

In a Tradition of Republican Revolution:
Romanticism and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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May 2010

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Abstract

'In a Tradition of Republican Revolution: Romanticism and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*' by Keith O'Sullivan

Philip Pullman's children's fantasy *His Dark Materials* is a work influenced by Romanticism, particularly British Romanticism. The thematic concern of the work, with building not a kingdom but a secular humanist republic of heaven where all people are free and equal citizens, and its philosophical concern, with the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience, owe much to values and norms held and developed by Romantic writers and thinkers. *His Dark Materials* makes a case for the revolutionary potential of literature, but children's fantasy specifically, to challenge established customs and effect social change. Its republican validation of personal liberty, egalitarianism and partnership questions the centrality of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism in Western culture, as well as oppressive nostalgias for childhood innocence that refuse to say anything positive about adult experience.

While John Milton and *Paradise Lost* – the Romantics' foremost precursor poet and poem – the works of William Blake, particularly *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, and Heinrich von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' are acknowledged influences on *His Dark Materials*, there are also similarities between the text and the political tracts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Paine and William Godwin, as well as the imaginative writings of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats.

Despite the continued growth in the number of critical essays published on Pullman's *oeuvre*, relatively few scholarly monographs have been published on *His Dark Materials*; furthermore, while the influence of Romanticism on *His Dark Materials* is generally accepted, the extent of this influence has not been examined in detail. Danijela Petkovic suggests that while 'it is possible to draw numerous parallels' between *His Dark Materials* and 'the key Romantic texts of the nineteenth century' to do so would necessitate going 'far beyond the scope' of scholarship to date (2008: 97) – this dissertation illuminates some of these parallels.

This dissertation begins with an introductory chapter that states the thesis and expounds the relationship between *His Dark Materials* and a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writing; contextualizes the dissertation, both theoretically and critically; and, outlines the structure of the argument in the succeeding chapters. Chapter One, entitled '*His Dark Materials* as Children's Fantasy', argues that Pullman employs the language and generic conventions of children's literature and fantasy to develop a story that promotes the need for personal and social change to as wide a readership as possible. In light of his acknowledged indebtedness to Milton, Chapter Two, entitled '*His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm', considers both the influence of *Paradise Lost* on the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with building a republic of

heaven and the similarities the text shares with iconoclastic theology and theocracy in Romantic writing. Chapter Three, entitled '*His Dark Materials* and Romantic Constructions of Childhood', examines the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience in *His Dark Materials*, as well as the text's challenge to oppressive nostalgias for childhood that malign maturation and subordinate children to adults. The dissertation concludes with a chapter that offers a summation of the arguments made to substantiate the claim that the thematic and philosophical concerns of Pullman's text are expressed through well-established Romantic paradigms – that *His Dark Materials* is written in a tradition of republican revolution.

Acknowledgements

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This dissertation is for Jennifer, who makes all things worthwhile: 'In every sense, but that of plagiarism, this work is as much yours as it is mine'.

Abbreviations and Notes

Primary Sources

NL: Pullman, P. (1998). *Northern Lights*. London: Scholastic.

SK: Pullman, P. (2001). *The Subtle Knife*. London: Scholastic.

AS: Pullman, P. (2001). *The Amber Spyglass*. London: Scholastic.

Secondary Sources

CPW: all references to Milton's vernacular prose are to Wolfe, D. M. et al, (Eds.). (1953-1982). *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

OED: Thompson, D. (Ed.). (1995). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (9th Edition). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Online Sources

John Milton

All references to *Paradise Lost* are taken from the online 1667 first-edition text provided by the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, at <http://www.lib.virginia.edu>: accessed 1 May 2010. The 1667 title page describes

Paradise Lost as ‘a poem written in ten books’; however, when Milton came to work on a revised edition in 1674 he rearranged the text into twelve books. While this twelve-book version became canonical, the changes are so few – as the 1667 poem was, in most ways, already so finished – that the need for restructuring is arguable.

William Blake

All references to *The Book of Urizen* are taken from the 1794 online edition provided by the Department of Languages and Literatures, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, at <http://www.facstaff.uww.edu>: accessed 1 May 2010.

All references to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* are taken from the 1789 and 1794 online editions provided by the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, at <http://www.lib.virginia.edu>: accessed 1 May 2010. The online editions are based on the Dover edition, first published in 1992. Pagination is based on the 1977 facsimile edition edited by Geoffrey Keynes, published by Oxford University Press. The source copy consulted is UVa Clemons Library call no. PR4144.S71977.

Sections of Dissertation Previously Published or Pending Publication

Material from the section ‘The Ecclesiastical Magisterium of *His Dark Materials*’ has been published in O’Sullivan, K. (2008). *Lost in Translation: Iconoclasm and*

the Transition of *His Dark Materials* from Book to Film. *Inis, The Magazine of Children's Books Ireland*, 23, 29-32.

Material from the section 'Democratizing Genre and Language: *His Dark Materials* as Crossover Fiction' is pending publication in O'Sullivan, K. (2010). Democratising Literature: *His Dark Materials* as Crossover Fiction. *The Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, Spring.

Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n

Paradise Lost

Youth of delight, come hither,

And see the opening morn,

Image of truth new-born.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience

We must eat again of the Tree of Knowledge

‘On the Marionette Theatre’

A war [is] coming. I don't know who will join us, but I know whom we must fight

His Dark Materials

The story is against those who pervert and misuse [...] an apparatus of power that
wields unchallengeable authority, in order to [...] suppress human freedoms

Philip Pullman

Introduction

This introductory chapter states the thesis; expounds the relationship between *His Dark Materials* and a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writings; presents the theoretical and critical approach taken in the dissertation; and, outlines the structure of the argument, as developed in subsequent chapters.

***His Dark Materials* and Revolutionary, Republican Romanticism**

The fact that individual volumes of Philip Pullman's children's fantasy *His Dark Materials* – consisting of *Northern Lights* (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) – have been awarded The Carnegie Medal and The Guardian Prize for Fiction attests not only to their perceived literary merit but also to their popularity. The impressive list of distinctions conferred upon the work culminated with Pullman himself being presented with the 2005 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award for writing that 'stands firmly on the side of young people, ruthlessly questioning authority [...] whilst maintaining an optimistic belief in the child in the darkest of situations' (Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2005).

Despite the prestigious nature of the accolades bestowed upon author and text, however, such honours have come, for the most part, without a detailed scholarly critique of what Pullman describes as the 'three debts that need acknowledgement above all the rest' (AS: 549-50): namely, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667); the

works of William Blake, but particularly *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1789-1794); and, Heinrich von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' (1810). This dissertation fulfils a distinct need, articulated in literary circles, to examine, in detail, the parallels that exist between *His Dark Materials* and key Romantic texts of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries (Petkovic 2008: 97) – while Milton is chronologically a Neo-Classical or Renaissance writer, this section of the chapter sets out a case for his 'presence' (Kitson 2005: 463) in the Romantic period (c. 1775-1830).

While Romanticism – the 'sets of beliefs, values, and opinions' (Stephens 1992: 1-3) that shaped the way Romantic writers understood the world – informs *His Dark Materials*, the text's intertextuality is not limited solely to this discourse. A distinctly rich work, embedded in a whole web of literary sources, it interweaves 'intricate threads of relationship [...] with text quoting text and image quoting image in a metaphorical reflective hall of mirrors' (Scott 2005: 96). In his acknowledgments, Pullman claims that he has stolen material from every book he has ever read (*AS*: 549). In fact, according to Michael Dirda, aside from its dialogue with *Paradise Lost* and the poetry of Blake, *His Dark Materials* makes reference to

Jewish Kabbalah (the legend of the god-like angel Metatron), [...] the 'death of God' controversy, Perelandra, the Oz books (the Wheelers), Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelungs* (Siegfried's mending of the sword), Aeneas, Odysseus and Dante in the Underworld, the Grail legend and the wounded Fisher King,

Peter Pan, [...] the doctrine of the hidden God and speculation about the plurality of worlds, situational ethics (actions, not people, being good or bad), the cessation of miracles, *Star Wars*, colonialist evangelizing, the fetch of British folklore, the [...seventeenth-century] doctrine of sympathies (for the Gallivespian communication device, the lodestone-resonator), the popular mythology of the Jesuits as ascetic masterminds of realpolitik, superhero comics [...] Ursula Le Guin's *Earthsea* books, Fritz Leiber's sword-and-sorcery tales of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, Jack Vance's elegant *Dying Earth* stories (2000).

