A Myth of Loss:

-

Religion, Death and Love

in

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

A Thesis

Submitted to Leiden University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master's Degree

In Literary Studies

Specialization English Literature and Culture

By

Durba I. Telkamp

S1496115

June 2015

Supervisor:

Michael Newton

Second Reader:

Evert van Leeuwen

Tell them stories. They need the truth. You must tell them true stories, and everything will be well, just tell them stories.

Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*

This paper is dedicated to Shudha/Dobby-chan.

First of all, thank you for reading every chapter and giving me feedback, and for discussing ideas with me, even when I made no sense whatsoever.

But most of all, thank you for existing! For being such a huge part of my life, being who you are, and being around for me every single time I needed you, and even when I didn't.

Although you might not know this, you've been a wonderful inspiration to me, and a very good reason to live.

I guess, in the end, we learned it the hard way that truth and courage work together to make a person strong and beautiful. And being true to yourself and fighting for what you believe in is what makes existence worth the effort. That's something you have done so well, besides also giving me the strength to fight for what I believe in.

I hope that by telling you stories of (my) life, pain and loss, I have not made your own life too heavy, and hope that you understand why there were not too many happy stories to tell.

Acknowledgements

Jolijn, for that one, very interesting and enlightening post-dinner discussion on loss.

Mr. Dylan, for being such a great source of happiness, and for always surprising me with your amazing, even wise way of seeing things in this world and in people.

Gerard, for all the help with being a more critical reader, and writer.

Mom, for always being so proud and happy about every small achievement.

Dulal, for giving me the idea to work with Pullman's trilogy, and for all those long evenings when I would just insist on working on the paper, and you would leave me alone.

Michael, for absolutely everything. The thesis meetings were not just helpful, but inspiring and thought provoking. And how can I forget all the suggestions you've made for things that I "could be" reading! But most of all, thank you for being understanding, and giving me the space, and tools, to reflect upon and improve the paper.

Abstract

Although the target audience of Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*, consisting of *Northern Lights* (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) might seem to be children and young adult readers, the books have also attracted numerous adult readers. In this fantasy story Pullman addresses important questions regarding issues such as religion, the existence of God and the function of belief, love, and death. But beyond all these controversial and difficult discussions, this thesis argues that the story itself is best understood as permeated by a sense of loss. In each part of the trilogy, a character ends up losing a loved one, be it a parent, child, sibling, daemon or lover. In the final book, the Authority, Pullman's vague god figure, is also killed off, resulting in a collapse of religion and the Church as an institution. His two young protagonists, Will and Lyra, travel through the world of the dead and eventually free all the souls trapped there, and these souls dissolve into elementary particles and become part of the physical world. This leads to the question of what really happens after we die, if there is no Heaven, and we simply return to the state that we were created from. This idea completely undermines what we are taught by religions such as Christianity and Islam, that there is a life after death and one will go to heaven or hell depending on their actions and choices of this life. Thus, besides a physical loss caused by death, there is also a loss of faith. Finally, this thesis will argue that through his portrayal of religion, death and love in the trilogy, Pullman presents loss as a defining element of life, and this prevalent sense of loss enables him to redefine the meaning and function of religion, death

and love in the 21st century, while also putting forward a new myth that might compensate for such losses.

Table of Contents

Introduction …… 8

Chapter I: Religion …….. 18

Chapter II: Death …….. 34

Chapter III: Love …….. 48

Chapter IV: A Myth of Loss ……... 61

Conclusion ……..... 78

Works Cited ……... 84

Introduction

Philip Pullman's highly acclaimed trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, published between 1995 and 2000, is the story of two adolescents – Lyra and Will – who journey through parallel universes, both of which resemble and are yet distinct from our own world. Besides human beings, fantastic creatures such as witches, talking bears, tiny spies, harpies, and the peaceful mulefa (who are capable of communication and use wheels to move about) populate these multiple universes. The books have become famous globally, and while there have been accusations or questions about the supposed anti-Christian nature of the stories, compared to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series the trilogy has attracted less attention and criticism from religious parties. While Pullman's trilogy is an account of the adventures of Will and Lyra, who must travel through parallel worlds, and to the world of the dead, it is also a story about matters such as growing up, learning the nature of love and loss in life, and about existential issues such as what we are meant to do with our lives. By telling a story of two children and their role in a celestial battle, Pullman also tells a story of the human condition, in which loss appears to be a defining element. It will be argued here that through the art of storytelling, Pullman attempts to formulate a myth for his readers, one that deals with loss, as well as other contemporary concerns. Stories can be an effective way of communicating ideas, since most people grow up with stories such as fairy tales and children's stories; even when we outlive our childhood, we don't simply leave the act of engaging with or reading stories behind. Stories keep us company throughout our lives, and even as adults, we are as likely to return to the fairy tales and stories of our childhood.

Regardless of what age-group or what audience stories are written for, they play a major role in the human experience of living and growing, not just in physical but also in intellectual and emotional terms; "[t]he power of stories to shape consciousness and affect action has been recognized since time immemorial" (Naugle 1). Thus, stories may influence our development as human beings and also be involved in moulding us into who we are. Additionally, it can be argued is through stories and myths that "the truth is best communicated" (Rayment-Pickard 15). One reason why stories might be the best means of communicating the truth could be because "[c]hildren are not transformed through instruction, argument, or any form of manipulation, but through their own engagement with powerful ideas and imagery" (74), which is exactly what stories provide. Stories offer experiences and, perhaps, messages to readers in a way that many didactic methods or tools, such as education or instruction manuals, fail to provide. Illustrating this process, in his book titled *The Child That Books Built* (2010), Francis Spufford discusses the effects, on his personality, of what he read during his childhood and adolescent years. In a story, the author has the liberty to discuss issues and address questions that are central to human existence, questions such as what our purpose is in life, and why we even exist to begin with. But since these questions and the possible solutions or answers are integrated into the story itself, they can create a fictional or imaginary safe space, a hypothetical realm, where the reader is able to explore his or her own ideas and difficulties, with the help of what is being discussed in a given story.

Keeping in mind the influential and complexly didactic nature of stories, and how they influence children, we must also ask ourselves what it is that we want children to learn from these stories. It is also important to question, in a

largely secular Europe and America, what kind of stories children actually need. Would stories, in which Christian values are stressed, and the promise of an afterlife in Heaven is clearly stated, still speak to the children of today, who live in a world where matters such as religion, life after death, and the nature of love are brought into question? It must be kept in mind that:

> [l]ate modernity is [yet another] time for uninhibited questioning of authorities, a time for seeing all the ghastliness of life's darker side, a time for losing the old centres which gave assurance of continuity and identity, and a time for growing out of the illusion that there is such a tool as reason which can serve as the final arbiter of truth and falsehood (Newby 74).

Thus, if children and adolescents are not able to find the answers they seek in older stories based on religion and faith, where are they to look? It appears that there is a need or demand for new stories, or even a new myth, not one that celebrates God and all his promises, but one that will help readers, children and adults alike, to deal with the problems they face in a world without God. And these new stories can be fantasy, science fiction, fairy tales, or even realism, to name a few potential genres.

While fairy tales will possibly always remain a very important element in the non-institutional education of children, other genres also play an important role, such as fantasy for example. David Gooderham states that "[f]antasy literature … speaks to readers in quite other ways from those of realist [and other forms of] fiction" (159) and that "children's fantasy texts have not infrequently been an important means for the undogmatic mediation of new ideas about the world and human life to the next generation in their early and

formative years" (165). It has also been argued that "[fantasy has the power to shape and strengthen the imagination to survive the ills that flesh is heir to without buckling under their weight" (Lenz 48). Fantasy thus provides a kind of literature that enables authors to create a means of enlightening and empowering readers, and for readers to draw from their reading the inspiration, strength, meaning and hope required to flourish in the world. Somewhat like fairy tales, fantasy provides a world where borders can be transgressed, and the rules of our physical world as we know it are not necessarily applicable. In an imaginary space, writers can bring into focus big ideas such as religion, death and love, but present it in a way that is accessible for children, as well as adults.

One thing that many writers for children seem to avoid in their writing, even today, is that they fail to portray life as it really is, in all its cruelty and pain. While harshness and cruelty are indeed explored in children's literature, there remains the question of how far they can be explored, and if there are not indeed certain aspects of real life that are not suitable for young readers, such as extreme cruelty, both physical and sexual, rape, incest, or the glorification of violence, for example. Since children's literature is a form of literature that is defined by its audience, and therefore by cultural concepts of the child, there is a prevalent concern regarding what is appropriate or suitable for young readers in terms of content. Most literature meant for children tend to highlight the nicer parts of life, and even amplify them, without making extensive mention of the difficult aspects, such as anxiety and suffering for example. An author such as Philip Pullman, on the other hand, who is "daring, uninhibited, and true to the violence, perilousness, heady freedom, hopefulness and potential in life" (Newby 74), seems better able to combine aspects of life, such as violence, death and loss

into his story, while keeping in mind the limits to which young readers can be exposed to such matters. Authors, illustrators, publishers and other professional involved in producing books for children "need to take into account [children's] emotional vulnerability [since] [t]hey don't have the defences [that adults] do when reading" (Craig and Muchamore n. pag.).

Pullman is a well-known British author, and has written numerous books for children and young adults, with works ranging from "magical-realist novels … to detective stories and issue-driven 'teen' fiction dealing with race, feminism, adoption and child abuse" (Rayment-Pickard 3). He is now mainly known for his famous trilogy titled *His Dark Materials*. The essential element that sets Philip Pullman apart from a number of other authors is that although he writes stories for children, he does "not 'dumb down' the cruelty, pain or horror of the human experience. Neither does he expect children to pretend that there are no nasty sides and no struggles involved in the "attempt to be fully human and fully alive" (Earl 285); that is one of the things that make him a good writer, because he tells true stories about the experience of living. In the trilogy, he incorporates ideas of religion, death and love, which speak to the readers of a late modern era. Mary Earl remarks that *His Dark Materials* "rank[s] with the very best children's literature precisely because [it] deal[s] very effectively with [real life] issues" (283). Pullman's stories also belong to the "works of fiction" that function in "both mirroring and contributing to late-modern spiritual development" (Newby 70).

The trilogy is a "mythic saga centering on the combat between good and evil" (Newby 69), although the distinction between these two forces are not clearly delineated, and "it will take the reading of all three volumes to be sure of

the goodness or evil of all parties and forces involved" (Newby 72) and where "Christian beliefs in God, the fall and the afterlife are all radically called into question (Gooderham 155). Needless to say, his "atheistic stance … has brought Pullman plenty of criticism" (Watkins n. pag.), but also enormous renown. An important aspect of Pullman's philosophy that can be found in the trilogy is his preference for and celebration of the physical world and life, perhaps unlike authors such as C.S. Lewis, who some have argued, sees death as a means of "a release from this ghastly life on earth" (Renton n. pag.) for his characters in the Narnia stories. In an interview with Jennie Renton, Pullman states that in *His Dark Materials*, he "bang[s] the drum for the primacy of the physical world that we live in … [a]s far as [he] can see we only get one shot at life, and that is in the here and now … [so] it's a sort of betrayal of life to long for death" (qtd. in Renton n. pag.). Although Pullman appears to value the physical life or existence in this world, there is little actual joy expressed in relation the experience of living; he does not seem to portray existence in joyful, or even delightful terms.

Further, the author himself argues that the trilogy "appeals because the story it tells is all about a massive conspiracy, and we love massive conspiracies" (Pullman 657). The story "can be read at many levels, from an adventure story to a parable about the essence of human nature and how this has been betrayed {by the church?]. As [Pullman] puts it himself, it is also a story about what it means 'to be human, to grow up, to suffer, and to learn'" (Tucker 89). The trilogy centers around its two main characters, the children Lyra and Will, who "manage to overcome forces of oppression to establish a new order based on truth, honestly and love" (Tucker 90). The children are "from different universes, [and] get caught up in the most ambitious plan ever conceived by a human being,"

(Watkins n. pag.); there is a war coming, because Lord Asriel, Lyra's father, "wants to destroy God, replacing his kingdom with the Republic of Heaven" (Watkins n. pag.), and the two children have a role to play in the war and the future of all universes. During their journey Will and Lyra also travel through the land of the dead, and liberate the souls of the dead and bring them back to the world, and destroy the religious notion of an afterlife in heaven as promised by religions such as Christianity. But throughout their journey together, the children also help one another to grow and learn about life and growing up; the trilogy is also at its core a story about human life and what it entails.

Like many other fantasy stories, Pullman's trilogy is a combination of the fantastic and the realistic. Eliminating the realistic aspect would mean robbing the story of its human element, and removing the fantasy element would make it rather too mundane and drab. While it holds true that "a water-tight definition of realism" (Morris 6) is hard to put forward, scholars and critics have tried to formulate definitions to their best abilities. Erich Auerbach for example defines realism, in terms of a representational form ,"as [being] the […] serious artistic representation of everyday life" (qtd. in Morris 131). Pam Morris attempts to define realism as:

> a literary form [that] has been associated with an insistence that art cannot turn away from the more sordid and harsh aspects of human existence (3).

She also argues that we might:

> define[s] literary realism as any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing (Morris 6).

C. S. Lewis defines realism, as a mode or presentation, as "the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail" (59). Lewis also defines fantasy "as a literary term … [as] meaning any narrative that deals with impossibles or preternaturals" (50), thus pointing out the fact that literary fantasy deals with "the fantastic" (Lewis 50). While Pullman engages in writing stories for his readers that may seem like fantasy at first glance, since he is writing about 'impossibles' including different worlds that are populated by conscious beings unlike anything we know, he nonetheless treats this fantastic material realistically, in the sense given above by Lewis. This realism also relates to the psychological complexity and 'truthfulness' of his stories; he addresses existential questions that are common to many human beings. In *His Dark Materials*, one of Pullman's "achievements … has been his seamless incorporation of 'big' philosophical ideas in a palpable form accessible to the imagination of young readers" (Lenz 48). In the trilogy, "he uses his narrative to make concrete a significant number of abstract constructs … [g]ods, souls, ghosts, love, and hate are all made physical throughout the trilogy's pages" (Padley and Padley 327-8). For young readers, and to some extent also for adults, these ideas are indeed difficult to grasp, but Pullman's fiction makes them accessible and somehow comprehensible. By focusing the reader's attention on matters such as death, love and loss, Pullman draws the reader's attention to certain fundamental questions, and "explore[s] the questions he considers to be the 'most important of all': Is there a God? What does it mean to be human? What is our purpose?" (Watkins n. pag.).

