who discovered the truth about the Authority and helps Lord Asriel leading his rebellion, is a female angel. The future of mankind is in the hands of women – after all, it is still mainly women who raise children and teach them moral values. Pullman's Republic of Heaven is a very positive and feminist view of the world.

Nicholas Tucker, author of *Darkness Visible: Inside the world of Philip Pullman*, says that *His Dark Materials* “is a strongly humanist text, celebrating the abiding existence of human courage and essential goodness.”¹⁰¹ Actually Pullman says through his story that people have to create their own Heaven, they have to create a better world because the one we used to know was becoming more and more oppressing. Pullman

⁹⁹ Philip PULLMAN. *The Tiger in the Well*, op.cit., p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰¹ Nicholas TUCKER. Op.cit., p. 167.

believes in the goodness of mankind. Even bad people can change. We can see it in the book thanks to Marisa Coulter. At the beginning of the world, she is ambitious and cruel. She takes sides with the ones who have power. Nevertheless as the story progresses, she begins to think that Lord Asriel is not completely wrong, that the Church is “suffocating” humanity, and she decides to help Asriel and to save her daughter and the world. Human beings do not need religion anymore to create a better world. As Andrew Marr writes: “What [Pullman] 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.”¹⁰² We can find again Freud’s idea that we must forget our religious illusions in order to go on in life. “The establishment of the republic shifts the responsibility from authority figures to individuals, from dogma to free will.”¹⁰³ This as well means growing up. People are able to think by themselves and need to experience all the pleasures that life brings.

Pullman is an epicurean. He wants a world where everybody can enjoy every little earthly pleasure, where they can live their full lives with their moments of joy and sadness. People should live their lives intensely, and not wait for a hypothetical heavenly afterlife. “It’s very easy to forget how wonderful it is to have nerves and sense organs and to feel extraordinary pleasures – even something as simple as a cool breeze on a hot day. (...) They’re all part of this extraordinary business of having a body and being alive. We shouldn’t forget these things.”¹⁰⁴ And of course, sex is part of these pleasures. For Pullman, sexuality is natural and should not be repressed. It is one of the reasons why he denies the Church, though he was raised in Christian faith. Repressing sexuality means

¹⁰² Andrew MARR. “Pullman does for atheism what CS Lewis did for God” [Online]. [ref. of January 30, 2006] Available at :

<[http://www.portal.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml;jsessionid\\$TDHI2TQAAAY1JQFIQMFSFGGAVCBQ0IV0?xml=/opinion/2002/01/24/do2401.xml&sSheet=/opinion/2002/01/24/ixop.html](http://www.portal.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml;jsessionid$TDHI2TQAAAY1JQFIQMFSFGGAVCBQ0IV0?xml=/opinion/2002/01/24/do2401.xml&sSheet=/opinion/2002/01/24/ixop.html)>

¹⁰³ Lance PARKIN and Mark JONES. *Op.cit.*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁴ Philip PULLMAN. Quoted in DODD, Celia, “Debate: Human nature: Universally acknowledged” [Online]. [ref. of January 30, 2006] Available at: <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/printFriendly/0,,1-100-1100513,00.html>>

contradicting human nature because sex is part of it. In *His Dark Materials* the obsession of the Magisterium in keeping people in a state of “innocence” is dangerous. The Church wants to infantilize people, this is where its aversion for sex plays a part because children are not supposed to have sex, and non-sexual human beings would be childish human beings. And this is where the Magisterium makes a mistake, for children are not that innocent. William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* already described cruel and violent young boys who, without adults and their wisdom and experience, regress and become real savages. In Pullman’s *The Subtle Knife*, the children from Cittàgazze resemble the boys of *The Lord of the Flies* in the sense that there are no more grown-ups to teach them what is good and what is bad, and they seem to turn naturally to the evil side; they steal, they throw stones at a poor cat, and they take arms against Will and Lyra, who they really want to kill:

The children were coming out of the trees, one by one, maybe forty or fifty of them. Many of them were carrying sticks. At their head was the boy in the striped T-shirt, and it wasn’t a stick that he was carrying: it was a pistol. (...) [T]he other children, too, were yelling and waving their fists in the air. Two of them were lugging heavy rifles. Will had seen children in this mood before, but never so many of them, and the ones in his town didn’t carry guns.¹⁰⁵

The Magisterium is wrong to believe that children can only do good – in Pullman’s trilogy, even angels can kill¹⁰⁶ – and if they do it, they do it without knowing it. One needs to know what evil is to really be aware of what goodness is. Pullman had already evoked the theme of the loss of innocence in his novel *The Butterfly Tattoo*,

¹⁰⁵ Philip PULLMAN. *The Subtle Knife*, op.cit., p. 226.

¹⁰⁶ At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, the angel Balthamos kills Father Gomez, the assassin priest, to prevent the murder of Lyra: “Balthamos, desperate, ignored the dæmon stinging his face and his eyes and his mouth, and used all the little weight he had to hold the man’s head down in the water, and he kept it there, and kept it there, and kept it there.” (Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 467.) Moreover, many of Lord Asriel’s soldiers are angels.

written three years before *Northern Lights*. In this novel, the young hero, Chris, learns that “[l]osing that innocence is the first step on the road to *real* knowledge.”¹⁰⁷ In *The Butterfly Tattoo*, Pullman already explains what Original Sin means to him:

“We’re not innocent; we *know*. (...) The Garden of Eden – you know that story? The tree of knowledge of good and evil. (...) Before you eat the fruit you’re innocent, whatever you do is innocent, because you don’t understand. Then you eat it. And you’re never innocent again. You *know* now.”¹⁰⁸

The Church depicted in *His Dark Materials* wants a world where Original Sin has never been committed, where people are ignorant of what evil is. The Magisterium wants people to be “[l]ike children. Like sheep. No sheep can do evil, because it’s innocent, right? But no sheep can do good, either. If you don’t know what it is, you can’t do it.”¹⁰⁹ In Pullman’s Republic of Heaven, as Sin has been committed – and is celebrated – people could choose deliberately to be good because they know that it is good, and not because it is the only solution offered to them as it was in the Garden of Eden. And for Pullman, it is a superior form of goodness: “You can’t do good unless you stop being innocent. All the real good in the world is done by people who’ve tasted the fruit of that tree.”¹¹⁰

2.2. Is Pullman a real atheist?¹¹¹

As Pullman writes on his website, he thinks that God is dead.¹¹² He has lost his faith in God. Nevertheless, he is still profoundly marked by his Christian background, by

¹⁰⁷ Philip PULLMAN. *The Butterfly Tattoo*, 2005, p.156.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹¹¹ My principal source for this part is the interview for the Christian magazine *Third Way* and which is called “Heat and Dust,” because, in this interview, Pullman seems very sincere about what he really thinks and less anti-Christian than in his articles.

¹¹² Philip PULLMAN. “Philip-pullman.com,” [op.cit.](http://philip-pullman.com).

the influence of his grandfather who was a priest. His grandfather taught young Philip that “God is gentle with us,” that “he loves us and wants us to come to him.”¹¹³ Pullman certainly used to love this God, but he cannot find him anymore. He confesses that since his adolescence, religion does not make sense for him, that “it began to seem impossible to reconcile the creation story with the scientific account” and that “nowhere in [the] knowledge available to me do I see the slightest evidence for God.”¹¹⁴ In his mind, science has taken the advantage over religion, because scientific facts can be proven, religious ones cannot. His attitude is the one of Saint Thomas Aquinas: he needs proofs to believe. Moreover, Pullman deplors that “[e]very single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up by persecuting other people and killing them because they don’t accept him.”¹¹⁵ He thinks that Jesus Christ set up some guidelines that can help us be better people. “What a pity the Church doesn’t listen to him,” he declares in “Heat and Dust.”¹¹⁶ The teachings of Jesus – and of the other founders of religions, like Buddha or Mohammed for example – were based on love and tolerance, but they seem to be forgotten when we see the acts of intolerance, and even hatred, that have been and still are committed in the name of God. It is understandable that Pullman does not want to belong to a religion which does not coincide anymore with his ideas and beliefs.