Nevertheless, this dissertation argues that *His Dark Materials*' challenge to the authority of Christianity in Western culture and the reification of innocence as a culturally idealized ontology is significantly influenced by, or shares notable similarities with, the revolutionary hopes and republican values of Romantic writers and thinkers – especially those of British origin. In particular, it is claimed that the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with promoting not a kingdom but a secular humanist republic of heaven where all people are free and equal citizens, and its philosophical concern with exploring the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience, owe much to Romanticism.

According to Claire Squires, Pullman's homage to Milton, Blake and von Kleist in the 'Acknowledgements' to *The Amber Spyglass* suggests that these sources are of 'vital importance' (2003: 20). However, while von Kleist's short essay embodies a

libratory desire for adult knowledge and experience similar to that found in *His Dark Materials*, it is not a seminal source in the ways that *Paradise Lost* or the works of Blake are. Consequently, the twin focus of this dissertation is on Milton and Blake as influential figures. Even though Pullman contends that ‘everything’ (2007, August) he manages to say in *His Dark Materials* is in von Kleist’s ‘wonderful and extraordinary little essay’, where his nineteenth-century predecessor examines ‘the Adam and Eve story and sees it as part of the important and inevitable process of developing as human beings’ (2003, March), its real significance lies in the fact that it acts as a kind of literary bridge: it links Pullman’s readings of Milton’s poetic treatise on the necessity of acquiring knowledge to Blake’s dialectical songs of innocence and experience. In essence, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ conceptualizes a reconstitution of the Miltonic Fall in terms of the Blakean dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience. Furthermore, although von Kleist’s essay might also be thought to suggest the influence of German Romanticism on *His Dark Materials*, such a line of development is tenuous. In particular, the *Nachtseite* (the dark side) in German Romanticism, which pessimistically portrays individuals as innately imperfect and nature as malevolently sinister, differs significantly to the more optimistic treatment of both of in Pullman’s text: in *His Dark Materials* individuals are shown to be capable of wisdom, while nature is presented as a universal spiritual force.

Pullman develops the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials*, however, not just through a self-conscious engagement with a predominantly British

Romantic tradition that adopts Milton as a symbolic figure of republican value but also by utilizing the epistemological position of children's literature as an agent of cultural and ideological acculturation. The fact that *His Dark Materials* is children's fantasy contextualizes Pullman's writing in terms of audience, narrative and linguistic style. In particular, the crossover appeal of both children's literature and fantasy is exploited by Pullman in order to ensure his republican agenda reaches as wide a readership as possible.

That *His Dark Materials* is published as children's literature is also the principal reason why the text is persistently set for contrast and comparison against C S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956). Pullman, however, has sent out cautionary counsel to those who would situate *His Dark Materials*, for contrast and comparison, among the writings of twentieth-century British fantasists ever since his *South Bank Show* interview. While a claim for Pullman being a secular version of Lewis as a writer would seem to be a synecdoche for a more general argument about the vision of heaven presented in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman has argued that the thematic concern of his text with building a secular humanist republic of heaven is informed by a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writings – not the theological writings of St Augustine that inform Lewis' work. In particular, he has asserted that, in terms of its thematic and philosophical concerns, *His Dark Materials* offers not a rewriting of *The Chronicles of Narnia* but of *Paradise Lost*. According to Pullman, the reason he wrote *His Dark Materials* is because he 'wanted to do *Paradise Lost* [...] the story of the Fall [...] the story of how what

some would call sin, but [...he] would call consciousness', came about – and to celebrate it (Nelson 2005).

In enlisting children's literature, or story in general, as the medium for revolutionary change, Pullman exalts the role of storyteller. In a manner not altogether dissimilar to the way in which the task of Wordsworth's poet or Blake's bard is to educate, the task of Pullman's storyteller is not merely to entertain but to challenge, resist and unfetter. His role as storyteller is, therefore, also that of guide, leading his readers to see situations that he believes are in need of reform. Through *His Dark Materials*, Pullman makes an implicit claim for the author as liberator: someone who recognizes the appeal of the power of the imagination over a merely utilitarian and oppressive view of life. As Rayment-Pickard argues, Pullman sees himself, like his character Danny Goldberg in *The Tiger in the Well* (1991), as a 'lone storyteller standing on a chair before [...] crowds of religious unreason, superstition, and authoritarian oppression' (2004: 17).

While there might not be the same sense of social upheaval in twenty-first-century Britain as there was in late-eighteenth-century Europe, *His Dark Materials* still shares the concern of revolutionary and republican Romantic writings with the nature and place of the individual in society. Pullman's stated aims in writing *His Dark Materials* include 'killing God' (Meacham 2003), undermining the basis of Christian belief and challenging 'nostalgias for childhood' that refuse to say 'anything positive about growing up' (2003, March). These aims, which uphold

human liberty, suggest that life should not be one endless childhood; that people should not be held in superstitious ignorance; and, that individuals should think for themselves, unhindered by the prejudices of state institutions.

An Age of Revolution

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Romanticism is an aesthetic and philosophical tendency, an expression of dissatisfaction with the Age of Reason; however, it is also inextricably linked to the revolutionary, republican upheavals that occurred in America and Europe in the late eighteenth century. It was an 'Age of Revolution' in which literature was often infused with politics to such an extent that it became a catalyst for social change. The most notable challenge to established authority in the period, and one that was reflected in the literature of the day, was that of republican revolution. Fuelled by the emancipatory hopes and aspirations of revolutionaries in both America and Europe, and characterized by the violent reality of insurrection, the growing agitation for change in Europe was inaugurated dramatically with the fall of the Bastille in 1789. With the advent of the French Revolution, established customs were radically challenged, and a pervasive feeling that new things were possible took hold.

The political prose treatises of Rousseau, one of the founding fathers of modern-day European republicanism and Romanticism, were designed to instruct and suggest changes in society for its future betterment. They represent the beginnings of a

language of liberty that helped in creating a climate conducive to violent revolution in late-eighteenth-century Europe. However, while his belief in the sovereignty of citizens as the only form of legitimate government was a spark for popular insurrection, Rousseau's approach to challenging oppressive authority rested upon an admirable and consistent republican belief in 'the inalienability of human liberty' (Cole 1986: xxli):

common liberty is one consequence of the nature of man. Its first law is to see to his maintenance; its first concerns are those he owes himself; and, as soon as he reaches the age of reason, since he alone is the judge of the proper means of taking care of himself, he thereby becomes his own master (Rousseau 1987: 142).

The language of liberty evident throughout *His Dark Materials* recalls Rousseau's oratory of change. In his address to the citizens of Geneva, Rousseau's assertion, that if he had to make choice of the place of his birth he would have sought out for his country 'some peaceful and happy Republic [...] whose citizens, long accustomed to a wise independence, were not only free, but worthy to be so' (1986b: 34), could well have been spoken by any one of the self-named 'followers of wisdom' (AS: 506) who populate the worlds of *His Dark Materials*. Their intention to become 'free citizens' of a 'republic' is one that acknowledges the need to keep minds 'open and free and curious' (AS: 222, 506, 520). Furthermore, Rousseau's desire to seek out a Republic in which the right of legislation was vested in *all* the

citizens is clearly shared by King Ogunwe in *His Dark Materials*, finding expression in the democratic sentiments of the king's proclamation: 'I am a king, but it's my proudest task to join [...] in setting up a world where there are no kingdoms at all' (AS: 222).