In the trilogy, Pullman presents his readers with a worldview that is rather bleak, or at least unillusioned. When it comes to the matter of love, none

of Pullman's characters are given a happy ending; all relationships are somehow marked by loss and separation. He kills off the God-like figure known as the Authority, and brings about an era where religion and God as we know it does not exist anymore. With the fall of religion and God, the hope of an afterlife spent in heaven is also taken away, and death is portrayed as the end of life, though not one's existence. The ghosts of the dead, after being liberated from the land of the dead, turn into elementary particles, and become part of the physical world and live on in a different form. Thus, while "Pullman squarely acknowledges the darkness of the world," he also acknowledges the necessity to face that darkness and "affirms the possibility of creatively coping with life's ambiguities" (Lenz 49). Although stories with happy endings may be quite popular, for children of the contemporary age, it could also be said that unrealistic, idealistic stories about religion and faith, or stories with unrealistically happy endings may no longer suffice for certain readers. Rather, as Millicent Lenz explains, only when one is "[n]ourished with … stories, the imagination is made ready to accept human experience in the fullness of its contradictions, the mix of its creative and destructive qualities" (48-9). While stories, as a form of art, may not provide consolation or all the answers that one seeks, they may well provide a means of dealing with those questions and difficulties. Through stories such as Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, readers enter "into philosophical thought through a quickening of the imagination," since in stories like these, "[r]eally powerful and historically important ideas, such as authority, belief, objectivity and truth [are concretely embodied] in the events and symbols of [these] work[s]" (Newby 73). And it is precisely such stories, those that are both true and confronting, that will help to create the new myth that might be required.

According to Philip Pullman, "[w]e need a story, a myth that does what the traditional religious stories did: it must explain … [i]t must satisfy our hunger for a why," and should answer questions such as "[w]hy does the world exist? Why are we here?" (665). Furthermore, instead of a new doctrine or school of thought, "[w]e need a myth, a story, because it's no good persuading people to commit themselves to an idea on the grounds that it's reasonable" (Pullman 666). It might not be sufficient any more to provide people with fully rational and logical arguments, but rather, one must also give them stories that will allow them to explore their most basic human inquiries and fears. By writing a story such as *His Dark Materials*, Pullman seems to be working towards providing his readers with just such a myth, one that will help us to deal with the experience of being human and having to live in this world. The myth will also help readers to make sense of all the loss they must and already do face in their lives, and somehow provide a means of comprehending and coming to terms with those losses.

This thesis will argue that through his portrayal of religion, death and love in the trilogy, Pullman presents loss as a defining element, and this prevalent sense of loss enables him to redefine the meaning and function of religion, death and love in the modern era of the 21st century. His myth is, in the end, one that focuses on loss, loss of faith due to the loss of God and religion, which also means a loss of the idea of an afterlife, and also a loss of love, or the possibility of it; but that does not necessarily entail an all-encompassing loss. This loss may also make way for a different world, where we are not subject to the shackles of religious faith, and can see life in a different light and live it with different values and codes. Such loss might thus actually result in a form of

freedom, which will enable us to create a different world, a better one than the one we live in, and take full advantage of the one life that we are given.

Chapter I

Religion

-

Now that He is dead…

Alongside works of writers such as C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* has been categorized as a work of high fantasy. This does not come as a surprise since Pullman's work does include a number of the common elements of high fantasy, namely that it is set in a number of alternate universes that are populated by magical or fantastic beings such as gods, angels, talking bears, and witches. But unlike the works of his precursors, Pullman's writing incorporates and involves "much more … specific allusions to Christian institutions and concepts than is usual in high fantasy" (Gooderham 155-6). In the story, Pullman makes use of Christian tales and concepts such as "Adam and Eve's Fall, Christ's Redemption of Humankind, and the Harrowing of Hell" (Scott 96). And while authors like Lewis and Tolkien had addressed and questioned religious institutions and concepts, they neither fully challenged nor subverted those aspects. Pullman on the other hand "chips away at the very basis of Christian doctrine" (Schweizer 160), and he does so by "virtually dismantling the biblical teachings about theism, creation, original sin, and divine Providence" (Schweizer 161). In the words of Bernard Schweizer, in Pullman's "fictive world, religion is mass deception; God is a grizzled, tottering liar; his prince-regent a kind of devil; and the servants of the church are as corrupt as they are tyrannical" (160). In the trilogy, Pullman "goes much further than either of [and against] his forebears in not only rejecting corrupt human beings, but in

identifying depravity in the celestial powers" (Scott 97) and finally destroying the God-figure. Following the death of the Authority, and his Regent, Metatron, the universe is freed of the oppressive power that they had asserted over the kingdom. On the one hand, these deaths create a sort of feeling of freedom, which can enable people to explore religion and faith, but in a different, less restricted and controlled manner. But on the other hand, with these deaths there also comes a sense of loss, a loss not just of God but also of religion and faith. What does this loss mean for the future of humanity in regard to faith? What God and religion once provided, must now be fulfilled in some other way, not by cruel and oppressive figures like the Authority or his Regent, but by a new myth.

The God-like figure that the reader comes across in the story is known as 'the Authority', who is old and weak and has retreated to the shadows and left all the work to his regent, an angel called Metatron. Pullman's choice, to call him 'the Authority' is interesting because if one considers Hannah Arendt's definition of authority, it can be said that "authority is vested in someone," and that "[i]ts hallmark is unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey, [so that] neither coercion nor persuasion is needed" (qtd. in Smitha n. pag.). Furthermore, the angel Balthamos tells Will that the Authority "was never the creator [but] … [a]n angel like [themselves] – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as [they were]" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 671). This brings up the question of the validity of the Authority's power and position, since he is not the creator, but has rather put himself in that position. Pullman's story thus "establishes God as a fraud and a liar", and "[h]is moral integrity is called into question by his association with Metatron, the sexually repressed, brutal, and power-hungry Regent" (Schweizer 165). Due to the Authority's weakened state, he has had to withdraw from his celestial duties, leaving

Metatron in charge, and as Baruch informs Will, Metatron wishes to "intervene more actively in human affairs" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 696) in order to weed out any disobedience or revolt against the church and the Authority, thus creating a sort of eternal inquisition in all the universes that exist. This is due to the realization on the Authority's part that "conscious beings of every kind have become dangerously independent" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 696), and they must be controlled. The image created of God "is not [that of] a champion of mankind but rather its enemy, since He is opposed on principle to what is beautiful, enlightened, and pleasurable in life" (Schweizer 164). In the figure of the Authority, who is "an old and once powerful creature, a fallen angel and power-crazed liar … Pullman has created a figure akin to traditional depictions of the devil" (Padley and Padley 331) instead of one similar to the traditional image of God the creator. It must also be noted that "God's power in *His Dark Materials* is neither unconditional nor absolute" (Schweizer 165). Contrary to depictions of God that adhere to the Christian image, Pullman robs his Authority of the usual attributes of "God's supposed omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence" (Schweizer 165). And "[s]ince the Authority clearly has only limited power and presence, it is not surprising to find him implicitly also devoid of omniscience, seemingly unaware of all but his most immediate surroundings" (Padley and Padley 330). When Will and Lyra stumble across the Authority, just as he is about to die, they see an angel who is "old … and terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner … and [this] [d]emented and powerless … aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 993). When he is finally freed from his crystal litter, he disintegrates and eventually vanishes; the Authority ends his life as "a mystery dissolving in mystery" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 993). Given the weak

and helpless image, it can be said that "[s]uch a disoriented, feeble God has obviously no claim to omnipotence or omniscience" (Schweizer 166), and "his tottering condition in the end further dramatizes His transformation from an object of worship to an image of loathing" (Schweizer 166) and pity.

In the trilogy, the religious institution of the Church carries out the orders of the Authority. This institution also features prominently in the trilogy, and surprisingly as an evil force. The Church of Lyra's world consists of multiple organizations, namely "the Magisterium, its Consistorial Court of Discipline, Society of the work of the Holy Spirit, and the General Oblation Board" (Scott 97), which are all involved in controlling every living being and subjecting them to the laws of the Magisterium. The collective itself "is represented as a powerful and ruthlessly repressive organization, determined to root out sin and to control weak human beings" (Gooderham 155). Permeated with corruption and evil, the church in the world that Pullman has created is focused only on oppression, control and manipulation, all in the name of religion and God. In the multiple universes of *His Dark Materials*, God and religion are used as mere excuses to carry out inhuman acts that are deemed necessary by religious institutions. The witch Ruta Skadi tells the other witches of the "cruelties and horrors" she had witnessed, all of which were "committed in the name of the Authority, all designed to destroy the joys and the truthfulness of life" (Pullman *The Subtle Knife* 581). One example of these crimes would be the experiments conducted by the General Oblation Board, headed by Mrs. Coulter, which attempt to separate a child from his or her daemon, and "the point of … these forms of cutting is to control impulses and deaden feelings" (Rustin and Rustin 236), so that the children may never experience the physical and emotional aspects of growing into adulthood, and thus also stepping out of the realm of innocence and into that of experience.

The Magisterium is also ruthless in its pursuit of achieving its goals, even if that means having to kill innocent children, and that is precisely what happens when Father Gomez is granted absolution prior to his sin, and then sent out to kill Lyra. As the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, states in an interview, the church in Pullman's trilogy is "a church, as it were, without redemption" and "[i]t's entirely about control" (n. pag.). According to Jonathan and Kenneth Padley, "in the worlds of *His Dark Materials*, [their version of] Christianity and the church are bad … [because] … they are founded on lies … they tacitly endorse child abuse and they believe in murder without mercy" (326), none of which seem to be admirable or noble choices and actions. By portraying God, certain angels and the church in this manner, in the story "[t]he forces of [evil] are precisely those forces said by ancient authorities to be the forces of [good]" (Newby 73). In this light, Mike Newby states that:

> [w]hatever else is happening [in the story], the reader is challenged to consider a whole range of issues, of concepts and perspectives taken for granted, of the meanings of oppression of mind and body so guarded by the Church (73).

Besides the appropriation and subversion of Christian concepts and myths, a number of additional elements that set Pullman's works apart from those of authors like Lewis and Tolkien is his treatment and portrayal of the good and evil forces or characters, and his stance on the existence of God. Compared to Pullman's story, the works of Lewis and Tolkien, present the reader with relatively clearer distinctions between the forces of good and evil. In Tolkien's stories of Middle Earth, the over-arching sense is that the races of hobbits, dwarves and elves for example, are forces of good; however. this is somewhat contradicted by the fact that one will find that, in the case of all three races, there are hobbits, dwarves and elves who cannot be classified as fully, or only,

morally and ethically good characters; in this light, the examples of Frodo, Thorin, Boromir, and Thranduil would be relevant, for all of them make questionable choices and decisions. Indeed in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Frodo, the hero of the story, refuses at the last moment to throw the ring into the fires of Mount Doom, and it is only because of Gollum that the ring is finally destroyed. Faced with the ultimate test, Frodo fails. This clearly shows that no matter how noble one may be, or dedicated to a quest, one may miscarry in the end because he or she is incapable of being fully good. In regard to the race of men, the same rule applies, for example if one takes into consideration the character of Boromir, who is noble and courageous, but still falls prey to the power of the ring, or considers his father, Denethor, who is corrupted through his use of the *palantir*.

In Pullman's stories on the other hand, it is not always clear who is good and who is evil, for example, as is the case with the characters of Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter. Lord Asriel is initially presented to us as a noble person, with a grand mission at hand, which is "not ecclesiastical reform or even the demolition of the established Church…[but] rather, open warfare against God" (Schweizer 164), who has become weak and corrupt. But in this war, he also kills the child Roger, Lyra's friend, by severing the connection between him and his daemon, in order to open the gate to another world. Once the reader experiences Lord Asriel doing something so cruel, it might be that he cannot be seen as a noble and good character anymore, even if the reader understands or argues that his choice to kill Roger would be a small price to pay if it helped further his war against the Authority. The opposite is true in the case of Mrs. Coulter, who is the very incarnation of evil throughout the entire story, until at the very end, when she gives up her life in order to save Lyra. It is only then that we are given reason to doubt whether she is not simply an evil character, but that

there must be some goodness in her too. Thus, Pullman's characters are multi-faceted, rather than being simply good or simply evil, and both the characters of Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter "also serve as reminders that any final division of characters into good and evil is never easy and often impossible" (Tucker 151). Burton Hatlen very fittingly states that Pullman "refuses to predicate Good and Evil as cosmic forces … [r]ather, for him the words "good" and "evil" … describe certain potentials mixed together in every human being, and the relationship between them is worked out within the human heart" (80). As mentioned before, in the stories of Middle Earth, Tolkien does indeed portray various characters such as elves, hobbits or dwarves, who are generally considered to be good, as capable of making morally or ethically wrong choices and actions. While with Tolkien there is a definite existence of characters that can be a combination of both good and evil, Pullman's characters pose a more complicated matter, since the division between good and evil within any given character is harder to clarify. Pullman also adds a human dimension to these two forces by locating them within the human heart; we are finally responsible for good and evil, because we create and sustain it ourselves. Keeping this in mind, one can agree with Peter Jukes' statement during an interview that "Pullman has been simultaneously accused of making his fictional worlds too morally simplistic, and of being morally confused, allowing good characters to do dubious deeds" (n. pag.), but it is precisely this contradiction that makes the characters more interesting and humane. The complicated nature of the characters keeps the reader interested in the story because "in the moral maelstrom of Pullman's multiple worlds, [one is] never sure who is on whose side" (Meacham n. pag.). Pullman also addresses, in a certain manner, the question of whether God is still alive, or not, which is something authors such as C.S.Lewis, J.R.R.Tolkien, Madeleine L'Engle, George Macdonald, Kenneth

Grahame or Edith Nesbit may not have done. He explores the "conviction that God is dead … [and that] the divine structures have been usurped by wickedness" **(**Scott 96). In an article titled "The Republic of Heaven", Pullman states that the trilogy is "saying something about the most important subject [he] know[s], which is the death of God and its consequences" (654). Additionally, he discusses the "idea that [to him] God is dead" and he takes it "that there really is no God anymore," that "the old assumptions have all withered away" and "the idea of God with which [he] was brought up is now perfectly incredible" (Pullman 654). This brings up some of the main questions that come out of a reading of the trilogy: if God is indeed dead, what are we still doing here? What is our purpose in life? If God is dead, does that also mean that it is the end of religion and faith? Is Pullman writing about the end of God, or organized religion and religious faith, as we know it? According to Donna Freitas and Jason King:

> Pullman has by no means killed off God in general. He has killed off only one understanding of God – *God-as-tyrant* – and an oddly antiquated and unimaginative one at that. Pullman has done away with the malicious, lying, controlling, manipulating being in charge of his universe in order to put an end to unjust cruelty and domination (19).