Nevertheless the influence of his Christian education is visible in his work. In *His Dark Materials*, he often uses a Christian imagery. Nicholas Tucker also notices this fact in his book *Darkness Visible*.¹¹⁷ When, in *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra tells her story to the ghosts in the land of the dead, the description Pullman makes of her makes her look like a prophet: “and then Lyra reached the tree and sat down on one of the thick roots. So many

¹¹³ Philip PULLMAN. “Heat and Dust,” op.cit.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ “Pullman makes use of Biblical stories and imagery throughout *His Dark Materials*, even though his feelings have now turned against the Christian religion that he no longer believes in.” Nicholas TUCKER. Op.cit., p.6.

dead figures clustered around, pressing hopefully, wide-eyed.”¹¹⁸ In this scene she resembles Jesus Christ who is often depicted sitting under a tree, surrounded by children, when he tells his parables. And the ghosts are looking at Lyra completely trustfully, because she is the one who has come to save them. She has sacrificed herself for them when she abandoned her dæmon to enter the land of the dead. She is a Christ-like figure for the ghosts. Later on, Pullman associates her name with the expression “full of grace” which makes her look like the Virgin Mary.¹¹⁹ Lyra appears as a religious, biblical figure. She was born to redeem humanity and is described as a saint. She will eventually sacrifice her love story with Will in order to make her world a better place. The Christian imagery already appeared in a former book by Pullman, *The Butterfly Tattoo*. At the end of the story, the villain is described as a real devil. The match he has lit “illuminated is face like hellfire. His expression wasn’t human.”¹²⁰ He claims: “This is the pit of hell. (...) I’m a demon, me. I’m a killer. I’m the angel of death.”¹²¹ This description is closer to the classical Christian representation of the Devil than to the likeable Satan who helps Adam and Eve on their way towards wisdom, as Pullman sees him in *Paradise Lost*.¹²²

Pullman seems to be ambivalent. He sometimes appears to be divided between his Christian background and his profound belief in science – this ambivalence appears in his novel *The Broken Bridge* when he writes “It was another still, sunny day (...). It might have been a blessing, Ginny thought; on the other hand, it might have been the greenhouse effect.”¹²³ Science is the starting point of his atheism. His belief in science is stronger than his belief in God. But at the same time, he seems to miss God. We can notice that with what the ex-nun Mary Malone answers Will when he asks her if she

¹¹⁸ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p. 314.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

¹²⁰ Philip PULLMAN. *The Butterfly Tattoo*, op.cit., p.180.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹²² Philip PULLMAN. In MILTON, John, *Paradise Lost*, op.cit., p. 1.

¹²³ Philip PULLMAN. *The Broken Bridge*, 2001, p.102.

misses God by the end of *The Amber Spyglass*: “ ‘Yes,’ Mary said, ‘terribly. And I still do. And what I miss most is the sense of being connected to the whole of the universe. I used to feel I was connected to God like that, and because he was there, I was connected to the whole of his creation. But if he’s not there, then...’ ”¹²⁴ When she left the Church and stopped being a nun, she felt free, but “in a universe without purpose.”¹²⁵ With her discovery of Dust and of other worlds, with the new experience she has acquired, she feels that “everything [is] throbbing with purpose and meaning,” but still, “it [is] impossible to find a connection because there [is] no God.”¹²⁶ Pullman believes that God is dead, but the place God leaves remains empty. It has to be filled by something else, we need something to make the connection between us and the world around us. That is what he expresses through Mary Malone’s still looking for God in a sense. “[W]e need Heaven nonetheless, we need all the things that Heaven meant, we need joy, we need a sense of purpose in our lives, we need a connection with the universe,” he affirms.¹²⁷ But we need it when we are still alive and we should not wait. This is what he means by the Republic of Heaven and by maintaining that we have to build it where we are. There is no proof of the existence of an afterlife, as there is no proof of the existence of God.