While Britain was affected by the various revolutions that erupted at the end of the eighteenth century, the uprising in France effected a particularly intense response from Romantic writers – some supported the revolution, others denounced it, but few were ambivalent. A change of sensibility, which challenged conventional ideas about the nature of both the individual and society, is reflected in the subject matter of a great deal of the prose and poetry of the day. The prose writer William Hazlitt, in a book of essays written in 1825 and entitled *The Spirit of the Age*, describes how in his early youth the French Revolution had seemed the dawn of a new era; while, Shelley believed that writers were imbued with – what he describes in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) as – 'a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit' that was 'less their own than the spirit of the age' (2003: 701). Reminiscing in a letter that was written in middle age, Robert Southey noted that few persons but those who had lived through it could 'conceive or comprehend what the memory of the French Revolution was, nor what a [...] world seemed to open upon those who were just entering it. Old things seemed passing away, and nothing was dreamt of but the regeneration of the human race' (Wordsworth and Wordsworth 2001: xxv).

Edmund Burke's anti-reformist writings, but particularly his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), mark the beginnings of the 'Pamphlet War' in Britain: a series of interconnected prose publications that debated the effects of the French Revolution on Britain (Butler 1998: 2). While debate around events in France was often uninspiring, the more renowned cases for reform in Britain in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution were fired by the enthusiasm of leading London radicals such as Paine, Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. These writers, many of whom constituted a close circle of friends, produced, between 1791 and early 1793, a series of innovative and utopian proposals that included the establishment of a humane welfare state, the dismantling of the centralised state, and the promotion of a new egalitarianism in inter-personal relations, which would negate women's subservience to men (Butler 1998: 5). Chapter Two, '*His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm', argues that *His Dark Materials*, which is shaped by a republican agenda similar to those of Paine, Godwin and Wollstonecraft, is Pullman's utopian proposal for a secular humanist republic of heaven. Furthermore, the dissertation also suggests, more generally, that there is a series of female figures – including the text's female protagonist Lyra, the biblical figure Eve, and the ex-nun and research scientist Dr Mary Malone – that impacts on the nature of the libratory and emancipatory aspects of *His Dark Materials* and posits gender equality as a central tenet of Pullman's secular humanist republic of heaven.

It was the twelve-month period beginning in 1792, however, that marked the onset of what was to become the *annus mirabilis* of eighteenth-century radicalism, for it

saw the emergence of one of its canonical texts. In May, the Society for Constitutional Information printed and distributed nationwide Paine's *The Rights of Man* – a response to *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. In his pamphlet, Paine, an independent republican and a supporter of the revolutions in both America and France, attacked established authority. Essentially, *The Rights of Man* argues that every 'ministry acts upon the same idea Mr Burke writes, namely, that the people must be hood-winked, and held in superstitious ignorance by some bugbear or other' (2003: 339). It argues for the need to remove traditions and institutions that impede the rise of capable individuals, because the rights of human beings are natural and arise from a rational social contract.

While not as revolutionary as *The Rights of Man*, the 1793 version of Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* also exemplifies radical reformist writing, with its large horizons, optimism, extremism and, sometimes, impracticality. Principally, Godwin's work stresses that the exercise of authority, or government, should not require that humankind 'be kept in ignorance' (1998: 164). In the chapter 'Of Obedience', Godwin echoes the language of Rousseau when he argues that individuals should divest themselves of 'the shackles of infancy' because 'human life should not be one eternal childhood'; they should judge for themselves, 'unfettered by the prejudices of [...] the institutions of their country' (1998: 158). In 'Of Political Imposture', he also rebels against deceptions that divide humankind into two classes, one of which is 'to think and reason for the whole', and the other 'to take the conclusions of their superiors on

trust' (1998: 165). However, because Godwin was writing for a select readership, a close intellectual circle of radicals, his writing was understood primarily as a platform for debate as opposed to a catalyst for insurrection on the streets.

First-generation Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, also, at the outset, showed great enthusiasm for the events in France: Wordsworth wrote *The Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* (1793), a pamphlet that gave support to the Revolution; and, Coleridge, inspired by what appeared to be the beginnings of a new society, if not a new world in France, planned a utopian scheme of emigration to America called Pantisocracy. For poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge, the turbulent age through which they lived was, for a while, a time when progressive reforms seemed a real possibility. The result was that by the early years of the 1790s there had evolved a rhetoric of liberty that was 'international rather than patriotic, "levelling" rather than hierarchical, and above all misleadingly unconstrained since it put its claim in respect of the individual conscience' (Butler 1998: 5). Although she focuses, primarily, on political prose tracts, Marilyn Butler also argues that the salient values of much Romantic poetry included 'a sense of personal liberty and autonomy, a belief in civic virtue, and a hatred of corruption – all of which can be seen as symptomatic of not only a "republican" tradition in Western European thought' (1998: 3). These are the principal values advocated by the protagonists of *His Dark Materials*.

While the possibility of radical social and political reform in the immediate aftermath of the French Revolution was optimistically expounded in the writings of many Romantic writers, events in both Britain and France from 1792 to 1795 were to call into question the relationship between literature and socio-political revolution. Aside from the charge of libel against Paine by William Pitt's Administration in December 1792, for the spread of radicalism through 'seditious literature' (Mori 1997: 122), the catalyst for the dissipation of a political agenda in late-eighteenth-century Romantic writings was the turn of events in France. Those who had initially supported the French Revolution had disconcerting news to contend with as it seemed Burke's worst fears were realised: the September Massacres of 1792, the execution of first the King and then the Queen in 1793, the Terror of 1794, and the royalist rebellion in the Vendée of 1793-1795.

The events in France precipitated a moral crisis in many Romantic poets, as their hopes in a 'morally acceptable' (Gregory 2003: 15) revolution were dashed. Wordsworth, in particular, who was living in France until December, left the country bewildered and shocked by the increasingly violent turn of events (Legouis 2005: 35). With the degeneration of the idealism that initially accompanied the French Revolution, a change was effected in the psyches of these poets. For Wordsworth and Coleridge, in particular, this led to a quest for revolution within the self: for human improvement by means of reason and education. By 1814, the 'Mind of Man' (2001: 6. 40) was identified by Wordsworth in *The Excursion* as 'My haunt, and the main region of my song' (2001: 6. 41), while Coleridge's poetic subjects –

as opposed to his prose, which moved towards abstruser areas such as philosophy and theology (Hamilton 2003: 85) – gradually turned to nature and religion, the inner life, friendship and home.

In effect, poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge made conscious decisions to abandon support for the French Revolution in favour of reform through literary expression. While less startling than socio-political radicalism, these poets trusted in the educative potential of poetry to effect personal and, by extension, social change. However, while there is legitimacy in Marilyn Butler's (1998: 1) contention that, in light of the turning of events in France, the themes and techniques of the poetry, but not the prose, of the 1790s went 'underground', to re-emerge in the 'more specialised, refined, and sometimes notionally radical, body of literature' that was nineteenth-century Romantic poetry, it fails to acknowledge the oftentimes explicit revolutionary nature of much second-generation poetry.