By doing so, he has also paved the way for a world where conscious beings can freely go about their quest for both enlightenment and truth, without being hindered by religion, God, or religious institutes like the church.

Many scholars and critics have called Philip Pullman an atheist, and while he admits to being one, he also acknowledges the influence that his readings of religious texts have had on his literary career, and also admits that he finds religious questions

to be of immense importance and interest. Even with his interests rooted in religion and religious concepts and doctrine, Pullman clearly "perceives Christianity and its churches as things which have been and continue to be centres of wickedness" and "[i]n *His Dark Materials*, he writes what he perceives" (Padley and Padley 327). Although he does profess to being an atheist and does not put much faith in Christianity and the church, "Pullman [does not] wholeheartedly dismiss the notion of religion" (Padley and Padley 327), and also believes that religion does not necessarily have to be a force of evil. He also appreciates the Biblical stories and myths, which clearly have had a major influence on his own writings. For Pullman, things become complicated "when individual religious impulses start to become organized into faith collective," and that is precisely when "religion for [him] swiftly goes downhill" (Padley and Padley 327). In other words, it can be said that Pullman is against organized religion and religious intolerance. And we may feel that he quite rightly does so, for example, if one considers the issue of how religion is being used to justify religious extremism and acts of terrorism all over the globe, such as the attack of 9/11, or the countless other terrorist attacks, it appears that organized religion, when used for the wrong purposes, can be a very destructive power. Considering Pullman's views on religion, it might be valid to ask why an author who claims to be an atheist has written a story that incorporates Christian myths and doctrines. Hugh Rayment-Pickard claims that Pullman has done so because "he must use and therefore advertise Christian myth in order to subvert it" (19), and that Pullman also "engages in a contest of narratives [and] he tries to 'out-narrate' Christianity [by] tell[ing] a better story" (16). In other words, "[i]n order to attack religion, Pullman ends up telling a religious story" (Rayment-Pickard 19). But while he attacks and subverts certain core myths and concepts of Christianity in the story, "Pullman continues to employ

Christianity's humanistic ethics, traditions and values … [and] its biblical themes and narratives" (Scott 96). A crucial question that, according to Naomi Wood, we must "ask of religion as it appears in children's literature [is] whether it enlarges or constricts our view of the cosmos" (3), and additionally, whether religion confines us in a well-defined space, or rather gives us the space and freedom to explore human existence, creativity and knowledge. Instead of inhibiting our emotional and spiritual growth, as is done by organized religion and traditional religious doctrines, religion must instead be encouraging and allow humans to be involved in developing their consciousness. In Pullman's fictional world, much as in our own, it appears that "religion is the primary obstacle to human growth, blocking both personal development and cultural progress," and also that "Christianity tries to separate us from the experiences that make us human" (Rayment-Pickard 48). One of the biblical concepts that Pullman uses in his trilogy is the Fall of man, after having eaten from the tree of knowledge. The Christian church condemns this action, and labels it as the beginning of sin in the existence of man, both in our world and Lyra's. On the other hand, Pullman celebrates the fall by portraying it as "the birth of consciousness" (Lenz 4). And it appears that in his view, the fall into experience is something to be celebrated, instead of condemned. In the trilogy, a substance called Dust is presented as the embodiment of consciousness, and in extension, it "is a sign of experience, knowledge and human development" (Rayment-Pickard 65). Moreover, "Pullman's church fears Dust, because it fears real human experience … and idolizes innocence because it associates experience with error, and error with sin" (Rayment-Pickard 65). It does not wish conscious beings to be able to develop further since that will make them harder to control within the given boundaries of the church. That is precisely why they designed the experiments to separate children from their daemons, in order

to remove original sin. On the possibility of the church creating "a world without sin" (Lenz 180), such as the one in Lyra's world is trying to create, Millicent Lenz states that "such a world would be both unnatural and ultimately disastrous from the perspective of free will" (180). Since consciousness, in the form of original sin, and free will go hand in hand, "removing original sin implies the removal of free will, which would thus mean the destruction of that which makes us human" (Lenz 182). Lenz further explains that sin is something essential to human life and growth because "without sin, we would not be human and we would have nothing to strive for – ours would [then] be an empty existence" (180) and "[i]n essence, we need sin [because] without it we cannot begin to experience grace" (181). So where does one begin if one wishes to break free of the domination of such an oppressive power which attempts to root out sin, consciousness and free will from our lives?

It could be said that one of the first steps would be to get rid of or remove the God or authority that heads such a church. In *The Amber Spyglass* Pullman does this by destroying the Authority. The "death of God leaves humanity without any ready-made truths or values", since formerly "God used to provide all the moral values, universal truths and systems of meaning" (Rayment-Pickard 77). According to Pullman himself, a certain sense of being connected to things beyond our own existence provides us with a sense of meaning, since "the meaning of our lives is in their connection with something other than ourselves" (656). In regard to the role played by religion or God in the human life, Pullman further states that:

> [t[he religion that's now dead did give us that, in full measure: we were part of a huge cosmic drama, involving a Creation and a Fall and a Redemption, and Heaven and Hell. What we did mattered, because God saw everything … and one of the most deadly and

> oppressive consequences of the death of God is this sense of meaninglessness or alienation that so many of us have felt in the past century or so (Pullman "The Republic of Heaven" 656).

This sense of meaninglessness is the same one which Bernard Schweizer refers to when he states that "[t]he end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century brought with it a sense of doubt, uncertainty, and searching" (160). Myths and notions, such as Christian ones, that had once made sense were being questioned due to advances in science and technology, and they failed to provide concrete answers to the existential questions, as they might once have been able to, in earlier eras. With the traditional notion of God, religion and our existence disintegrating, is it possible to replace the older myths "with new metaphors for the human soul, and in doing so, breathe new life into our sense of our place in the world in which we live" (Vassilopoulou and Ganeri 269)? There is also the hint in the story that "there is something basically unhealthy and unethical about Christianity, and that we would be better off without it" (Rayment-Pickard 32).

For the contemporary age when the traditional notion of God and religion is no longer sufficient to provide answers, it appears that a new myth is needed. This myth, instead of providing answers to the more serious questions of life, should rather suggest ways in which to address those questions. Since "when God dies, everything changes ... [and] the truth must now be *invented* and values must be *created*" (Rayment-Pickard 77). In the trilogy, all the conscious beings who have survived the war waged against the Authority and his kingdom of heaven must now choose to work to their best ability to create and sustain a republic of heaven; in this way, Pullman "dismantle[s] the grand narrative of the Christian religion and replace[s] it with an emancipatory and "natural" humanism" (Gooderham 163). Although God is

dead, “the cosmos [still] retains all its theological meaning … humans still have a destiny … [and] there are still … ethical rules” (Rayment-Pickard 77). So, even though the figure of God is dead, it does not necessarily mean that faith or the inspiration for humans to live and still concern themselves with existential questions is also dead. It just requires a different approach, and hence the proposal of a republic of heaven. Pullman proposes a humanistic religion, which celebrates the physical and material life. This notion of the republic of heaven also encourages everyone to live good lives, and to do so not for the hope of being able to enter heaven, but to be able to create a better world and life for themselves and others in the present. Eventually, by living our lives in that manner, Pullman says that we can buy our freedom, after death, by recounting the stories of our lives. This is another area where Pullman contradicts himself in his writing; although he advocates the necessity of living good lives, none of his characters are fully good, but rather a combination of good and bad moral traits. Thus, one may be lead to question just how valid, or possible, Pullman’s insistence on living good lives really is. According to Hugh Rayment-Pickard, Pullman appears to “find Christianity life-denying and authoritarian” (90) and that “[h]e sees the church offering false promises of heaven rather than motivating people to change their real social circumstances” (89). On the contrary, “Pullman offers a humanistic religion of life and love, in place of the Christian myth of fall and redemption” (Rayment-Pickard 89). In the contemporary age, “[w]e will not be saved by God or the church, but by realizing our human potential for good and building the republic of heaven” (Rayment-Pickard 55). Thus, in the end, Pullman is attempting to substitute Christian myths “with his own story of human salvation” (Rayment-Pickard 55), which will come about because of humans themselves, and not because of some divine power. This new myth celebrates “the extraordinary fact that we’re alive in this

world, which, although it is full of rain and mud, is nevertheless extraordinary and wonderful" and "the more [we] explore it and discover about it – scientifically, imaginatively, artistically – the more wonderful and extraordinary it becomes" (Wartofsky n. pag.).

After the death of the Authority takes place, when "the whole religious job-lot collapses down into the abyss," as signified by Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter taking Metatron down into the abyss with them, "the world is cleared, secularized, ready for its new human-scale regeneration" (Gooderham 163). But these deaths leave the reader with a sense of loss, as in the loss not just of a God figure, but also of a religious faith in itself, which eliminates all the notions and concepts of heaven, hell, redemption and salvation. And since Pullman shows "no interest in reconstructing a more comprehensively conceived deity" (Gooderham 165), one must return once more to the story for further clues or answers. A reading of *His Dark Materials* will reveal that "the apocalyptic drama provides a rich and deep rooted metaphor, indeed, virtually a new myth … that of the radical change from a religious to a secular era" (Gooderham 164). The world that this myth aims to create is called the 'Republic of Heaven', which is "no construct of bricks and mortar" but "rather a state of consciousness" (Lenz 3). Thus, through this myth, Pullman is "ultimately implying a myth to live by" (Lenz 2), and Pullman's "metaphor for a changed consciousness is represented by the toppling of the "Kingdom" of Heaven, making way for the "Republic" of Heaven in its stead" (Lenz 3). Millicent Lenz states that:

> the scene of the disintegration of the Authority … read metaphorically dramatizes the passing of an old and no longer viable mode of consciousness to make way for a new, creative way

> of being in the world [and therefore] the old awareness must disintegrate to make way for the new (9-10).

But will the new republic be able to provide conscious beings with the things that we once required from religion? Even in the contemporary age, where God, heaven and hell might not exist anymore, we still need:

> all the things that heaven meant, we need joy, we need a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives, we need a connection with the universe, we need all the things that the kingdom used to promise us but failed to deliver (Watkins n. pag.).

The new myth will bring about a world which is "no longer a God-given paradise, but a creaturely-constructed … community" (Gooderham 168). Thus, it shall be built on the conscious effort of living beings, and this will be possible because the Fall into experience marks a positive turn in our existence, instead of being "an indelible mark of human imperfection" (Gooderham 166). Pullman thus goes "about establishing the humanistic values of a new, secular world" (Gooderham 166) in his story. And this new republic must also "make it clear that trying to restrict understanding and put[ting] knowledge in chains is bad", and also that "what shuts out knowledge and nourishes stupidity is wrong [and] what increases understanding and deepens wisdom is right" (Pullman "The Republic of Heaven" 666). The new myth reinforces the pursuit of knowledge, and "Pullman's vision of a materialistic republic of heaven is very moral [because] he stresses mutual responsibility" (Watkins n. pag.). The myth must also account for the fact that "[g]oodness and evil have always had a human origin" and there's no one responsible [for these two forces] but us" (Pullman 666). In the end, by disposing of God, religion and faith, Pullman provides us with a new myth, which frees us from the shackles of oppression

and gives us a different way to approach the heavier existential and philosophical questions regarding our existence and its purpose in this world. This myth enables Pullman to "replace the old myths with a new, more honest story, written to replace the delusion of" (Wartofsky n. pag.) God, heaven, hell and even the afterlife. What makes Pullman's trilogy more honest, and realistic, is the fact that although he is writing a story, he is addressing matters that are crucial to the human condition, or experience. Besides writing a story about the death of the Authority, Pullman is also writing a "story about human life without an afterlife" (Gooderham 161), and what happens when these myths and concepts are broken down and makes room for new myths to be created. Thus, in losing God and religion, we may finally gain the freedom that was denied Adam and Eve, and the human race, since the Fall. For Adam and Eve, the Fall resulted in their expulsion from Paradise, and their initiation into knowledge, mortality, shame and the necessity for work. But losing God for us may mean the liberty to be able to approach life in a different manner, without the previous consequences of the Fall, and with a new myth. This would be a myth that does not portray knowledge, mortality and experience as things for humans to be hindered by, or as sinful, but rather as means of guidance and liberation.

Chapter II

Death

-

And when we die…

Death, as an integral and inseparable part of life, is something that figures prominently in *His Dark Materials*. Pullman does not shy away from the death of characters, and he also does not render those deaths as something that is easily acceptable for children, by making them less gruesome or painful. Besides the deaths of numerous enemies, throughout the story, Lyra and Will both experience the deaths of many loved ones as well. Among them are Lyra's parents, Mrs. Coulter and Lord Asriel, her friends Roger and the aeronaut Lee Scoresby, and Will's father, John Parry. Interestingly, it turns out that not all of the deaths are acts of personal sacrifice, such as that of Mrs. Coulter and Lord Asriel. While fighting the Regent Metatron, they decide to give up their lives in order to create the possibility for both Lyra, and Will, to continue working on building the Republic of Heaven. The same can be said of the death of Lee Scoresby, who sacrifices his life so that John Parry can continue his work and fight for Lord Asriel. The deaths of John Parry and Roger on the other hand, are not a result of willingly made sacrifices. John Parry's death is the result of the jealousy and hatred of a witch who once loved and was rejected by him, and Roger's death is a murder, undertaken by Lord Asriel to further his plans. Thus, death is not always a gift willingly given, but can also be an unexpected act, carried out by someone else, without the victim's consent.