However Pullman does not totally reject the teachings of the Christian religion. For him whatever we learn that can help us be better people is good to take: “Whatever we can find that we feel to be good – and not just feel but can see with the accumulated wisdom that we have as we grow up, and read about history and learn from our own experiences and so on – wherever they come from, and whoever taught them in the first place, let’s use them and do whatever we can do to make the world a bit better.”¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, op.cit., p.447.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

¹²⁷ Philip PULLMAN. Quoted in HITCHENS, Peter, “This is the most dangerous author in Britain” [Online]. [ref. of March 7, 2006] Available at: <<http://home.wlv.ac.uk/~bu1895/hitchens.htm>>

¹²⁸ Philip PULLMAN. “Heat and Dust,” op.cit.

Knowing what Pullman confesses about his faith, it is not very fair to label him as strictly anti-religious. He does not definitely hate religion. By reading the more political articles that he has written, for instance “The war on words,” we understand that in fact he is against any form of authority that exercises too much power over people and deprives them of too many liberties; he is not against religion only.¹²⁹ I do not think that Pullman is a complete atheist. He is a believer in his own way. Kate Kellaway, remarks in “A wizard with worlds” that Pullman is “not short of faith but he believes in humanity and in goodness, not in God.”¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Philip PULLMAN. “The war on words” [Online]. [ref. of April 17, 2006] Available at: <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1343733,00.html#article_continue>

¹³⁰ Kate KELLAWAY. “A wizard with worlds” [Online]. [ref. of April 17, 2006] Available at: <<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,638058,00.html>>

CONCLUSION

In his trilogy, Pullman raises intelligent questions and gives his own point of view about religion and the meaning of Original Sin. *His Dark Materials* is his best and most acclaimed story. There are few books for children that receive such an attention as Philip Pullman's now famous trilogy. There are even less that are on one hand praised, and on the other hand criticized and attacked to such an extent that some people want to see them burnt¹³¹. The majority of people opposed to the books only sees in them anti-Christian propaganda, whereas it is obvious that Pullman did not limit himself to that. Of course he did affirm through the character of Mary Malone in *The Amber Spyglass* that "[t]he Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake,"¹³² but in fact he does not try to convince anybody. With his books, he is just telling a story, as he explains in "Heat and Dust," the interview for the Christian magazine *Third Way*.¹³³ Actually religious movements are eager to condemn books that seem to contradict the teachings of the Church. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories are among these controversial books. They are thought to be a plea for wizardry. Anyway the Church tends to criticize everything that is popular. If Pullman's and Rowling's books provoke so many reactions from the public it is thanks to the cultural context. They would not have attracted the attention so much some decades ago. There are articles and books written about them, whereas it is not the case for the largest part of books for children. This phenomenon touches essentially four series of books for children and young adults: Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. This is not a coincidence. These four stories are all about

¹³¹ John CORNWELL. "Some enchanted author" [Online]. [ref. of January 30, 2006] Available at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2099-1311328_1.00.html>

¹³² Philip PULLMAN. *The Amber Spyglass*, *op.cit.*, p. 441.