Even though second-generation Romantic poets were too young to be directly affected by the revolutionary fervour of the 1780s and 1790s, many were, nevertheless, disillusioned by the shift from radicalism to conservatism by some of their predecessors – but especially Wordsworth and Coleridge – in the aftermath of events in France. Poets such as Byron and Shelley, who were both radicals, were not only concerned with the nature and place of the individual in society but also convinced that literature was an appropriate medium for such subject matter. Shelley, in particular, sought to understand and explain what he saw as the

temporary failure of the revolutionary movement in his writing. His growing sense of despondency over what he believed was a lack of desire among writers to inspire meaningful social change is clearly evident in his preface to *The Revolt of Islam* (1817), where he speaks of the 'melancholy desolation' of 'cherished hopes', resulting in 'gloom and misanthropy', becoming 'the characteristics of the age' (1829: xi).

In light of Byron's encouragement to develop radical socio-political views in both poetry and prose, Shelley published *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* (1817), and *An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte* (1817), as well as the long narrative poem, *Laon and Cyntha*, first withdrawn and then reissued as *The Revolt of Islam* – works that were all clearly intended as a challenge to church, state and society. However, despite the fact that, when Shelley met Byron in 1816, the two poets exchanged revolutionary thoughts that were to have a direct effect on the writings of the younger poet for the remainder of his short life, Shelley's political bent was evident long before his meeting with Byron. In March 1811, he and his friend Thomas Jefferson Hogg were expelled from University College, Oxford, for publishing a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*; while, soon after his expulsion, he eloped with Harriet Westbrook and became involved in more radical revolutionary agitation while travelling through Ireland. Not only did he support the struggle for Irish independence through non-violent means, but he also published a pamphlet, *An Address: To the Irish People* (1812), which he

distributed in the streets of Dublin as part of his 'attempted intervention in the Irish political scene' (Lewes 2003: 2).

It is in *Queen Mab* (1813) and 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820), however, that Shelley's revolutionary bent finds definitive imaginative expression. In *Queen Mab*, Shelley surveys what he sees as the disastrous progress of Western history, and reveals, in a dramatic, visionary framework, the pattern of oppression and exploitation that tyrannical ideologies had forced on Europe. The poem calls for a complete reassessment of existing political, religious and social norms on a grand scale. Shelley's views are infused everywhere throughout 'Ode to the West Wind', but particularly in the call for the destruction of old orders, so as to allow for the construction of new ones – just as the destruction of winter gives way to the renewal of spring. In both poems, Shelley confirms his belief in language as the medium of change and reform, owing to its ability to lie outside ordinary, accepted cultural assumptions: in effect, he argues not only for the moral and social functions but also the revolutionary potential of poetry – something he expands upon in *A Defence of Poetry*.

Romantic poets wrote in a period of immense cultural upheaval, which held exciting potential for the future. Many writers hoped for social and personal betterment, either through socio-political revolution or the educative potential of literature. While Butler's contention that the 'polarization of literature and politics around 1800' (1998: 12) comes as an ironic ending to half a century in which the arts were

infused with revolutionary thought is broadly accurate, it is also overstated. Although the after-history of poetry, post-French Revolution, is to a significant extent that of the private theme and the small, highly educated audience, the works of many Romantic poets prove, conversely, that imaginative writing was still often imbued with revolutionary agenda. Romantic poetry continued to include a considerable number of texts with very clearly built-in cultural determinations: texts that were, if not always radically revolutionary, still consciously socio-political in nature. While many Romantic poets struggled with the complexities of their age, they retained, in general, a desire for revolution; a belief in the necessity and legitimacy of challenging established authority; and, a conviction that literature had a central role to play in keeping human beings morally alive and politically sensitive.

The specific values of revolutionary and republican Romanticism explored in subsequent chapters, and examined in relation to Pullman and *His Dark Materials*, are those that pose a challenge to established authority and promote personal liberty, egalitarianism and partnership. Individual chapters of this dissertation examine *His Dark Materials* in relation to Romantic attempts to promote liberty, free from oppressive religious authority, through iconoclastic writing; and, uphold egalitarianism and partnership as the values of a just society, through writing that endorses the desirability of knowledge and the naturalness of the movement from childhood innocence to adult experience. *His Dark Materials* engages with Romantic writings in order to illuminate, address and challenge both twenty-first-

century Western culture's authorization of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism, as well as its idealization of nostalgias for childhood innocence.

Sharing similarities with the republicanism of Rousseau and Paine, and with the revolutionary impulse of poets like Shelley, *His Dark Materials* is imbued with Pullman's sense of personal liberty, belief in civic virtue and hatred of corruption. Focusing primarily, but not exclusively, on the oppressive power of ecclesiasticism, the challenge *His Dark Materials* offers to customary authority is more moral or religious than political. It suggests that the prevalence of institutional religion in contemporary societies is – to borrow the words Butler uses to describe Paine's views on religion in *The Rights of Man* (1792) – 'evidence of a sinister conspiracy by a ruling caste that, in all ages and in all civilisations, cynically uses the mystifications of religion as instruments of policy' (1998: 122). *His Dark Materials* implies that religious authority breeds oppressive individualism, while personal liberty coexists with civic responsibility. On the *South Bank Show* in 2003, Pullman claimed that *His Dark Materials* specifically condemns religious authority because, as far as he is concerned, 'churches of every sort and of every religion' have established a most effective way of 'controlling human lives for reasons that are ultimately selfish and cruel'. However, the critique of churches in *His Dark Materials* is, in fact, directed specifically at ecclesiastical authority.

His Dark Materials also gives evidence of Pullman's attempt to 'undermine the basis of Christian belief' (Wartofsky 2001) and promote secular humanism (2000,

October). In the text, the main obstacle to the creation of a new world based on egalitarian values is the Authority: a 'tyrant', masquerading as God. The emphasis in Pullman's text on the desirability of replacing a Kingdom with a republic of heaven finds expression in language that is imbued with a revolutionary sentiment reminiscent of that found in Romantic writings. *His Dark Materials* is the story of a 'last rebellion' (AS: 222), against the Authority, based upon the premise that it is time to start again but 'properly this time' (SK: 334). Its challenge to what it portrays as the oppressive nature of Christianity is couched in republican rhetoric. It claims that human history is characterized by struggle – a struggle to seek freedom from those who wish human beings would 'obey [...] be humble and submit' (SK: 334-35). Despite the controversy surrounding the 'seditious' (Maguire 2008; Miller 2007) nature of the text's critique of organized religion, *His Dark Materials*, like the later writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge, makes a case for the possibility of human improvement and societal transformation by means of the educative potential of literature: the quest for revolution within the self.

A Republican Milton and a Revolutionary Blake

His Dark Materials is a creative retelling of one of the founding myths of Western culture: the biblical account of the Fall, as reinterpreted by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. When Pullman suggested his idea for *His Dark Materials* to David Fickling, his editor and publisher, he described it as '*Paradise Lost* for teenagers in three volumes' (Parsons and Nicholson 1999: 126). Pullman's fascination with *Paradise*

Lost is evident in, amongst other things, the title he chose for his work and the many epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass* that come from Milton's epic poem of man's 'First Disobedience, and the Fruit | Of that Forbidden Tree' (I. 1-2). Discussing the influence of Milton's poem on *His Dark Materials*, Pullman stated that *Paradise Lost* 'was the starting point' for him; that he found it 'intensely enthralling, not only the actual story – the story of the temptation and so on – but [also...] the power of the poetry and the extraordinary majesty of the language' (2000, August).

That the peculiar power of Milton's language – its rhetorical, elevated and incantatory nature – should attract Pullman is unsurprising; however, notwithstanding Milton's captivating talent for displaying so impressively 'what amazing things the English language can do' and 'what amazing things can be done with the English language' (Ricks 1989: xviii), it is the revolutionary and republican 'ethos' of *Paradise Lost* that has had the greatest influence on Pullman. According to him, he found that in reading *Paradise Lost* his interest was

most vividly caught by the meaning of the temptation-and-fall theme. Suppose that the prohibition on the knowledge of good and evil were an expression of jealous cruelty, and the gaining of such knowledge an act of virtue? Suppose the Fall should be celebrated and not deplored? (2005a: 10).