The presence of death in the story is connected to a universal question that all human beings must ask themselves at some point in their lives. The existential question that Pullman appears to be confronting is that of what really happens when we die. In religions such as Christianity, believers are promised salvation after death, based on how they live their lives on earth. If one lives as a good Christian, then, he or she will be rewarded, by being sent to Heaven. On the contrary, if one fails to live as a good Christian, then they will end up in Hell, as punishment. But what the exact meaning is of being a good or bad Christian is dictated by the church, and must be followed rigorously in order to reach Heaven and avoid going to Hell. For true believers, this explanation appears to be sufficient, but it is understandable that skeptics require some more proof than the word of the church. There is no evidence that Heaven and Hell actually exist, since no one has ever returned to tell the tale. They are, rather, ideas enforced by those who believe in their existence, and those who require their existence in order to gain power and control over others, such as religious institutes like the church. Thus, due to a lack of logical or scientific proof, or a lack of blind faith, "humanity cannot pierce that ultimate of mysteries…[that of] what lies beyond this world of the living" (Leet 178).

In *The Amber Spyglass*, in order to find the ghost of her dead friend Roger, Lyra and Will journey to the land of the dead. He comes to her in dreams and tells her that he is unhappy, and this makes Lyra decide to undertake the journey. Will accompanies her on this journey, along with the two Gallivespian spies, Chevalier Tialys and the Lady Salmakia. Through this journey and its consequences, Pullman attempts to answer the question, or rather, tell a story of what happens to us when we die. According to Karen Patricia Smith, "[a] journey

to the world of the dead is formidable and one rarely undertaken in children's literature" (144). The journey of a hero into the underworld, in order to accomplish a certain goal, and come out of there alive, is a theme that appears in many ancient works of literature, ranging from Sumeria, Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as in Welsh, Japanese and Mongolian mythologies. This journey, "[i]n classical [Greek] tradition … is an Orpheic journey," (Smith 144) based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, who are in love with each other. When Eurydice dies, Orpheus journeys into the underworld, known as Hades, to request Pluto to return Eurydice to him. When Pluto agrees to grant his wish, and releases Eurydice, "Orpheus is instructed not to look back," but unable "to resist, he does look back, and Eurydice vanishes" and Orpheus "thus [finds] the price too heavy for him and finally fails the test" (Smith 144), and loses Eurydice in the process. Besides having overtones of the story of Orpheus, this episode in the trilogy is also an appropriation of the Christian tale of Christ's 'Harrowing of Hell'. The myth of Christ's 'harrowing of hell' "is a key scene in medieval mystery plays, in which Christ, between his death and his resurrection, was able to release from limbo the souls of those who had died before his coming" (Pinsent 204). Similarly, Will and Lyra will also eventually free the ghosts of the dead people from the land of the dead. Through Will and Lyra's journey to the world of the dead, and their action of liberating the ghosts of the dead people, Pullman is once again appropriating a Christian myth, as he does with the myth of the Fall. But once again, he also subverts the Christian myth, because by portraying the land of the dead as neither heaven nor hell, and having the ghosts eventually released into nature, Pullman undermines, or rather completely contradicts the Christian notion of an afterlife, and the promise of heaven or the threat of hell.

For Pullman, death eventually leads to freedom, given that the ghosts can attain their freedom by narrating true stories of their lives to the harpies who guard the passage from the world of the dead to the natural world.

In the words of Karen Patricia Smith, Will and Lyra's "journey into the world of the dead is [also] the most terrifying excursion that the children make in the story" (144), and as with Orpheus, they must also pay a price to gain entry into the land of the dead; "the price for Pullman's children [is that they] must leave their individual souls [or their daemons] behind" (Smith 144-5). This separation of the humans from their daemons (regardless of whether the daemons are visible or not) marks one of the most profound senses of separation and loss in the entire trilogy. When they step on the boat to continue their journey, Lyra has to leave Pantalaimon behind on the shore, since that is the price to be paid for the journey. Will on the other hand, does not have a visible daemon, but feels the pain nonetheless; Pullman describes the feeling of separation as:

> an agony building inside him … Part of it was physical. It felt as if an iron hand had gripped his heart and was pulling it out between his ribs, so that he pressed his hand to the place and vainly tried to hold it in … But it was mental, too: something secret and private was being dragged into the open where it had no wish to be, and Will was nearly overcome by fear and self-reproach, because he himself had caused it (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 886).

The separation of human and daemon is thus, as it appears in this description, an immensely painful and heart wrenching experience. Although Pullman calls Lyra's desertion of Pantalaimon the fulfillment of the prophecy of "the great

betrayal" that she would make which "would hurt her terribly" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 886), it could also be seen as one of Lyra's greatest sacrifice, in order to fulfill a promise made to a friend. But regardless of the reasons as to why they must leave their daemons behind, it appears to be an unimaginably painful experience.

When they finally manage to enter the world of the dead, Will and Lyra, and the readers are surprised upon realizing the nature of that world, for "Pullman's afterlife does not fit into the usual dichotomies of heaven and hell" (Leet 179). In the world of *His Dark Materials*, the land of the dead:

> isn't a place of reward or a place of punishment. It's a place of nothing. The good [end up there] as well as the wicked, and [they] all languish in this gloom forever with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep or rest or peace" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 916).

David Gooderham states that Pullman "describes the world of the dead in graphic contemporary terms as a prison camp – perhaps better, with its grim hopelessness, a concentration camp" (161-162). He also adds that the world is "suffused … with archaic elements which speak to deeply-rooted human fears" (Gooderham 161-2). These fears are inflicted on the ghosts by the harpies, who are capable of knowing all the bad, evil or cruel thoughts and actions committed by the ghosts of the dead during their lives, and their ability to constantly remind the ghosts of the worst parts of their lives. This land is therefore more like a prison where the Authority sends the ghosts of all dead people, regardless of how they have lived their lives and what rewards or punishments were promised to them. By depicting the land of the dead as neither heaven nor hell,

Pullman questions the validity or truthfulness of the promises made by the church regarding the afterlife.

Among the many ghosts that Will, Lyra and the Gallivespians encounter, there are those of a male monk and a female martyr. The male monk sees Lyra as an agent of the devil, and says that she is trying to tempt all the other ghosts to sin against God. He tells the others that:

> [t]he world [they] lived in was a vale of corruption and tears. Nothing there could satisfy [them]. But the Almighty has granted [them] this blessed place for all eternity, this paradise, which to the fallen soul seems bleak and barren, but which the eyes of faith see as it is, overflowing with milk and honey and resounding with the sweet hymn of angels. This is heaven, truly! (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 916).

To this monk, who is one of the believers, the bare and harsh land, through the sheer strength of his faith (which endures even in death), becomes the heaven that was promised to him by his religion and church. Even in death, he is subjected to suffering because of his faith. The female martyr on the other hand, expresses a completely different view on the afterlife. She tells the ghosts that:

> [w]hen [they] were alive, [the church] told [them] that when [they] died [they'd] go to heaven. And [the church also] said that heaven was a place of joy and glory and [they] would spend eternity in the company of saints and angels praising the Almighty, in a state of bliss. That's what they said. And that's what led some of [the believers] to give [their] lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around

> [them], and [they] never knew" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 915-6).

The martyr appears to regret her choice of having given up her life for her faith, and ending up in a prison instead of the promised heaven. Although she, like the monk, had pledged her life to her faith, she is more doubtful of her present situation. In a manner, she represents the perspective of the skeptic, who actually questions and doubts the promises made by her faith. She does not, unlike the monk, choose to see the land of the dead as the promised heaven, but for what it really is. Her words also echo Pullman's insistence on enjoying the life we are given and the importance of living it fully. By using two individuals connected to the Christian faith, but who voice different opinions on the nature of the land where they are trapped, Pullman also portrays the difference between the perspectives of the believer and the skeptic. This is also one of the ways in which he invites the reader, through the doubt of one of his characters, to question the validity of the Christian notion of an afterlife.

Having succeeded in finding Roger's ghost, Lyra decides that the thing she and Will has to do is to free all the souls from the land of the dead. Will agrees with her decision, and they begin to spread the word to all the ghosts. While the children do face resistance from a number of ghosts, such as that of the male monk, most of the other ghosts, such as the female martyr, seem to embrace the idea. After having expressed her doubts about the promised Christian heaven, she tells the others that:

> now [that] this child has come offering a way out, [she's] going to follow her. Even if it means oblivion … [she'll] welcome it, because it won't be nothing; [they'll] be alive again in a million leaves … be

> falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze … be glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world which is [their] true home and always was (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 916).

And once the ghosts are all freed, when they pass out through the opening that Will cuts with the knife, out into the physical world, they all dissolve into the air, returning to an elementary state of existence. In the end, they all become a part of Dust again, thus they merge with the existing consciousness, or the universe, and live on in that state. For Pullman, unlike the Christian doctrine, death is something final. There is no eternal life after death that can be enjoyed in heaven or suffered through in hell. Rather, for Pullman, death leads to a return to nature, to becoming a part of the whole universe, or rather a part of Dust.

Will and Lyra's journey through the land of the dead, and their eventual decision to release the ghosts, thus depicts Pullman's view on death and the afterlife, and also suggests that death is not after all the final stage of our existence. Pat Pinsent argues that:

> [i]nstead of the traditional view of heaven [and hell], Pullman's mythology involves the imprisonment of the dead in an underworld, much like the classical Hades,

and that:

> [i]n an inevitably Christlike parallel, Lyra [and Will] release the dead from [that] deadly place, not so they can go to heaven but rather to allow them to be dissolved into the elements of their being (204).

Carol Scott states that Pullman's use of Will and Lyra's "descent into the underworld that parallels the Harrowing of Hell," (104) and enables them to release:

> the spirits to merge once again with the energy of the universe, melds religious, classical, and folk traditions in a modern idiom consonant with Pullman's vision of a harmonious universe (104).

For Pullman, the old God is dead, and so is heaven and hell. Once again, just as he creates a new myth to counter the loss of the old God and religion, Pullman also presents the reader with a myth regarding death. The nature of this myth is by no means a new one, for the likes of Percy Bysshe Shelley had previously written about death in similar terms; thus, Pullman does not so much create an authentic myth about death, but rather taps into myths that already existed before his time. For example, Pullman's view on death reflects some of the ideas presented in Shelley's poems, such as in *Adonais* (1821), where death is shown to be a transcendental experience, one that results in the dead becoming a part of nature. Moreover, one also finds a reflection of the idea that we have our beginnings in dust, and upon death, it is to dust that we must return.

In regard to Pullman's treatment of the Christian notion of an afterlife, David Gooderham states that in *His Dark Materials*:

> Pullman achieves a powerful and coherent narrative precisely by jettisoning popular notions of the soul living on in a happy afterlife and by returning to older fears of the horror and finality of death – from which only a raising from the dead, a resurrection, can be a sufficient remedy … From such a ghastly place release, any release, on any terms is infinitely to be desired. So, although the liberation

> he effects does not take the form of Christian resurrection, these captives do *rise up* from the underworld (161-2).

But in order for a ghost to be able to pass through the land of the dead and out into the natural world, a price must be paid. When the harpies, who guard the entrance to the land of the dead, hear that Lyra and Will are planning to release all the ghosts, they get angry because that would rob them of their one purpose in life. Eventually, with the help of the Gallivespians, they come to an agreement, and the harpies are:

> assigned an important task that establish for them a sense of self-worth … that is, the task of guiding the dead to the upper world, where souls will become dispersed matter in a living realm … and their hearts are softened (Smith 148).

It is also agreed that the ghosts of the dead must pay the price for freedom with stories, and not just any stories, but true stories.

When Lyra and Will attempt to enter the world of the dead, they are stopped by the harpies at the entrance, and they demand the children tell the harpies a story; Lyra then begins to spin out an elaborate tale, being the gifted liar and storyteller that she is. But the harpies know instantly that it is all a lie, and they attack the children. And once they get past the harpies and the entrance, "in the world of the dead the ghost children ask [Lyra] to talk about the real world and the physical sensations they can't feel" (Renton n. pag.). That is when Lyra has to put aside her talent to create stories from lies, but instead, create stories from truth, and her own experiences. Hearing her accounts of the real world reminds the ghosts of what they were once capable of feeling and experiencing, and puts into sharp contrast the life they now have to endure,

maybe even for eternity. It makes them yearn once again to be part of that living world, regardless of in what state. According to Anne Marie Bird, it is thus "Lyra's gift for storytelling [that] makes it possible for her to lead the [ghosts] out of the world of the dead" (qtd. in Renton n. pag.). Had she not been able to weave such vivid stories about the world of the living, the ghosts might have wanted to remain in their prison forever. Once a weaver of lies, Lyra realizes that there is more to storytelling, and that it is possible, even more difficult, to weave stories out of truth. In relation to this shift in Lyra's gift for storytelling, Millicent Lenz discusses the "necessity of evolving a *true* and creative imagination, as distinct from a fanciful one," which results in the storyteller being "capable of shaping meaningful stories out of the chaos" (7) of worldly experiences.

Moreover, David Gooderham states that:

> [e]scape from the [l]and of the [d]ead can only be won by those who have lived aesthetically and soulfully, who have enjoyed the gift of life through their intellects and senses … [o]nly then is it implied that they will have stories to tell (52).

In these lines, one can hear an echo of the idea of Pullman's republic of heaven, where all its citizens are expected to live and enjoy life. Added to that idea is Pullman's insistence on the need to be truthful. Through the act of having to tell a story in order to pass out into the upper world, "imagination [of a certain sort becomes] the instrument of 'redemption' [for the ghosts of the dead], through the[ir] power of forging meaning out of chaos of existential experience" (Gooderham 52), just like Lyra learns when she has to tell the ghosts true stories. When the ghosts of the dead tell the harpies stories to buy their freedom, "the resulting stories [will] add to the level of consciousness in the world," in which

way "they participate in the evolution toward a universe that is wholly conscious of itself" (Lenz 53), a world in which Dust will never disappear. Since all souls return to Dust, and Dust is equated to consciousness, it also means that once-living conscious beings will participate in keeping Dust, or consciousness alive through their own, active and creative efforts.

The land of the dead created by Pullman "consists of a dim and desolate, endless plain populated by the ghosts of the dead" (Colás 34). It is a space where the "dead [are] consigned from time immemorial to a blank, barely material existence" (Colás 35). By having the children free the ghosts and enabling them to reintegrate into Dust, and hence removing the possibility of a life after death lived out in heaven or hell, it appears that Pullman is writing a story about death as an end to our material existence. In other words, "[t]he ultimate stark message of Pullman's trilogy declares that there is no life "beyond" [death]" (Gooderham 52). But although death is the final step of existence in a material form, it is not, according to Pullman's story, the final step in the existence of conscious beings. Thus, in Lyra's world, death is a means of losing a material life, but of gaining freedom, to be able to disperse throughout the universe, in the form of elementary particles. Furthermore, "[t]o think of ourselves as [Dust] places us in a cosmic perspective [where] we are in the end – and in the beginning – just particles of matter", and since "[e]verything wears down, Dust is itself an emblem of the inevitable corruptibility of matter" (Rayment-Pickard 62). Thus, our beginnings from and ending in Dust also emphasizes the inevitability and finality of death.