¹³³ Philip PULLMAN. "Heat and Dust," *op.cit.*

other worlds that seem very realistic and, except for *The Lord of the Rings*, about children who, thanks to the qualities they discover in themselves, can achieve grand things. This kind of stories have become very popular since the mid 90's – the period when the first volume of *His Dark Materials* was published. Of course Tolkien's saga had been already famous for about forty years in several countries, whereas the *Narnia* books seemed to be known only in the English-speaking countries. In France, *The Chronicles of Narnia* were almost completely unknown until J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* stories began to be successful. Taking advantage of the popularity of *Harry Potter*, the French editor Gallimard launched a new colourful edition of the *Narnia* books, claiming that they were a source of inspiration for J.K. Rowling. But what really made French children, and perhaps adults as well, get interested in the *Narnia* stories was the broadcasting of the movie *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in December 2005. *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* have already been released in cinemas in 2001 and the first part of the movie *His Dark Materials* is scheduled for 2007. Why such an infatuation for this sort of stories? Pullman would explain that it is because “[w]e all need some sort of myth. Some sort of over-arching narrative to live by.”¹³⁴ He would also add: “For hundreds of years in the West, this need was fulfilled by the Christian story, but that is now either dead or dying.”¹³⁵ Without accusing the possible ineffectiveness of the Christian religion, and of religion in general, it is clear that nowadays, people miss landmarks in their lives and they look for role models in books or movies, able to teach them some values. Children are eager to identify with the heroes of their favourite books, movies or cartoons. That helps them grow up. This is why, in my opinion, fantastic stories, and these four stories in particular, are so successful. Even children who do not like books read them, and this is very significant. These stories are about young heroes whose life is not easy, who are

¹³⁴ Philip PULLMAN. Quoted in McCRUM, Robert, “Dæmon geezer” [Online]. [ref. of April 17, 2006] Available at: <<http://books.guardian.co.uk/whitbread2001/story/0,11169,640032,00.html>>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

orphans. More and more children do not have a traditional family structure with a mother and a father, they are often raised by a single parent and sometimes parents are not really present for their children, thus children easily identify with orphan heroes. But in spite of their unlucky background, these young heroes manage to become good people. Children need this kind of stories, and editors have well understood it. More and more fantastic sagas, starring children as heroes, cover the shelves of bookshops: young Christopher Paolini's *Eragon*, the French author Pierre Bottero's *La Quête d'Ewilan*, Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* stories and so many others.

The success of fantastic stories can also be explained by the fact that fairy tales soon become too childish. Children like Manichean structures, where the hero fights the villain and wins. They like imaginary magical universes peopled with ugly creatures symbolizing the evil side. A simple look at video games or role playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Magic: The Gathering* would confirm this fancy for monsters and manly heroes very far from the image of Prince Charming in fairy tales. Girls begin to get interested in these fantastic worlds as well. The passive princess of the fairy tales, whose only role is to wait for the prince and have many children, is soon forgotten. She does not make girls dream anymore. This can be a consequence of the feminist movements. Girls do not think anymore that they have to find a husband and stay at home to take care of the children. In nowadays fantastic stories, girls often are as strong and brave as boys. And what is important for the readers is that the heroes of stories like *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials* do not need the intervention of a fairy godmother. They have magical powers themselves. This is very appealing to children because most of them wish they had magical powers to solve all their problems or simply to tidy their rooms. Stories that enable children to live their dream by proxy are really popular. The fact that adults as well read *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *His Dark*

Materials can signify a kind of regression. At the basis, adults read them to know what their children enjoy so much. But the magic is soon effective with them as well. Adults want to go back to the happy and secure world of childhood. There is more and more stress and pressure at work, and by reading books for children, adults want to escape from all that. They want to relax and expect books to be really entertaining and easy to read. Claudia Fitzherbert affirms: “Adults read J.K. Rowling because she is not complicated.”¹³⁶ They also like them for the same reason as children: after a hard day of work, adults as well wish they could clean the house and wash the dishes with a magical spell. Adults like these books because they address to the child hidden inside them.

¹³⁶ Claudia FITZHERBERT. “This Author is Original and Also Dangerous” [Online]. [ref. of April 19, 2006] Available at: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/01/23/nwhit123.xml>>

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