These comments suggest that Pullman reads *Paradise Lost* as evidence of Milton's, as opposed to the poem's, orthodoxy: 'suppose the Fall should be celebrated and not

deplored?', he muses. However, while it has been argued that *His Dark Materials* is nothing less than a reprise of *Paradise Lost* (Cornwell 2004), Pullman's intentions are not Milton's: the latter attempted to 'justify the wayes of God to men' (I. 26); the former seeks to rationalize the ways of man to man.

Pullman is not the first writer to be indebted to Milton. According to Lucy Newlyn, 'every one of the writers belonging to the tradition of English Romanticism could be said to have engaged with what [...Milton] had to say, as well as with his poetic reputation' – he is 'vital to an understanding of what Romanticism is' (2001: 1-2). Despite Newlyn's contention that 'the formation of Romantic aesthetics is bound up with Miltonic influence in ways that are indirect, and possibly incalculable' (2001: 2), one of the more obvious, and significant, ways in which Milton had an influence on the writers of the period was as a republican poet – his influence on Pullman is no different.

In the twenty-first century, Milton is generally regarded as one of the most learned poets in the English literary tradition and *Paradise Lost* as a text representative of Western culture, a 'classic' of English literature, a masterpiece, albeit a controversial one. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries both Milton and *Paradise Lost* were similarly significant (Duran 2007: 49; Corns 2005: ix; Kitson 2005: 463). For many writers of the Romantic period, Milton was the principal precursor poet: a claim supported by the fact that *Paradise Lost* was published over 100 times from 1705 to 1800, making it along with *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible, one of the

most widely read books of the century (Havens 1922: 4).

In writing about Milton, the Romantics were, in many ways, engaging in their own form of canon formation, identifying his work as an example of the kind of art they wished to replicate. Coleridge, in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), describes Milton and Shakespeare as the two ideal poets, ‘the two glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain’ (2001: 381), not rivals but ‘compeer[s]’ (2001: 381), while Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) stated that Milton’s work constituted ‘one column’ of British national achievement – Shakespeare being the other (Wittreich 1970: 466). Furthermore, in 1859, De Quincey, in dismissing Dr Johnson as ‘the worst enemy that Milton and his great cause [...had] ever been called on to confront’, also claimed that *Paradise Lost* was ‘ideally grand [...and] beyond the region of ordinary human sympathies’ (Wittreich 1970: 500, 507).

While twentieth-century readers from Ezra Pound through T S Eliot to Harold Bloom have seen Milton as a debilitating literary predecessor for the writers of the Romantic period, Robin Jarvis (1991) suggests that most contemporary scholars consider his influence as enabling. However, Milton’s influence in the Romantic period was not just as a poet but also as a political prophet: although he appealed to writers from a variety of different political persuasions, he was ‘a revolutionary writer for a revolutionary age’ (Kitson 2005: 464). The Romantic period established Milton as a republican writer of great importance.

Even in his own lifetime Milton was regarded as a republican revolutionary: the regicides' 'goose quill champion', as John Tatham describes him in his satirical pamphlet of 1660, *Character of the Rump* (1879: 289). His characteristic response to social, political and religious authorities was clearly antagonistic. Favoured under Oliver Cromwell's regime as the public defender of England against European criticism in the aftermath of the trial and execution of Charles I, the author of *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (1651) was, with the Restoration of Charles II, not only condemned as a regicide for 'detestable, execrable murder, [...] never-before-paralleled nor ever-sufficiently-to-be-lamented-and-abhorred villainies', but also singled out by name: 'this Murder [...] and these Villainies, were defended, nay extolled and commended, by one Mr John Milton, [who] did [...] bespatter the white robes of your Royal father's spotless life [...] with the dirty filth of his satirical pen' (Masson 1877-1894: V. 693).

Milton's early writings record his firm belief that 'a republic [...] is the only form of government fit for adults' (Dzelzainis 1995: 308). His *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) introduces an innovative if not original version of the social contract – that the people or their representatives enjoy the right to end the tenure of their king or government (a principle that was to be brutally articulated by revolutionaries in Europe and America in the second half of the eighteenth century). It is the sequence of published and unpublished works Milton wrote between the 1659 and 1660, however, that expresses his hostility not just to Stuart monarchy and monarchy in general but also to the rule of any single person whatsoever.

Adopting the republican terminology for kings, protectors, dictators and the like in *A Letter to a Friend* (1659) Milton insists on 'the Abjuracion of a single person' or, as he puts it by way of rhetorical variation, 'the abjuracion of Monarchy' (1982: VI. 330, 331), while his *In Proposalls of Certaine Expedients* (1659) urges the Parliament and army to declare themselves 'against single government by any one person in chief' (1982: VII. 336). Milton's confidence in republicanism found definitive expression in the 1660 second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, where he decided, while reviewing the first edition, that he had been too concessive with regard to admitting to the possibility of monarchy being a fit form of government in some circumstances. He, therefore, added new material warning against becoming 'the slaves of a single person' and asserting that 'a single person, [...is] the natural adversarie and oppressor of libertie, though good' (1982: VII. 448, 449).

Despite the strength of Milton's republican convictions, however, Thomas Corns argues that there is 'little in his early vernacular writings and almost nothing in his Latin defences to demonstrate that Milton actively sought to argue for an English republic in terms derived either from classical models or from Machiavellian political theory' (1995: 26). Consequently, Corns concludes that Milton's republicanism was 'more an attitude of mind than any governmental configuration' and manifested itself in the 'eloquent rehearsal, not of republican argument, but of republican values' (1995: 27, 41). Such a conclusion is also supported both by John Scott, who claims that Milton's republicanism was essentially 'a moral one,

opposing the moral qualities of virtue to vice, reason to passion, liberty to tyranny' (1992: 47), and John Rumrich, who suggests that his writings record his 'axiomatic belief in rational liberty' and his 'undaunted willingness to challenge [...] customary authority' (2005: 141).

Whatever the complexity, if not complication, of Milton's political thought – as detailed so extensively by Christopher Hill in *Milton and the English Revolution* (1977) – his republicanism was the focus of several of the most significant biographies and histories of the Romantic period: William Hayley's *The Life of Milton*, published in 1794, was extremely important for Romantic writers, as it claims that Milton was not only the man 'most eminent for energy of mind, for intensity of application, and for frankness and intrepidity' but also 'the most perfectly blameless in the sentiments of government, morality and religion' (Griffin 1986: 32); Charles Symmons' *Life* of 1806 argues that Milton 'preferred a republic, [...] to the unascertained and unprotected constitution' (503); while, Godwin's *History of the Commonwealth of England* (1826) contends that Milton, though favouring a quiet life, could not decline public office, dedicated as he was to applying himself to the service of that 'scheme of a republic, which above all earthly things he loved' (2000: 37).

In light of his republicanism, it is unsurprising that for many first-generation Romantic poets Milton was a republican hero – an example of virtue and morality, standing against the corruption of his time. In fact, Milton's works were available in

the late eighteenth century not only in English and Latin but also in French: both *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* and *Areopagitica* were translated into French in several editions in the early days of the Revolution (Kitson 1992: 226). Poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge were indebted to Milton for their early radical thoughts, informed as they were by seventeenth-century republican writings, but particularly Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, *Of Reformation* and *The Readie and Easie Way* (Kitson 2005: 465). In the sonnet 'London', composed in 1802, Wordsworth apostrophizes the elder poet: 'Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour', representing him in an image of republican virtue: 'Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart: | Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea' (2008: 225). Coleridge, too, sought spiritual and revolutionary inspiration from Milton: in his miniature Miltonic epic, 'Religious Musings' (1794-96), it is 'MILTON's trump' that proclaims millenarian renewal and the end of earthly despotism (Wittreich 1970: 155-56).