Moreover, when the traditional Christian notion of death leading to an afterlife, of heaven and hell are taken away, people of the contemporary era still

require a myth that can answer their deep-seated human fears, and questions, regarding what happens after death. In the contemporary era, with a decline in the strong belief in religious notions of the afterlife, and due to the lack of evidence, "[w]e may not even believe that there is anything beyond this material world" and after death, "[b]ut this does not free us from projectin[g]" (Earl 283) our fears. This new myth, then:

> must talk about death in terms that are as true as they can be to what we know of the facts, and it must do what the Christian myth did, and provide some sort of hope or consolation. The myth must give us a way of accepting death, when it comes, of seeing what it means and accepting it, not shrinking from it with terror (Pullman 666).

It must therefore prepare the citizens of the contemporary era to face the unknown world that lies beyond death. It must give us sufficient reason to be able to embrace death peacefully when it is our turn to die, and maybe even dissolve into elementary particles.

In Pullman's world, the story of an individual's life becomes the means of attaining eternal freedom, even in death, given that the story pleases the harpies. Seen in this light, according to Lauren Shohet, "[e]very individual's story – rather than the Christian sacrifice of a single … individual – serves to release the soul from death" (27-8). Thus, we are the only ones responsible for the fate of our soul after death. The choices we make on how to live our lives in this material or physical world determine whether we are worthy of that eternal freedom; only "by producing specific narratives can individuals gain access to the ecstatic release into collective "Dust" [or consciousness]" (Shohet 27-8). We must live

our lives in a manner that will make our story a worthy one to leave behind, for it is through stories and words that one may attempt to achieve immortality. Lauren Shohet states that "[t]he knowledge that art overcomes death produces art" (28), and the fact that the stories of our lives will live on even after we die might be a source of inspiration for people to live better and truer lives, in order to be able to create true stories. And while the trilogy may rob the characters and readers of the idea of heaven and hell, it tells them that it is possible to live on forever, as part of the collective consciousness known as Dust. Thus, instead of being the last step of our existence, death becomes a step in moving towards becoming a part of everything and living on beyond death.

Chapter III

Love

-

And when we must part…

Love appears in various forms in *His Dark Materials*. For instance, the outflow of Dust is only saved by the physical expression of Will and Lyra's love for each other. It is only after they kiss for the first time that the flow of Dust changes direction, and begins to flow inwards to the land, instead of away from it, since love, in this case between Will and Lyra, and its fulfillment, is what nourishes and maintains Dust within all universes. When Will and Lyra repeat the scene of Eve tempting Adam with the fruit, the fall happens once again, the difference being that this time the fall enables Dust to return, and in doing so, results in the saving of humanity. Additionally, the evil regent, Metatron, is killed by Lyra's parents, in order to create an opportunity for Lyra and Will to be able to save the universe. Both of these actions and their resulting consequences are due to love.

The Greeks categorized love into four types, and the four names they used for these various forms of love were *storge, philia, eros* and *agape*, which refer to affection, friendship, romantic and divine love respectively. This emotion called love makes itself manifest in the story in diverse forms such as the love between parents and children (storge), between friends (philia) and between lovers (eros). While some of these relationships involve intense love, somehow most of the relationships based on love in the trilogy do not endure; for some reason or another, the people must always part. One of the most touching relationships in

the story is that between Will and Lyra. These two children start off as strangers, who become friends, and finally fall in love with each other. It is the physical expression or consummation of their love that finally helps to save the gradual outflow of Dust, and restores balance in the universe. And although the two children only just get to know and express their love for each other, it is necessary for them to part, knowing that they will never see each other again. Their separation creates a deep sense of loss, for even though there is a deep bond of love between the two, they may not remain together to explore that love, and spend their lives together. Most of the other relationships between characters in the trilogy are also marked by a sense of loss. In most cases, loved ones die, or are lost in some manner. Just like Pullman creates a sense of loss through religion (by killing off the Authority) and death (by contradicting the notion of an afterlife) in the story, he also does that through the element of love. It appears that for Pullman, love and loss go somewhat hand in hand with each other. And the question that arises is simply that of why there must be separation when there is love. Why cannot characters such as Will and Lyra live out their lives together, and be able to explore their love for each other over the span of their lives? Why does Pullman choose to let his characters love, or fall in love, only to separate them from each other?

Parental love in the story figures through the characters of Will and Lyra's parents, and also the secondary parental figures that the children encounter throughout their adventures. Lyra and Will both experience the absence of parental figures in their lives. In Will's case, although his father is absent, he does have a mother. But his mother requires Will to take care of her, and he has to keep her safe and inconspicuous so that the authorities do not take her away and

put her into a facility. Thus, instead of having a mother to take care of him and comfort him, Will has to become the caretaker in the mother-son relationship, and shoulder all the burdens and responsibilities that come with it.

Lyra is initially unaware that her parents are none other than Mrs.Coulter and Lord Asriel, both of whom have been absent from her life when she was growing up. Neither of the children have the experience of growing up with loving nor caring parents, who are there for them. But Lyra meets Lee Scoresby, the Texan aeronaut, who comes to love her as a daughter. Other characters in the story who take a manner of parental interest in the children include the Gyptian Farder Coram, John Faa and the witch Serafina Pekkala.

Although absent throughout most of her life, Lyra's parents, in the last moments of their lives, decide to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their daughter. While Lord Asriel fights with the angel called Metatron, with the intention of destroying him by dragging him into the abyss, Mrs. Coulter takes a leap towards them, and with that force, pushes herself and the other two into the abyss. This sacrifice on the part of Lyra's parents may come as a surprise, given their absence in her life, but there are instances in the story that show that her parents must have cared for her, even before they choose to fall into the abyss in order to destroy Metatron. In *The Golden Compass*, Mrs. Coulter arrives just in time, unknowingly, to save Lyra from being subjected to the process of intercision. Although she is able to watch other children being separated from their daemons, she is unable to do so when it is her daughter's turn. In *The Amber Spyglass*, we find Lyra being drugged and held captive by her mother. Mrs.Coulter appears to be taking these measures in order to protect Lyra from the church, who wants her killed. While Lyra is thus drugged and sleeping,

Mrs.Coulter takes care of her daughter as she has never been able to, for example, by feeding and bathing her. Eventually, when Lyra is saved by Will, and leaves with him and the Gallivespians, Mrs.Coulter begs her not to leave, adding that it hurt her to watch her daughter go. Towards the end of *The Golden Compass*, when Lyra arrives at Lord Asriel's prison, or rather his fortress in Svalbard, he is at first shocked to see her. But when he sees Roger, and realizes that he will not have to kill his own daughter in order to open the gate to another world. It is in these various moments throughout the trilogy that the reader gets to see glimpses of the parental love that Mrs. Coulter and Lord Asriel harbor for their daughter, Lyra. It is this very love, which in the end causes them to sacrifice their lives for her future.

The aeronaut Lee Scoresby and Lyra develop a close friendship, and he considers her to be almost like a daughter, which makes him one of the secondary parental figures involved in Lyra's life. He protects her, fights by her side and for her, and eventually gives his life in the hope that he was, by sacrificing his own life, helping her in some way. When Lee Scoresby and John Parry are followed by the forces of the church, at one point they reach a pass, where Lee Scoresby tells John Parry to go on, and that he will hold off the enemy forces as long as possible. That is also where he meets his death, by being shot by the enemy soldiers. Lee Scoresby's love for Lyra enables him, much like her parents, to sacrifice his life to enable Lyra and Will to go on with their journey.

In *His Dark Materials,* besides parental love, in the form of *storge*, the reader also comes across love in the form of *philia*. Lyra's relationship with Lee Scoresby, Iorek Byrnison the armoured bear, and Roger the kitchen boy could all be used as examples of this sort of love. It is partially due to her love for Iorek

Byrnison that she tricks the fake bear king Iofur Raknison into fighting with her friend Iorek in single combat, which enables Iorek to defeat the other bear and reclaim his kingship. It is also out of a combination of her love for Roger, and the guilt that she feels about having played a role in his death, that she journeys to the land of the dead in order to save his ghost. But it must also be kept in mind that in the end, Lyra loses both her friends, that is, Lee Scoresby and Roger, since they both die. But the strongest bond of friendship that is forged in the entire trilogy is that between Will and Lyra, and this friendship eventually turns into romantic love. These two children meet in the world of Cittàgaze, and quickly learn to trust each other and work together. This in turn nurtures the "binding force of friendship and interdependence" (Rustin and Rustin 418) that the children develop. When Lord Boreal steals Lyra's alethiometer, Will agrees to help her get it back. When they do succeed, Lyra promises Will that she will only use the alethiometer to help him find his father. When Lyra is drugged and kept hidden away in a cave by her mother, Will comes to save her. The children thus play important roles in each other's lives, work together to achieve their goals and "they each come to recognize and depend on the other as a friend" (Rustin and Rustin 416). But their friendship slowly evolves into something more; the love between them evolves from philia to eros. During their way out of the land of the dead, there is a scene where Lyra falls into the abyss and is saved just in time by one of the harpies called No-Name. Once rescued, she and Will hold each other close, because at that moment:

> [s]h wasn't Lyra just then, and he wasn't Will … she wasn't a girl, and he wasn't a boy. They were the only two human beings in that vast gulf of death (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 950).

Step by step, the children approach the moment when they will realize the nature of their feelings for each other, and act on it. But even before they discover romantic love, Will and Lyra have friendship, which is one of the first things their relationship is based on, besides trust.

When discussing the element of romantic love, or eros, in *His Dark Materials*, besides the relationship of Will and Lyra, it is also worth mentioning the love between the angels Baruch and Balthamos. Interestingly, since both these angels are male, it seems on the surface to be a homoerotic relationship, but the nature of their love far transcends the notion of one mans love for another. They are not just humans, but angels, and can even feel each other across vast distances. For example, at the moment when Baruch is killed, Balthamos actually feels it. And his pain, on the death of his loved one, is as sad to read of, as any human's sorrow would have been. Then of course we have the relationship between Will and Lyra, who start off as friends, but end up falling passionately in love with each other. Having successfully freed the ghosts of the dead, by leading them out into the upper world through a hole that Will cuts into the world of the mulefa, Will and Lyra once again come across the scientist Mary Malone. Mary Malone is aware that she must play the role of the temptress, in order to make way for the Fall. She thus tells them stories of her own life, and one story in particular about a boy who had given her marzipan and whom she had fallen in love with, and kissed for the first time. Her story enables Will and Lyra to make sense of the changing emotions they feel towards each other, and to express that. They wander off into the forest, where at one point Lyra holds up a red fruit to Will's lips, and they kiss. It is a reenactment of Eve offering the fruit of knowledge to Adam, only that this time, "the Church and Christianity …

[cannot] … tell them that what feels so good is wicked and bad" (Tucker 165). That is how Will and Lyra save Dust from being eradicated from the universe. Thus, what starts off as a strong bond of friendship between the two children "develops into a first adolescent exploration of sexuality, erotic passion and the giving of self to each other" (Rustin and Rustin 419). According to Philip Pullman, it is coming of age of Will and Lyra, or their transition from innocence to experience, "which serves as the culmination of the trilogy [and] represents an alternative view of the business of growing up" (qtd. in Wartofsky n. pag.). Furthermore, it is precisely "the moment when they become truly what they could be" (Pullman qtd. in Wartofsky n. pag.). Thus, by falling in love and expressing that, they make the transition into experience, and in a manner of speaking, leave behind their innocence.

Along with this new discovery of love, the children also receive sad news from the witch Ruta Skadi and their own daemons. They get to know that it will not be possible for them to live their lives together, in one specific world. When a person and his or her daemon end up living away from his or her own world for a longer time, their life span will be drastically shortened. The very same thing happens to Will's father, John Parry, who falls ill and eventually dies. And they are also told that it is necessary to close all the windows in the fabric of the universe that was ever made by the subtle knife, in order to restore balance to the universe. At first Will and Lyra think that they could leave a door open between their worlds, but then they realize that the one opening must be left for the ghosts of the dead to be able to reappear into the world of the living. This rules out all their options, and the children realize that there is nothing but separation for them in the very near future. Thus, although "Will and Lyra's

ecstatic union transforms the universe," its "consequences for human society can be realized only if they separate" (Shohet 33). It is through saying goodbye, through separation, that each of them can return to their own worlds and continue on working to build the republic of heaven, in their own respective worlds. Thus, for Will and Lyra, the "fantasies of escape to an alternative world are foreclosed … [they] must live in [their own world] and make it as much like "heaven" as humanly possible" (Lenz 9). Will and Lyra have no possibilities of a future together, if they wish to live out their lives to its full potential, and make the best of the one life they are given. Similar to Will and Lyra's love, and the way the relationship ends, there is also the separation of the angels Baruch and Balthamos. They both die in the end, and are not given the chance to live out their angelic lives together. There is also the case of Mary Malone's first love, the boy who gives her marzipan and who she then kisses. The reader is only told that the boy eventually moves away and they do not stay in touch or see each other again. Also with the relationship she has later on, with someone else, it does not seem to work, and they both go their own ways. Thus, for a number of reasons, be it physical separation, death or a matter of mutual consent, relationships based on love do not seem to endure in Pullman's trilogy. Lyra also has to say goodbye to her friends Roger and Lee Scoresby, and Will has to say goodbye to his father; most loved ones simply do not seem to stay for long in the children's lives.

Why is there then this presence of separation and loss when it comes to love? Is it Pullman's way of commenting on the nature of love in the contemporary world? Is he trying to say that the hope of fulfilling relationships is futile, and that we are doomed to live apart from those we love and wish to share

our lives with? One clear reason for the separation of Will and Lyra is that they must return to their own worlds, in order to carry out their work on building the republic of heaven. In their case, the sacrifice on their part, of giving up the possibility of having a life together, even if a short one, and of seeing each other again, is required for the greater good. In this manner, Pullman seems to be stressing the necessity of the individual to attempt to make the world a better place, through his or her own actions. In the end of the trilogy, Pullman "asserts the inevitable need for the openings between worlds to be closed and for [the] lovers to part" (Matthews 134). In other words, "[t]he ending of the book speaks of loss and the need for work" (Matthews 133). Although Lyra and Will love each other and want to be together for as long as they live, they must also live their lives fully, and aesthetically, in order to have true stories to tell the harpies upon their death. Regarding this issue, Laura Shohet states that "*His Dark Materials* requires the separation of art and desire – painful, partial, always seeking reconnection – in order to maintain every conscious beings passport into immortality" (29). And so is the case with the two children, who must put aside their desire, by separating, and live in order to create art on their own.