Radical influence aside, both Wordsworth and Coleridge also used Milton as a kind of bridge to negotiate their own movement to political conservatism in later life. In effect, they used Milton's disgust with the English people as a way of expressing their own disillusionment with popular politics: not only did Coleridge claim, in 1815, that Milton became more of a stern republican, an 'advocate for a religious and moral aristocracy' (Wittreich 1970: 215) that was the direct opposite of Jacobinism, but he also argued, in a 'Lecture on Milton and the Paradise Lost' (1819) that Milton, finding it 'impossible to realize his own aspirations, either in

religion or politics, or society, [...] gave up his heart to the living spirit and light within him, and avenged himself on the world by enriching it with his own transcendent ideal' (Wittreich 1970: 245).

Second-generation poets like Shelley and Keats also looked to Milton as *the* example of republican virtue. In *Adonais* (1821) Shelley, an opponent of the establishment of his day, looks to Milton as an example of republican virtue: 'Blind, old, and lonely', 'unterrified' despite the persecutions of the 'priest, slave, and the liberticide', Milton's clear spirit still 'reigns o'er the earth' (2002b: 508). In the short fragment 'Milton's Spirit', Shelley dreams of Milton arising spiritually and shaking 'all human things built in contempt of man [...] sanguine thrones [...] impious altars [...] prisons and citadels' (Wittreich 1970: 536). Milton similarly emerges in *A Defence of Poetry* as a courageous destroyer of false creeds through the 'supremacy of [his] genius' (2002b: 651). For Keats, too, Milton was part of 'patriotic lore' (Wittreich 1970: 547). In 1818, he lamented to his brother George and his wife that there were no longer patriots prepared to 'suffer in obscurity for their Country' – there was 'no Milton' (2002: 153). However, Milton was also used to attack first-generation poets who renounced the political radicalism of their youth for later conservatism. In his 'Dedication' to *Don Juan* (1819-1824), Byron contrasts the republican consistency of Milton with what he regards as the apostasy of poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. Echoing Milton's use of language in *Paradise Lost* (VII. 25-26), Byron asserts that though 'fallen on evil days and evil

tongues', Milton did not 'loathe the sire to laud the son', despising both Charles I and Charles II, and ending his life the 'tyrant-hater he begun' (1986: 43).

There is abundant evidence to support a case for Milton being the Romantics' 'prime precursor poet' (Kitson 2005: 463). As Newlyn argues, the history of Milton's reputation in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sheds light on a 'cultural phenomenon' that resulted in a Miltonic 'cult' (2001: 4). While Milton's 'authority' was challenged in numerous ways by writers of the Romantic period, to a great extent, he was consolidated within Romantic tradition as *the* poetic, political and moral guide.

As Chapter Three details, one of the most rigorous revisions of Judeo-Christian patterns of thought and Miltonic theodicy in Romantic poetry is Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where Eden and the Fall are located in the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience. If Milton was a revolutionary writer for a revolutionary age, Blake epitomized that age. In fact, the extent of the former's influence on Blake is evident in the fact that the ostensible subject of his poem *Milton* (1804), which argues that human beings must be 'just & true to [...their] own Imaginations' (2007: 502), is the Renaissance poet himself.

From his early youth when he rebelled against the art establishment, but particularly Joshua Reynolds, as a student at the Royal Academy to his friendship with political radicals like Tom Paine, William and Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft in later life,

Blake displayed a tendency toward revolutionary thought. Amongst other things, Blake's revolutionary bent and egalitarian nature led him to participate in the 1780 riot on Newgate Gaol, which resulted in it being burnt to the ground and its prisoners freed; to begin but never complete or publish a poem entitled 'The French Revolution' (1789), which transformed the events of June and July 1789 into a visionary apocalypse; to oppose slavery and racial prejudice in poems like 'The Little Black Boy' (1789); to stand trial for sedition in 1803; and, to champion equality between the sexes – perhaps following his association with Mary Wollstonecraft, whose work he illustrated.

In much of his writing Blake argues not only against monarchy but also the oppressive authority of church and state: in *Tiriel* (1789), he traces the fall of a tyrannical king; in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), he satirizes institutions of power and repression; while, in *America* (1793), a poem that is less a comment on the actual revolution in America as it is an observation on universal principles, he depicts the fiery figure of Orc as a representative figure of all revolutionaries:

The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,
What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness,
That stony law I stamp to dust; and scatter religion abroad
To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves (2007: 202.
Plate 8, 60).

The disappointment, if not disillusionment, Blake experiences at the degeneration of the ideals of the French Revolution into the real horrors of events like the Terror, however, saw him place his trust in personal revolution as a precursor to social transformation – he had, up until such events, frequently and courageously donned the *bonnet rouge* (also called *bonnet phrygien* or *bonnet de la liberté*) of the French insurgents as part of his dress. Consequently, Blake's political agendas were also often inextricably linked to his attempts to revolutionize the language of imaginative writing, as is evident in 'The SICK ROSE' (1794). While the poem is structurally simple, it requires readers to reject the strong literary convention of the rose being analogous to supposedly secure connotations of love and beauty, so as to consider another manifestations of the rose in literature. Blake destabilizes established convention by identifying the rose as sick: although he renders the image more acceptable, or more palatable, by his use of the lyric mode, he challenges an established literary symbol by describing it in language opposite to how it is usually described. The result is that his 'deliberately allusive language' invokes not only a contemporary social critique of 'prostitution' but also 'mirrors contemporary social reality for many working-class families, where wives pursue whatever forms of employment they can, including prostitution' (Linkin 1998: 332).

Blake possessed a rare dialectical perspective on the world that enabled him to hold contraries in balance. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, this perspective shows up the paradoxical nature of social structures that might generally be thought secure: 'Prisons are made with the stones of Law, brothels with the bricks of Religion'

(2007: 144. Plate 8, 21-22). Blake's poetry balances positive and negative, objective and subjective, light and dark, innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood without suggesting the moral superiority of one or the other, because he believed that the oppositional tension of contraries within each individual held the possibility for revolution in terms of transformative personal insight and, ultimately, social change: 'Without Contraries is no progression' (2007: 111. Plate 3, 7).

While Chapter Three examines the contrast between innocence and experience in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, this dialectical contrary is also a concern of another of Blake's illuminated book, *The Book of Thel* (1789). Thel, a maiden who laments the passing of youth and of innocence, is unable to understand the essential connection between innocence and experience, the spiritual world and the physical world: 'Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy? | Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?' (2007: 106). When she is granted visionary access to the world of experience, she is so shocked by the reality of her own sexuality and mortality that she flees back to the arcadian vales of Har 'with a shriek' (2007: 106).

It is, perhaps, Blake's religious views and beliefs that demonstrate most effectively not just this extremism but also the paradoxical nature of many of his philosophies. From an early age he was both beset and inspired by the most vivid visions: he apparently discovered the prophet Ezekiel sitting under a tree, conversed with the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, and saw a host of angels in a tree – it is likely that his religious upbringing, as the son of Protestant dissenters and disciples of the

mystic visionary Emmanuel Swedenborg, influenced such phenomena. According to E P Thompson (1993), however, Blake's visions were not the product religious devotion but the tools of subversion and rebellion.

While Blake described himself as a Christian, there is ample evidence to suggest that his Christianity was not conventional. If he was not subtly deriding belief in the existence of God through characters like Nobodaddy, he was, like the Gnostics, denouncing God as a tyrant, or celebrating satanic energy. Furthermore, although many of his poems are contextualized in terms of Christian mythology, theology or doctrine, Blake vehemently opposed organized religion, especially ecclesiasticism, as he saw it as oppressively puritanical and antithetical of human freedom and dignity. In essence, Blake's Christianity involves 'the liberty of both body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of the Imagination' (2007: 839. Plate 77, 10-11).