It must be kept in mind that although Will and Lyra are granted a few blissful days together, they are still required to say goodbye to each other, and part forever. Even though Lyra and Will promise to meet at the botanical garden (each in their own Oxford) once a year, there is still the physical absence of each other that they will have to live with for the rest of their lives. In a way:

> an absence is not a mere emptiness or vacuum, but is always the absence of something, or someone, a thing or a person, whose

> presence therefore makes itself felt, but in a different way from ordinary "presences" (Vassilopoulou and Ganeri 274).

Lyra and Will have felt love, but they will also have to live with the absence of one another, which results in pain. In *The Amber Spyglass*, "[a] maturing Will and Lyra discover their love for each other," but "[p]art of that maturity is acknowledgement of pain, in [their] case the pain of separation" (Smith 148). In the words of Karen Patricia Smith:

> [p]ainful choice is often conceived of as an adult predicament; but in reality, young people can easily be placed in such situations, [and] Pullman provides his protagonists (Smith 148)

with the possibility to explore the realm of these painful choices, and to discover their own way to cope with them. Pullman appears to be aware of the fact that "[s]trength comes with the capacity to acknowledge the pain, and not defend against it by denial" (Rustin and Rustin 238); he does not grant his young protagonists a happy ending, but makes them face, and accept, separation in the end. He does not protect them against the more painful experiences of life. Due to the way Pullman engages with loss and separation, the:

> separations [between characters in the trilogy] – those that embody the death experience as well as the act of saying farewell to loved ones whom [they] know … or doubt … [they] will see again [are rendered as] more absolute [and] heartrending" (Smith 149).

But even with physical separation, Will and Lyra work out some way to keep up the feeling of being together, even if across universes. They promise each other that once every year, they will each go to the botanical garden in their own

Oxford, and sit on one specific bench, in order to be together. When they find out that they must eventually say goodbye, Will says to Lyra that:

> [he] will love her for ever, whatever happens. Till [he] die[s], and when [he] find[s] [his] way out of the land of the dead [he]'ll drift about forever, all [his] atoms, till [he] find[s] her again" (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 1069).

To this Lyra replies that:

> [she]'ll be looking for [him], every moment, every single moment. And when [they] do find each other [they]'ll cling so tight that nothing and no one'' can ever tear [them] apart. Every atom of [hers] and every atom of [his] … [they]'ll live in birds and flowers and dragonflies and pine trees and in clouds and in those little specks of light [one] see[s] floating in sunbeams … and when [anyone wants to] use [their] atoms to make new lives, [it will not be possible] to take *one*, [the maker will] have to take two, one of [her] and one of [him], [and they'll] be joined so tight (Pullman *The Amber Spyglass* 1069).

Thus, it would appear that Will and Lyra do have some hope for being together in the future, maybe not in their current physical state of existence, but in the life after death, which might also make their separation seem a little less final in some way. Although their love causes them a lot of joy, the eventual separation also causes a lot of pain, but they can look forward to being united someday. In this way, Pullman is not fully condemning the possibility of romantic involvement for people of the contemporary era. On the contrary, Pullman's writing of Will and Lyra falling in love and their eventual separation indicates, on

his part, the "creation of a kind of myth of faithful love enduring forever" (Pinsent 204). As in Will and Lyra's case, their love will endure forever, even when they leave behind their physical forms, and become elementary particles.

As with religion and death, Pullman is also presenting his readers with a myth of loss in terms of love. It seems as if to Pullman, love in the modern world can be, on the one hand, a long-lasting experience, but on the other, it can also be a fleeting one. Will and Lyra's love for example, the eros that they share, is not long lasting because they must physically part, but they promise to keep up some sort of connection by figuratively being together once a year, at the botanical garden bench. Thus, while love can have a profound impact on us as individuals, it may not endure for long. Pullman's rewriting of the myth of the Fall of Adam and Eve, where Will and Lyra fall in love and experience their first kiss, (an action which saves the universe) Pullman "marks out the intimate personal relationship and sexual fulfillment of romantic love as the acme of relationships in the new secular era" (Gooderham 168). But this is followed by their separation; Margaret and Michael Rustin view "[t]he separation of the two adolescents [as being] rooted in [the] understanding of the separateness of selves, and of the psychic and philosophical importance of acceptance of the limits of each individual" (425). This necessary separation hints at the prevalence, and possibly even the necessity, of alienation among humans in the contemporary age. Through the "binary intensification" of love and loss, Pullman "exposes a deep strain of … alienation in [the] text as a whole", which can also be noted in "the general absence of satisfying intimate relations in the new … era" (Gooderham 171). After having loved and lost each other physically, Will and

Lyra embark "on conventionally responsible and useful careers in their respective worlds" (Gooderham 172). According to David Gooderham, the:

> settling of the protagonists into the custom of their worlds constitutes a further instance of alienation…insofar as the focus on the individual career and a life lived in the protection of leafy suburbs so easily constitute marks of social alienation in the contemporary world (172).

While it is true that Will and Lyra must go on with their lives on their own, they are not completely alienated. Will finds a friend in Mary Malone, and Lyra begins an education. And most importantly, they stay in touch with each other, through those annual visits to the botanical garden. Thus, it cannot be said that love in the contemporary era will lead to loss and separation, but rather that it will leave its mark, and possibly result in alienation from one another. Above everything, they will have the memories of their time together, and the love they felt for each other, to sustain them throughout their lives. In other words, as Alfred Tennyson wrote in his poem *In Memoriam*, "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all".

Chapter IV

-

A Myth of Loss

Although Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* is considered to be a story for children, and is marketed as a children's book (except in the United States) the trilogy attracts both children and adult readers. Pullman himself explains that the trilogy is a work of literature for children because "the main protagonists [are] children and they [are] in predicaments that children [can] understand," but he also "b[ears] in mind the fact that adults w[ill] be reading [the stories] too" (Costa n. pag.). The reason that makes this trilogy appealing to both adults and young readers, according to Steve Meacham, is firstly the "profundity of the philosophy that underpins the trilogy … essentially, the heretical notion that there was once a war in Heaven, and the wrong side won" (n. pag.). Furthermore, he states that "[e]ssentially, the trilogy is about the transition of innocence to experience [and] the triumph of knowledge over ignorance". The story can be seen, on "a superficial level" (Meacham n. pag.), as being one that relates the adventures of two children, Lyra Silvertongue and Will Parry, as they are caught up in the battle to decide who rules Heaven" (Meacham n. pag.) but on a deeper level, the trilogy is:

> an exploration of the fundamental themes of the [human experience]: initiation and the passage from innocence to experience, the nature of good and evil, the consequences of knowledge, and the notion of free will or individual responsibility (Bird 112).

The story also addresses existential questions that are central to the existence of human beings, such as our purpose in life, and what we are truly meant to do in the

duration of our lifetime. Throughout the span of the trilogy, Pullman is also writing about loss, as an integral element of our lives, in relation to religion, death and love. The story thus becomes a means of creating the possibility for a new myth to arise, a myth of loss, one that attempts to give the reader some idea as to how to face the various forms of loss that he or she may likely encounter in his or her lifetime.

In regard to how myths can influence human beings and the matter of our worldly existence, Karen Armstrong states that:

> [w]e are beings that fall very easily into despair. Unlike other animals, we fret about the human condition, are haunted by the fact of our mortality, and distressed beyond measure by the tragedies that flesh is heir to (78).

As human beings, "[u]nless we find some significance in our lives, [we] fall very easily into despair" (Armstrong 74). And this is one area where myths can be of help, because the myth:

> of a society [may] provide people with a context that [makes] sense of their day-to-day existence [and direct] their attention to the eternal and universal (Armstrong 74).

Additionally, Armstrong states that "[m]yth [is] not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning" (74); myth is also:

> related to what was thought to be timeless and constant…it look[s] back to the origins of life, to the beginnings of culture, and to the deepest levels of meaning (Armstrong 74).

It can thus be said that stories, narratives and myths play an essential role in the lives of human beings. If one traces the history of the importance of stories all the way back to antiquity, that is, back to the time of Plato, Aristotle, and even St.

Augustine, one would find the "suggest[ion] that much of life in terms of its thought, action, and destiny is a [result] of the [presence and] weightiness of stories" (Naugle 4), for "what human beings think, say, and do emerge out of the basic stories that inform their lives" (Naugle 5). Our ancestors made up myths and stories to explain things that could not be otherwise explained or comprehended, such as natural disasters, or the rising and setting of the sun. Besides being an explanation for certain natural phenomena, myths also "explain[ed] our place within [the world]" (n. pag.). But over time, advances in science, technology and our understanding of the universe has rendered many of those myths unfit for the dilemmas and questions that we now have regarding life and our existence, even though, interestingly, some scientific theories themselves are more a myth or story than an actually proven theory. For example, the idea of parallel universes, which Pullman uses in his trilogy, is something that has not been actually proved, by any scientist, but if one is willing enough to believe the story or the myth of parallel universes, it can become more than just a theory. Naugle also refers to the fact that over time, "our world has lost its story" (9), which has basically left us without a central narrative or myth to refer to. Thus, there is the implication that a new story, or new stories, must come into being. Since the old narratives and myths can no longer fully attempt to explain contemporary issues and questions, it can be thought that "we need twenty-first century literature with potent mythic and metaphorical dimensions … to shape our imagination and strengthen our beliefs" (Lenz 3), and that is where Pullman's myth of loss becomes relevant. In the words of Millicent Lenz, for citizens of:

> the twenty-first century, Philip Pullman's trilogy offers readers of all ages an adventure-packed story that speaks to some of the most urgent dilemmas of our time and suggests, for the thoughtful reader, not

> *answers* to the ills that presently beset us but rather ways of meeting them with courage and surviving them with grace" (1).

The trilogy, in other words, provides the reader "with a perspective that might help [them] survive contemporary crises" (Lenz 3). Thus, instead of giving specific answers to certain questions, Pullman creates a myth of loss that might enable the reader to make choices that will benefit both him or her, and the entire universe, for he "strongly believes that it is through stories that humans can best hope to understand both themselves and others" (Tucker 90). Since a myth is "the very structure that imparts meaning and significance to life and thereby holds it together" (Naugle 6), Pullman's modern myth, a myth of loss, may provide meaning to contemporary readers in ways that the older myths cannot.

As discussed in the previous chapters, Pullman explores loss through religion, death and love. Out of the loss in these three areas, the reader can identify loss itself as an element that permeates the trilogy, and that this myth of loss is something that arises from the loss that occurs in the story. The question that arises then is why Pullman focuses on loss as one of the main elements in his story? Loss is an integral part of every human life, even though it is almost always a very painful experience. So why discuss something so troubling and painful as loss in a trilogy that is meant for children, as well as for adults? One possible explanation could be due to the fact that Pullman himself does not see *His Dark Materials* as a work of fantasy, because he says that "[d]espite the armoured bears and the angels, [he] do[esn't] think [he's] writing fantasy … [he] thinks [he's] writing realism" and that his "books are psychologically real" (Meacham n. pag.). For Pullman, the trilogy "is a stark representation of reality … [t]his work is no fantasy for him" (Padley and Padley 328). On the contrary, "[i]t is the truth, or, at the very least, something extremely

close to it" (Padley and Padley 328). Burton Hatlen, for example, argues that "Pullman's most distinctive contribution to the fantasy genre is his blurring of the line that separates the "real" from the fantasy worlds" (75). Although writing about talking bears and tiny spies who are carried by dragonflies, Pullman is also dealing with realistic, human issues, like the transition from innocence to experience, and the nature of loss in human life, to name a few. And another reason could be that, like other authors, such as George Macdonald, Pullman trusts "in the ability of the child [reader] to interpret meaningfully texts beyond simple comprehension" (King 110). Pullman's capability of finding "images and words that contain "big, difficult ideas"" (Matthews 129) and his choice to integrate them into his writing further:

> reflects Macdonald's broader insistence on the need for children's texts that encourage – or rather require – interpretive efforts to construct meaning on the part of the child reader. [Furthermore] [l]ike Macdonald, Pullman implies that age is not a necessary barrier to or instrument of textual understanding; each reader will find the meaning that results from personal engagement with the text, constructing it through what is brought to the text and the possibilities that the novel itself offers. Pullman [thus] imagines a complex audience for his novel, one that ranges from child to textual scholar (King 111).

Pullman thus accounts not just for child readers, but adults as well, and critical scholars at that. Thus, Pullman deals with big and difficult philosophical ideas within the trilogy, which reflects his "insistence on the accessibility of meaning to all readers, naïve and scholarly alike" (King 117). In an interview with Wendy Parsons and Catriona Nicholson, Pullman states that he thinks "children have a fairly bleak view of each other and themselves" (n. pag.), thus it might not make sense to provide

them with a "sentimental view of childhood" (qtd. in Parsons and Nicholson), in the realm of stories and myths. Instead, Pullman writes a story where his young protagonists are courageous and strong. As a matter of fact, "the children Pullman depicts are fierce, brave and intelligent, liars, fighters and even – unwillingly – killers" (Costa n. pag.). He also portrays the ability of children to be cruel, for example in the way he portrays the band of children in Cittagaze who attack a cat, or by the children who make fun of Will's mother. For readers of the contemporary age, a new myth must:

> deal with human beings as they are, which includes recognizing that there is a depth of human meanness and wickedness which not even the imagination can fully plumb (Pullman 666).

The trilogy exhibits the "knowingness that there is no correlation between savagery and age" (Cantrell 315). According to Sarah K.Cantrell, this ability to admit and portray the cruel nature of humans, mainly children, among other aspects of challenges one faces in life, points at a "clear-eyed realism" (315) that:

> shifts Pullman's narrative away from simplistic binaries of child/adult, possibility/stability, innocence/experience and moves the trilogy towards the larger question of the choices that Lyra and Will make, even as they are horrified by the consequences of their own decisions (315).

Thus, readers of *His Dark Materials*:

> who approach fantasy seeking to return to childlike naïveté or who ignore the cruelty of which all humans of all ages are capable [of] will be sorely disillusioned (Cantrell 314-5).

The choices that Will and Lyra make throughout the story, regardless of how just or how cruel they might appear, encourages "readers to reflect on aspects of their own lives that could benefit from similar conduct" (King 115). So, once again, why is it worth letting children read stories such as *His Dark Materials*? In the words of Bernard Schweizer:

> there are significant gains to be reaped from letting our children indulge in this kind of fiction, since Pullman's message is also powerfully liberating and positive. What he places in the void created by his iconoclasm are important values that define modern liberal societies: gender equality … tolerance of sexual orientation … affirmation of sex … celebration of the life force … tolerance toward other races and ethnicities, and anti-imperialism (171).

Mike Newby argues that *His Dark Materials* is worth reading because the trilogy also:

> nurtures the philosopher in us, not in the narrow … sense of the word, but in the vast romantic sense that belonged to the great system-builders of the past [and] the message is, 'if you have more answers than questions, your imagination is dormant'" (73).

Thus, there is also an insistence on curiosity, creativity and the development of one's imagination. In order to be able to understand the world we live in, and the life we have, one must ask questions and be open to knowing new things, and through that one must develop ones own code, and hopefully live by that code. If one considers the actions of Will and Lyra, it may be noticed that "[w]hat drives them is their sense of what should be, according to their own values and personalities" (Tucker 113).

Pullman's stance regarding the imagination presents the reader with the main contradiction in the trilogy. Taking the case of Lyra, we see that she is a weaver of great stories, a talent that gets her out of many dangerous situations, in both *The Golden Compass* and *The Subtle Knife*. But in *The Amber Spyglass*, when she and Will journey to the land of the dead, the stories she tells, based on lies, only result in angering the harpies who guard the underworld. In order to placate them, and upon the request of the ghosts of the dead who are trapped there, Lyra begins to tell stories for which she draws upon her own, real experiences. It is only then that the harpies accept her story. Thus, this experience teaches Lyra the importance of how one may go about applying and exercising ones imagination. Thus, while Pullman agrees that imagination is a good thing (it saves Lyra many times), he also makes Lyra shift to a mode of storytelling based on fact, or realistic experiences, in order to calm the harpies. Interestingly, the ghosts of the dead must also pay a price for passing out into the upper world, which is that they have to tell the harpies stories about their own lives. There appears to be a clear insistence in Pullman's trilogy on the importance of true stories, based on a person's life for example. But Pullman somewhat contradicts himself by using the mode of storytelling himself, in order to convey the importance of developing a true imagination. This contradiction between imagination and true stories is similar to Pullman's contradiction in how he portrays his characters, as being mixtures of good and evil traits, but demands of his readers, and characters, that they live good lives, even when the possibility of that is questionable. In regard to this contradiction, it must be said that "[t]ruthfullness in a novel is never simply a question of reporting facts or realities [but rather that] telling the truth in a story requires fiction – it requires a kind of make-believe or, if you like, 'lying'" (Rayment-Pickard 27). Nicholas Tucker states that the trilogy:

> searches for an ultimate meaning to the age-old problem facing all readers of why exactly they are here and what they should then be doing about it … [and Pullman] meets this challenge through the imagination. For it is in stories, and the way they can renew faith both in ourselves and in others that he has always chosen to operate (183).

Thus, regardless of Pullman's own contradiction regarding the matter of ones imagination, it is apparent that the new myth also involves the imagination, besides curiosity and creativity, for:

> [c]uriosity, questioning, the freedom to imagine things differently and the moral imperative to do so, are what Pullman explores, and he suggests that they are intimately linked to the repair and salvation of the world (Baker 243-4).

Besides developing a true imagination, Pullman also incorporates Keats's notion of negative capability in his story, for example in the way Lyra is able to intuitively read the alethiometer. For Keats, the term 'negative capability' refers to "the ability to experience 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (qtd. in Jukes n. pag.). Pullman compares this experience to "being in twilight and seeing things in shadows" where "if you turn on the light, you'll miss the mystery and banish the shadows" (qtd. in Jukes n. pag.). Furthermore, for Pullman, negative capability "enables one to live creatively with contradictions, to transcend the dualism of good and evil" (Lenz 49). Millicent Lenz suggests that Philip Pullman:

> implies that human consciousness needs to evolve toward this state of

> receptivity, able to hold contradictions in balance and to exercise "negative capability" if we are going to be able to keep the "oppositions" of good and evil from tearing us apart (49).

In other words, negative capability is what gives humans the:

> ability to live creatively with all that threatens to engulf the human psyche in despair, the seeming chaos, meaninglessness, and absurdity so endemic to contemporary life (49).

In order to survive the human fears and anxieties about our mortality and our purpose in life, we must thus be able to accept the doubts and uncertainties that are part of our life, along with everything else. Margaret and Michael Rustin suggest that Pullman links the role of negative capability to development since:

> [t]he necessity for humans to feel anxiety as well as curiosity in the face of the unknown in themselves and the world, and not to know the outcome, is an essential truth that Pullman introduces to his readers, [for] without that, development shrivels up (236).

Negative capability also has to do with realizing or recognizing the interconnectedness of all things in this universe. In other words, "it is to do with [the] sense of the connection between things, and the meaning of things" since "the meaning of something is its connection to other things" (Renton n. pag.). According to Pullman, "[t]he more connections you see, the more meaning you see" (Renton n. pag.). This is linked to Pullman's notion of the interconnectedness of all conscious beings, and the reader learns that in the Republic of Heaven, every conscious being must depend on and be responsible for one another's existence and survival, for "[i]nterdependence is the condition of all people" (Shohet 30) and all conscious

beings. In an interview with Jennie Renton, Pullman speaks of experiencing negative capability, and thus realizing the interconnection between things for himself, and:

> what [he] seemed to feel, was that [he] saw the connections between things more clearly, much more vividly. There were patterns, there were correspondences, there were shadows … of something here of something there, everything was connected. With enormous excitement, [he] could see that the universe was alive and [he] was part of it (qtd. in Renton n. pag.).

Seeing ourselves somehow connected to the universe and everything else may also serve as a means of putting our existence into perspective, and that is what negative capability enables us to do.

In Pullman's myth of loss, there is also a prominent presence of the dual themes of innocence and experience. Unlike authors like C. S. Lewis, who generally tends to view the transition from innocence to experience as something undesirable, Pullman exhibits the opposite opinion; he actually "welcomes and celebrates the onset of sexuality" (Tucker 163) and also the "approach of adolescence" (Costa n. pag.). While there is definitely a visible "tension between innocence and experience" in Pullman's trilogy, he:

> sees advantages in both states, with experience being the natural replacement of innocence rather than its inevitable corruption (Tucker 157).

Therefore, Pullman's attitude towards the transition from innocence to experience is similar to that of William Blake's, who also celebrates the onset of experience and knowledge as something that is not to be deplored, since they are two contrary states of being that are part of our lives, and the process of growing up. While there is a loss

of innocence in the story, for characters like Will and Lyra, that loss paves the way for them to enter the realm of knowledge and experience, which, instead of harming them, makes them aware in a different way about the world they live in. Pullman's rewriting of the Genesis myth of the Fall of Man, centering on Will and Lyra, and the discovery and fulfillment of their love for one another, depicts original sin in a different way. In *His Dark Materials*, since Pullman presents:

> the Fall … not … as a disaster but as a necessary stage in human evolution, the whole notion of sin in general, and original sin in particular, comes to be seen in a different way, as a means to enlightenment and self-knowledge rather than as a major offense against God (Pinsent 203).

Although Will and Lyra are caught up in a battle between the Authority and Lord Asriel's forces, for the two children, "the real battle is moral and internal" (Baker 242). In the trilogy, "the most important journey is not an external event but an inner one concerning the child[ren]s journey towards adulthood" (Bird 112). According to Dierdre F.Baker:

> of all writers, the most likely to make the heart's journey concrete, or bodily, are writers of fantasy, those who deal in metaphor on a grand scale (237).

Pullman's myth of loss also touches on this matter, since for Will and Lyra, the experience of growing up and becoming aware and responsible individuals is what the internal, moral journey entails. For both Will and Lyra:

> [t]he act of self-recognition becomes a crucial act of distinction forming a clear demarcation not simply between innocence and

> experience, or childhood and adulthood, but between being conscious, or alive, and being conscious of self (Bird 121).

Will and Lyra sacrifice the possibility of building a life together in order to restore the balance of Dust in the universe, and to be able to fully live out their lives, aesthetically and responsibly. They are able to do that because they are aware of their responsibility, towards the entire universe and its existence. They could also have chosen not to make that sacrifice, but because they know it is what must be done for the greater good, they go through with their decision to part forever. In the story, "the final temptation for Will and Lyra [is] to put their own good above everything else" (Tucker 182), but they choose differently. In relation to Will and Lyra's sacrifice, Geoff Robson states that for these two "the challenge is to choose what is right rather than what is easy and where the strength to do so is sustained by the power of love" (95-6), even if that means having to part and losing each other forever.

In *His Dark Materials*, the reader finds Pullman engaging in the "imaginative reconfiguration of old myth[s] into a new story about life and death, and the "use of an outdated version of a theological concept", in order to create "a compelling new story – indeed, [a] new myth" (Gooderham 162). This new story:

> rather than merely captivating by its intriguing inventions encourages the more powerful reading experience of imaginative and speculative response (Gooderham 162).

Instead of giving his readers a myth that provides all the answers to the questions it asks, Pullman creates space for the readers to think for themselves, and come to their own conclusion about this myth. By writing a disconcerting and realistic story that deals with core existential questions posed by human beings all over the world and across the ages, "Pullman sets out to counter the force of a culture that tries to keep

the child asleep" (Matthews 125); he does this by giving the readers both inspiration and the necessary tools for questioning and critical thinking, instead of giving direct answers.

In terms of content and themes, realistic issues such as "[h]unger, bereavement, bullying, powerlessness, terror, despair and even torture feature in children's books" (Craig and Muchamore n. pag.). Some of these elements can be identified in Pullman's trilogy as well, and stories like this "don't deny that bad stuff happens, but what they tell readers is that it can be endured, and overcome" (Craig and Muchamore). Similarly, Pullman's myth of loss speaks of loss and bereavement in many forms in our lives, but it also gives the reader hope that it can indeed be overcome. According to Amanda Craig and Robert Muchamore:

> the best children's fiction is about finding something inside yourself which also works in the real world – the power of courage, kindness, humour and imagination.

Margaret Mackay takes the argument further by saying that:

> part of the attraction of reading fiction is to recognize our own idiosyncratic and subtle brews of unnamed emotion when they are clad in the different clothing of someone else's experiences. As fiction readers, we are thinking with somebody else's words, and we are feeling those words with our own grasp of particular feelings (65-6).

Therefore, it is through engaging with fiction, or more specifically in the case of Pullman's trilogy, with children's fiction, that we are able to explore our own emotions and also discovering our own nature, strengths and weaknesses.

Susan Matthews argues that:

> Pullman's popularity suggests the ability of children to elucidate his narrative – despite the ambition of his rewriting of one of the grand narratives, the myth of the Fall, which in its articulation in *Paradise Lost* is far from accessible to the contemporary child, adolescent or even adult reader (125).

Not only does Pullman 's trilogy kindle interest in the Bible, but also in other forms of literature, such as Milton and William Blake. By using the Bible, Milton and Blake as sources of inspiration, Pullman sets out:

> to reinterpret the ontology of humankind's moral and ethical universe, and to redefine humankind's quest for a meaningful purpose in life and the individuals responsibility in defining good and evil (Scott 95).

It becomes both Will and Lyra's task to establish the Republic of Heaven in their own worlds, by adhering to specific values, such as telling the truth, living aesthetically and fully, being kind and caring towards others, and always putting the greater good above personal gains. And in order to enable us, as citizens of this republic, to create and sustain this new world, Pullman provides his readers with his myth of loss. This myth attempts to suggest an answer to the age old question of our purpose here, and Pullman seems to be saying that "[o]ur purpose is to understand and to help others to understand, to explore, to speculate, to imagine…[and this] purpose has a moral force" (Pullman "The Republic of Heaven" 665).

Moreover, when the old religions do not provide the same meaning and purpose they used to earlier, when the religious notion of life after death has become something to be doubted, Pullman's myth becomes one that is more appropriate for the contemporary age. Nicholas Tucker states that:

> in a modern Western world where the orthodox Christian story looks increasingly remote and unbelievable, Pullman provides readers with a different type of spiritual journey [and that the popularity of the trilogy] suggests that in an increasingly Godless age the appetite still remains for literature that powerfully engages readers with its own type of spiritual quest (183-4).

The spiritual journey or quest that takes place in *His Dark Materials* is one that confronts the reader with reality, pain and loss. Instead of highlighting only the pleasant sides of life, Pullman portrays both the happy and sad aspects of it. He even makes sure that the ending of the story is a sad one, and one involving loss, just like his myth, and in a way, it can be said that "[w]ithout the freedom to deliver a sad ending' [the story] would lose the emotional power that makes [it] great (Craig and Muchamore n. pag.). But more importantly, it would not be as successful in highlighting the core of Pullman's myth, since, as I am arguing, it is a myth that deals with loss. Myths have the ability to shape "human experiences into enduring and meaningful forms, [which] can help us to respect and value the Sphinx-like riddles of life" (Lenz 49). Graham Richards states that a myth is "about generating stories, images, and symbols which can provide our emotions and life-experiences with meaning, value and structure" (11); this is what Pullman's myth, in the form of a story, is doing for its readers. But while it can be argued that Pullman has successfully constructed a myth that is applicable to the contemporary era, one must still question the power of this myth, and whether or not, and to what extent, it will influence people. Although it is said that a central myth (or myths) is necessary for human beings, one could also argue that some people might be able to function without myths in the first place. To some people, Pullman's trilogy can be just another story,

instead of a compelling myth. Millions of people may never even read the trilogy. If that is the case, where does that leave Pullman's myth, if people don't even get to know about it? In the end, the power of Pullman's myth and the influence it may have on the reader's life will depend on the individual reader, making the power of the myth a wholly subjective matter. It will be in the hands of the reader to choose what to learn or comprehend from the book, and how to apply or put that into practice in his or her own life. Nevertheless, regardless of such a contradiction, it must be kept in mind that "[s]tories are an ideological force, an instrument of truth", and it is also the case that the "story-teller's task is not merely to entertain, but to challenge, resist and liberate", (Pickard 17). *His Dark Materials*, a trilogy which "respects and excites the intelligence and imagination" (Lenz 13) of the reader, succeeds in doing all of these, and in doing so creates a modern myth of loss, one that will hopefully inspire, challenge and guide readers for years to come.