Blake's own imaginative brand of revolutionary religious fervour, however, was influenced not just by Gnostic heresy but also by two late-eighteenth-century subversive systems of thought: the Muggletonian and the Antinomian (Thompson 1993). Blake shared the Muggletonian sect's denunciation of reason and its celebration of the biblical Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve: in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake depicts Satan as the God of Reason, while, in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, he suggests that the sexual disobedience of our mythological parents is to celebrated. He also shared the Antinomians' antipathy toward the law: in *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804), he argued

for religious, sexual and artistic freedom as the means of realizing of our full potential as human beings. The Muggletonian rejection of reason, at a time when rationality and science were dominant discourses, and the Antinomian rejection of the law, when class and social standing were legitimized by appeals to the law, meant that both sects were associated with radicalism.

It is, however, in his four minor prophecies – *Europe* (1794), *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Los* (1795), *The Song of Los* (1795), and *The Book of Ahania* (1795) – and his unfinished epic *The Four Zoas* that Blake outlines his universal mythology. The poems, which focus on the fall of humankind, suggest that man and woman were once united with God, and that the loss of communion with the divine has not only been destructive for the species but also resulted in the division of the species into the sexes. Blake employs the poems to analyze the possibilities revolution affords humanity to free itself from forces of repression, such as institutional religion, and to reunite with God.

While Blake's complex mythology is often difficult to comprehend, the revolutionary imperative of his poetry is not: his desire to bring about change in both the social order and the minds of men and women is always clearly evident. 'I must create my own system or be enslaved by another man's' (2007: 676) is one Blake's most memorable statements, and a fitting summation of his proclivity for radical thought.

Like many Romantic writers, it is clear that Pullman believes that Milton is worthy of emulation as both a poet and a political figure; arguably, he is drawn to what he reads as the republicanism and rational liberty of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's detestation of oppressive earthly authority influences Pullman in his advocacy of a secular humanist republic of heaven: 'There is no kingdom of heaven, we must have a republic [...]. We can't have another king. We mustn't have another king. [...] We have to have a republic' (Insight Scoop 2007). Chapter Two, '*His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm', examines in greater detail how ideas about revolution in both Romantic writings and *His Dark Materials* were given direction by the 'ambivalent and problematic "republicanism" of *Paradise Lost*' (Newlyn 2001: 3).

His Dark Materials is an 'ambitious, decidedly Romantic, Blakean, and anti-Christian rewriting of Milton's *Paradise Lost* – in the subversive form of young adult fantasy' (Petkovic 2008: 96). The text gives evidence of a literary strategy that celebrates the temptation and fall of our mythological parents, Adam and Eve, who, encouraged by Satan, succumb to desire, rebel against divine authority and attempt to assume authority for themselves. Its revision of the biblical and Miltonic myths not only challenges the dominance of the antecedent narrative of the Fall in Western culture but also the authority it lends to Christian theology and ecclesiasticism, as well as cultural idealizations of innocence.

In Pullman's text God is the oppressor and the Fall itself is a crucial step to personal and societal self-realisation. *His Dark Materials* narrates a '*felix culpa*' (Pullman 2005, October) – a blessed sin or, more literally, a happy fault – in describing how its two children protagonists, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, the new Adam and Eve, endeavour to overcome forces of oppression, so as to establish a new republican order, free from restrictive authority. In so doing, they symbolically enact experience as a natural replacement for innocence, rather than as an agent of its inevitable corruption. By repeating 'the original decision of our mythological parents to seek full understanding and consciousness' (Tucker 2003: 90) by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Lyra and Will question the legitimacy of a Church establishment that is intent on condemning their search for liberty as an evil rebellion. In effect, the meta-narratological focus, as well as the basic plot, of the three volumes of *His Dark Materials*

is nothing less than 'man's first disobedience' [...]. In his reprise of *Paradise Lost*, original sin is a lie, and God is an ancient fallen angel who has perpetrated a creationist con on the human race, wickedly exploited by a viciously inquisitorial church. As the [...work] develops, the central teenage character, Lyra, emerges as a second Eve. In a quest that takes in the literal death of 'God', who is no more than a wizened, foetus-like invalid, Lyra releases human beings from attachment to the afterlife. [...] Will, the novel's hero, who becomes Lyra's companion, enables her to pursue her quest to its ultimate bittersweet consummation. This finale is the toppling of

the kingdom of heaven and the establishment of a celestial atheistic republic on Earth (Cornwell 2004).

In his self-appointed role as destroyer of false creeds, Pullman, like Milton, rehearses not a republican argument but republican values; *His Dark Materials* upholds the moral qualities of virtue and liberty. In its totality, the revolutionary and ‘republican’ (Pullman 2001c: 661) agenda of *His Dark Materials* is shaped by fallen adult empiricism – knowledge gained through experience. According to Pullman, it is his ‘most coherent and thought-out statement of where [...he is] religiously, morally and philosophically’ (2003, March). *His Dark Materials* celebrates what he believes is one of the constant truths of human nature, one that has endured long enough ‘to be as good as permanent’ (2005b): our human desire to lose innocence and acquire knowledge through the exertion of free will.

On a philosophical level, *His Dark Materials* is concerned with the necessity of losing innocence because, as Pullman insists, ‘innocence isn’t wise, innocence can’t be wise [...] and if we are to become wise, which it seems [...] a good thing to aim for, we have to leave our innocence behind’ (2003, March). The dialectic between innocence and experience in *His Dark Materials* is influenced by Blake’s poetry. The poems of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* reflect a series of shifting perceptions between Edenic innocence and worldly experience, so as to highlight the necessity, and naturalness, of the movement away from innocence toward experience and, possibly, wisdom.

The emphasis in *His Dark Materials* on the desirability of acquiring knowledge finds expression in its critique of oppressive nostalgias for innocence that would keep children ‘stuck in a sort of childhood’ (Pullman 2003, March) – the text’s challenge to the idealization of childhood innocence is examined in greater detail in Chapter Three, ‘*His Dark Materials* and Romantic Constructions of Childhood’, where true to his republican ideals, Pullman suggests that adult-child social relations can become egalitarian through wisdom.

Imbued with and shaped by its author’s adult perspective, *His Dark Materials* is a children’s fantasy narrative that promotes the end of innocence, but especially childhood innocence, as a culturally idealized ontology. By the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will’s new adult perspectives on the world, facilitated by emotional and sexual maturation, embody an integration of contraries: the visionary confidence of childhood innocence and the worldly experience of adulthood. Their fall from innocence into experience becomes a metaphor not just for the need for egalitarianism between children and adults but also for the text’s overarching republican petition for personal and religious freedom.

Theoretical and Critical Approach

Due to the fact that Romanticism, both as a term and as a signifier of ideology, has undergone numerous significant revisions since the mid-twentieth century, especially in light of cultural theory, it is important to indicate how these revisions

affect this dissertation's analysis of the relationship between *His Dark Materials* and Romantic writings.

'Romanticism' is a difficult term to define: it not only implies an ideology but also a period, movement or tendency. The purposeful and extensive revision of Romanticism from the late twentieth century to the present day has elucidated the diversity and unspecified temporality of the Romantic period and its various modes of self-representation to the extent that Romanticism itself has come to be seen as more multifarious and contradictory than most of its earlier twentieth-century critical characterizations had suggested. Until the latter decades of the twentieth century, the term 'Romanticism' was used, in a general sense, to claim, retrospectively, a degree of coherence for the immense range of cultural practices that affected all European arts by the first half of the nineteenth century (Bygrave 1996: vii). René Wellek (1949), for example, was content to see Romanticism in general terms: as a movement that manifested itself in the kind of art created after Neoclassicism, particularly in Britain, France and Germany. With the advent of the twenty-first century, however, such generalizations and uniformity of thought dissipated in the light of a rigorous critical re-examination of all things 'Romantic'.