Conclusion

A story about the adventures of two children, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is a trilogy that also explores pressing philosophical and existential questions. In the story "Pullman challenges long-held perceptions concerning organized religion, the after life, original sin, and the role of the soul" (Leet 182), while he also "contrasts innocence and experience, humanitarianism and religious hypocrisy, [and] good and evil" (Costa n. pag.). Sarah K. Cantrell refers to the book as being "[a]t once a page-turning, fast-paced adventure novel and a thoughtful reflection on innocence, experience, and responsibility" (305). By questioning matters such as religion, life after death, and the nature of the soul, "Pullman's trilogy delves into the moral complexities of weighty philosophical and religious questions" (Wartofsky n. pag.); these questions include those of what happens when there is no longer a God to worship, or what happens when we die and are neither sent to heaven nor hell as promised. While "Pullman's writing may be the kind that supplies more questions than answers" (Rayment-Pickard 4), his writing does attempt to provide suggestions to the reader as to how to deal with certain inquiries regarding life. And in order to provide suggestions on how to deal with these questions, Pullman not only appropriates and subverts certain Christian myths, but he also makes use of the works and ideas of his predecessors who have similarly appropriated and subverted such myths, namely William Blake, John Milton and Heinrich von Kleist. With these writers in mind, the trilogy explores the idea of innocence and experience, to some extent offering a re-writing of *Paradise Lost* and the Genesis myth of creation, just as it incorporates Kleist's notion of innate human grace. Harold

Bloom states that "[w]eaker talents idealize [while] figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (5), and that is precisely what Pullman does in his writing. By combining sources such as the Bible, Milton, Blake and Kleist, Pullman uses his exceptional storytelling skills to write a story about the human condition, and what it means to grow up and face life.

While he explores these abovementioned themes, he also writes about how loss is present in our lives, in various forms. He explores religion, or the loss of a God figure, the loss of the belief in an afterlife, and loss in love, and yet from these losses he creates a sort of new myth. In the trilogy, the death of God, known here as the Authority, creates the possibility of a secular world, one that is not controlled by organized religion and institutions. In such a secular world, the future of the universe depends upon the choices and actions of humans and other conscious beings. Death in the story "is not the end, but a way into a new life" (Robson 95-6). It is neither a way to secure a pleasurable afterlife in heaven, nor does it mean eternal damnation in hell. Rather, death leads to the freedom for one, after his or her physical existence ends, to become a part of the living, conscious universe. Love is something that Pullman values highly, but even in love he speaks of loss, through death or through lovers having to part. Regardless of how strong someone's love for another is, there is no guarantee that it will last, such as in the case of Will and Lyra, who must sacrifice their love for the greater good and save the universe from destruction. It is this sense of loss on which Pullman bases his myth.

But why is there even the need for a new myth? Panayiota Vassilopoulou and Jonardon Ganeri state that:

> [a] human being, we are now told, is a creature of crippling moral uncertainty, lacking [in] the ability to discriminate, unable to be certain of whether [his or] her actions are for the better or for worse (271).

We live in a world where the old central points of reference, such as the Bible for example, no longer function as they used to do. There is no one single text, story or myth to which we can turn for answers to our questions, or to be told how to live and make the right choices. Thus, Pullman's myth of loss could function as a central reference point of sorts, at least to his readers, in order to suggest ways in which to deal with the present human condition. Additionally, it is said that "a great writer can change the way we see the world" (Hatlen 75), and that a good writer should not set out to embed a message in his or her story, since that diminishes the value of the story. Pullman's story may, in the case of certain readers, have changed the way they perceive the world around them, and Pullman himself did not consciously set out to write a book with a message like that. The message should be contained within the story itself, and not be the main focus of the author. In an interview, in regard to the author's intention of highlighting a message within a story, Pullman states that:

> [w]hat you learn … after absorbing a really serious piece of fiction, is not a message. Your world has expanded, your world has enlarged at the end of it, and the more a writer focuses on message, the less expansion there'll be (n. pag.).

Thus, Pullman's story is not about sending an ultimate message to his readers, but it is a story that can help to broaden the reader's horizon, in terms of imagination and comprehension. Pullman's dedication to realism in his work is

reflected in his own admission "in all his writings about *His Dark Materials* that his deepest commitment in these books is to tell the story in the clearest and most engaging way possible" (Mackey 64). This argument is further developed by Margaret and Michael Rustin, who state that:

> Pullman's own commitment, as he has himself declared, and as the trilogy demonstrates in the writing, is to realism – psychological realism in our view … [and while] there is much 'magic' in the story … these [magical elements] are present in the story to bring the 'real' child characters into contact with aspects of themselves and experience, not to short-cut or simplify reality (420).

Pullman thus uses fantasy in his writing in order to highlight the psychological truths present in the story. In his myth, Pullman presents loss as a real and integral aspect in our lives, and appears to attempt to make some sense of the necessity of loss, and how to cope with it.

Regarding all these arguments, some skepticism is useful. One must keep in mind that, the trilogy is, after all, a story, a work of art that will not be read by a significant part of the global population. Since those people will never have known of Pullman's trilogy and his myth, the myth will have no effect on them whatsoever. Moreover for the percentage of the population who do read the book, there is no way to say for certain that the myth will speak to every single one of those people. Someone might find the story, and the myth, illuminating, while someone else might find it completely useless. So how is one to judge the actual value of this myth, and the impact it has on the readers? As mentioned earlier, one can draw the conclusion that the matter of the effect of this myth is purely subjective; how each individual reader interprets the myth is purely up to

him or her. Thus, while the influential power of Pullman's story may be somewhat exaggerated, there is still hope that those who have read it may make something out of it. The myth may have helped a number of people to understand the world differently. This subjective nature of the myth also relates to the notion of free will, or choice, (which are also two important issues in Pullman's writing) since it is up to the reader to actively choose what he or she desires to make of it.

His Dark Materials is undoubtedly an inspiring story, and emotionally engaging as well; it is not a story one can easily forget. It is also a story that may indeed change the way one looks at the world, and in particular how one looks at loss. Although Will and Lyra's separation was one of the saddest moments in the entire trilogy, the reader also understands why it was necessary, and can apply their experience to the things, or people, we lose in our own lives, providing us with the thought that although the parting may be, or almost always is painful, it is also necessary, and "[t]he message here seems to be that our allegiance should never be to any single person but to humanity or creation as a whole" (Freitas and King 157-8). Moreover, when one considers the loss of innocence, Pullman's story can help us understand why it is not necessarily a bad thing. In an interview, Pullman states that:

> [f]or [him] it's all bound up with consciousness, and the coming of understanding of things – and making the beginning of intellectual inquiry … [w]hich happens typically in one's adolescence, when one begins to be interested in poetry and art and science and all these other things. With consciousness comes self-consciousness,

> comes shame, comes embarrassment, comes all these things, which are very difficult to deal with (n. pag.).

Pullman's myth can help us to understand the need for the transition from innocence to experience, and see it as a different phase in life, one that entails much confusion, but also exploration and discovery, and that losing one's innocence has its virtues.

The myth of loss may also be a key to finding wisdom in our lives, because only by accepting loss and attempting to deal with it, can we attain wisdom and experience. And wisdom may be considered a good in itself, one closely connected to moral choices. Pullman's myth is one that is "tempered by a touch of realism" and meant for people of a "brave new secular world" (Gooderham 172), and it may very well, for those of us who do choose to read it, provide some way to make sense of the chaos in our lives, since in the 21st century, "[w]e stand here not at a moment of fixed certainties but of maximum potentiality … [and] we are looking out at [c]haos" (Hatlen 87). It is up to us to somehow make sense of that chaos, and also to create something out of it. This is somewhat reminiscent of the epigraph Pullman uses in the beginning of his trilogy, which is taken from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where we find Satan looking out into the wild abyss. Thus, the myth of loss can become a tool to help us "recover this moment of infinite possibility" (Hatlen 87), and create a new, different world order out of the chaos in which we now live.

Works Cited

Armstrong, Karen. Faith and Modernity. *The Betrayal of Tradition: Essays on the Spiritual Crisis of Modernity*. Ed. Harry Oldmeadow. World Wisdom Inc. 2005. 73-88. Print.

--- *A Short History of Myth*. Canongate 2005. Print.

Baker, Dierdre F. "What We Found on Our Journey through Fantasy Land." *Children's Literature in Education* 37.0 (2006): 237-251. Web.

Bird, Anne-Marie. ""Without Contraries is no Progression": Dust as an All-Inclusive, Multifunctional Metaphor in Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials"." *Children's Literature in Education* 32.2 (2001): 111-123. Web.

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. 2nd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Print.

Cantrell, Sarah K. "Letting Specters In: Environmental Catastrophe and the Limits of Space in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 39:2 (2014): 234-251. Web.

Colás, Santiago. "Telling True Stories, or The Immanent Ethics of Material Spirit (and Spiritual Matter) in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials." *Discourse* 27.1 (2005): 34-66. Web.

Costa, Maddy. "Kid's Stuff." The Guardian. 22 August 2001: n. pag. Web.

Craig, Amanda and Muchamore, Robert. "Should children's books have a happy ending?" The Guardian. 28 June 2014: n. pag. Web.

Earl, Mary. "Shadow and Spirituality." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 6.3 (2001): 277-288. Web.

Freitas, Donna and King, Jason E. *Killing The Imposter God: Philip Pullman's Spiritual Imagination in His Dark Materials*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007. Print.

Gooderham, David. "Fantasizing It As It Is: Religious Language in Philip Pullman's Trilogy, His Dark Materials." *Children's Literature* 31.0 (2003):155-175. Web.

Hatlen, Burton. "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*." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2005. Print.

Jukes, Peter. All His Materials. http://aeon.co/magazine/culture/philip-pullman-interview-the-religious-atheist/

Keats' "Negative Capability". http://wwwpersonal.umich.edu/~shanesq/EOTW/Supplementary_Readings/Literary_Process_and_Inspiration/Keats_NEGATIVECAPABILITY.pdf

King, Shelley. ""Without Lyra we would understand neither the New nor the Old Testament": Exegesis, Allegory, and Reading *The Golden Compass*." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Leet, Andrew. "Rediscovering Faith through Science Fiction: Pullman's His Dark Materials." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Lenz, Millicent. "Story as a Bridge to Transformation: The Way Beyond Death in Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*." *Children's Literature in Education* 34.1 (2003): 47-55. Web.

--- "Awakening to the Twenty-first Century: The Evolution of Human Consciousness in Pullman's His Dark Materials." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Lewis, C. S. *An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961. Print.

Mackay, Margaret. "*Northern Lights* and Northern Readers: Background Knowledge, Affect Linking, and Literary Understanding." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Matthews, Susan. "Rouzing the Faculties to Act: Pullman's Blake for Children." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Meacham, Steve. "The shed where God died." *The Sun Herald* 13 December 2003. Web. < http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/12/1071125644900.html>

Morris, Pam. *Realism*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2003. Print.

Naugle, David. "Narrative and Life: The Central Role of Stories in Human Experience." Friday Symposium. Dallas Baptist University, 1999: 1-16. Web.

Newby, Mike. "The 'God Beyond God' in Fiction for Young People." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 3.1 (1998): 69-74. Web.

Padley, Jonathan and Padley, Kenneth. "'A Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven': *His Dark Materials,* Inverted Theology, and the End of Philip Pullman's Authority." *Children's Literature in Education* 37.0 (2006): 325-334. Web.

Parsons, Wendy and Nicholson, Catriona. "Talking to Philip Pullman: An Interview." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 23.1 (1999): 116-134. Web.

Pinsent, Pat. "Unexpected Allies? Pullman and the Feminist Theologians." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Pullman, Philip. *His Dark Materials*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. Print.

--- "The Republic of Heaven." *The Horn Book Magazine* (2001): 655-667. Web.

Rayment-Pickard, Hugh. *The Devil's Account: Philip Pullman and Christianity*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 2007. Print.

Renton, Jennie. Philip Pullman Interview. Textualities. http://textualities.net/jennie-renton/philip-pullman-interview

Richards, Graham. *Psychology, Religion, and the Nature of the Soul: A Historical Entanglement*. Springer Science & Business Media 2011. Print.

Robson, Geoff. "Killing God? Secular and spiritual elements in some recent literature for children." *British Journal of Religious Education* 35.1 (2013): 87-97. Web.

Rustin, Margaret and Rustin, Michael. "A new kind of friendship–An essay on Philip Pullman's The Subtle Knife." *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 29.2 (2003): 227-241. Web.

--- "Learning to say goodbye–An essay on Philip Pullman's The Amber Spyglass." *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 29.3 (2003): 415-428. Web.

Schweizer, Bernard. ""And He's A-Going to Destroy Him": Religious Subversion in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Scott, Carol. "Pullman's Enigmatic Ontology: Revamping Old Traditions in *His Dark Materials*." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Shohet, Lauren. "Reading Dark Materials." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Smith, Karen Patricia. "Tradition, Transformation, and the Bold Emergence: Fantastic Legacy and Pullman's *His Dark Materials*." *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*. Ed. Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott. Michigan: Wane State University Press, 2005. Print.

Spanner, Huw. Heat and Dust." http://www.spannermedia.com/interviews/Pullman.htm

"The Dark Materils debate: life, God, the universe…" The Telegraph, 17 March 2004. Web.

Tucker, Nicholas. *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*. Cambridge: Wizard Books, 2007. Print.

Vassilopoulou, Panayiota and Ganeri, Jonardon. "The Geography of Shadows: Souls and Cities in P.Pullman's His Dark Materials." *Philosophy and Literature* 35.2 (2011): 269-281. Web.

Wartofsky, Anna. "The Last Word." *Washington Post*, 19 February 2001. Web. 11 February 2014.

Watkins, Tony. "Philip Pullman and his atheist fiction." 31 March 2010. Web. http://www.tonywatkins.co.uk/media/literature/philip-pullman-and-his-atheist-fiction/

Wood, Naomi. "Introduction: Children's Literature and Religion." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 24.1 (1999): 1-3. Web.