With regard to literature, specifically, definitions of Romanticism have always been in crisis. As early as 1924, A O Lovejoy (229-253) argued for a discrimination of Romanticisms, because he considered the characteristics of Romanticism to be so diverse as to resist all attempts at cohesive analysis. Nevertheless, in the period

from the mid-1940s to the late 1970s, it was still feasible to think of British Romanticism almost exclusively in terms of poetry (Corbett 2001). Furthermore, with the exceptions of the Gothic novel and *Frankenstein*, British Romanticism was associated, principally, with the writings of six male English poets: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. For a whole generation of readers, the concern that these poets seemed to share in exploring the possibility for human development in the dialectic between an individual's imaginative faculty and his or her natural surroundings came to represent *the* Romantic aesthetic project (McGann 1983: 32). The legacy of this restricted definition of Romantic aims and values (focusing primarily on the 'Big Six') led these poets to become identified with their works to such a degree that their feelings, imaginative constructions and attitudes came to be thought of as the primary context, as well as the fundamental materials for their poems.

By the end of the 1970s, the broadly accepted coherence of the Romantic aestheticism of these poets had come to denote, what Jerome McGann termed, the 'Romantic Ideology' (1983: 1): a kind of 'false consciousness' (1983: 5) in which socially constructed concepts like 'creativity', 'individuality', and 'genius' were endowed with a sense of fictitious objectivity. For McGann, the interest of scholars like M H Abrams (1984) – whom he specifically criticized – Harold Bloom (1973), and Northrop Frye (1968) in defending the coherence of this ideology resulted in concepts like those mentioned above being preserved within the canon of Romantic criticism, where they remained isolated from critique. From McGann's perspective,

Abrams's scholarship legitimised traditional views of canonicity, conventional views of literary history, and, inevitably, traditionally patriarchal notions of Romantic literature to such an extent that Romantic poets came to be thought of as detached or removed from the history of their time, existing and working in a kind of socio-political vacuum, their poems as literary texts inhabiting a distinctly aesthetic space.

Due to considerable developments in literary and cultural theory, the 1980s marked the beginning of a methodical reconsideration of Romanticism. In its attempt to expose the illusion of the High Romantic Argument, and the literary criticism that preserved it, New Historicism, in particular, challenged the underlying assumption of the *ancien régime* – as represented by Abrams, Bloom, and Frye – that 'poetry can set one free of the ruins of history and culture' (McGann 1983: 91). In *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (1983), McGann argued that Romantic criticism was imbued with the ideology of Romanticism to such an extent that what was required was not the construction of a new theory of Romantic poetry but a disciplined and systematic critique of the ideology that informed it. Although attacked by scholars like Clifford Siskin (1988), McGann's New Historicist approach not only proffered the historicity of literary texts as an assurance against reproducing Romantic ideologies but also endeavoured to reveal the influence historical (socio-political) factors had on the formation of such ideologies.

The subject-object duality that many first-generation male Romantic poets endorsed was challenged by feminism as decisively as it was by New Historicism. In particular, feminist criticism (Feldman and Kelley 1995) resulted in the reconsideration of a number of 'competing voices', but primarily those of Amelia Opie, Felicia Hemans and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, who had not traditionally been included in the Romantic canon – despite the fact that they offer valuable responses and challenges to their male counterparts. While feminine identity had been excluded from the traditional Romantic literary canon, the writings of women like Opie, Hemans and Landon highlight the fact that, in many ways, women sought similar things to men – equal rights for all individuals, the exercising of freewill and rational choice, and an ethos of justice. However, the ways in which they hoped these ideals could be fulfilled were less gender-dependent – and thus perhaps more egalitarian – than those envisaged by men.

Instead of appealing in a variety of ways to public programmes of political reform – as Edmund Burke, Paine, Godwin, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake did – feminine Romantic ideology established a private agenda, where there was a movement inward toward family politics, which, it was hoped, would ultimately transform the public sphere. Unsurprisingly, with the exception of some of the writings of Wollstonecraft, the main features of feminine Romantic discourse included, the valuing of rational love; the preservation of an ethos of care, particularly within the family; and, gender equality. In these respects, such

discourse embodies a challenge to a domestic ideology that would attempt to restrict women in the home or assign them subordinate roles (Jenks 1998: 156-57).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the general harmony of late-twentieth-century Historicism, as epitomized by the now established methodologies and strategies of scholars like McGann, Marjorie Levinson (1986), and Alan Liu (1989), is being succeeded by a variety of new and diverse textual practices that resist simple formulation (Budge 2008; Bugajski 2008; Keen 2008). Today's critical landscape is characterized by scholarship that represents what Michael John Kooy describes as 'a plurality of romanticisms', which he claims has 'effectively succeeded what was once a single-minded, albeit controversial, project: that of illuminating "Romanticism" – the Romantic ideology' (2000). Far from being defined by a singleness of purpose, the romantic archive is now the scholarly arena in which a variety of critical variants engage with one another, ensuring that the period is understood as a highly political, gendered and historically conscious age.

The fact that ideological definitions of 'Romanticism' moved from the homogenous to the heterogeneous is reflected, most clearly, according to Susan Wolfson (1997), in the attempts made by editors of twentieth-century anthologies to delineate a Romantic period. From the 1950s to the 1990s the major anthologies of Romantic writing (Noyes 1956; Abrams 1962; Perkins 1967) were, for the most part, generously annotated canons of exclusively male writings. These anthologies delineated the Romantic period as chronologically encompassing the years circa

1725 to 1840, at its widest, or 1798 to 1832, at its narrowest and most defined. These mid to late-twentieth-century anthologies took anything from James Thomson's (1700-1748) *Seasons* (1730) or *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) to the poems of the 1840s as border-markers. However, by the 1990s, noticeable revisions or outright challenges to these earlier anthologies became more frequent. Amendments to new editions of established anthologies were mostly characterized by a readiness to include women writers more centrally within the tradition, although this correction was essentially limited to the inclusion of Wollstonecraft, Dorothy Wordsworth and Mary Shelley rather than with chronological modification.

Even though the anthologies of the last decade of the twentieth century were more willing than their earlier counterparts to include non-canonical and women writers, they still shared with them a lack of coherence when it came to delineating a Romantic period. As such, the anthologies of the early 1990s were marked by either a concern for issues or for dates. Jerome McGann, in *The New Oxford Book of Romantic Period Verse* (1993), worked within a strict temporal framework to the extent that he polemically restricted the contents of his anthology to actual publications within the period 1785-1832. In effect, the chronological arrangement of the texts in McGann's anthology tries to break down the extreme domination of an author-centered perception of poetry. Conversely, Duncan Wu, in *Romanticism, An Anthology* (1995), attempted to anthologize by issues rather than dates. As a result, Wu's anthology offers a breadth of representation, which includes many unrecognized writers, particularly women. In the late 1990s Anne Mellor and

Richard Matlak's *British Literature 1780-1830* (published in 1996 – note the omission of the term 'Romantic') and David Damrosch's *Longman's Anthology of British Literature* (published in 1999, and whose section on Romanticism was edited by Susan Wolfson and David Manning) continued with the precedent of anthologizing non-canonical and women writers, especially writers of fiction. However, although they are both characterized by their effort to situate writers within the socio-political climate of their times, these anthologies, respectively, either strictly limit the period or treat its temporal boundaries as loose and blurred.

While the aforementioned archetypal frameworks associated with Romanticism lost much of their authority with its re-conceptualization in the latter decades of the twentieth century, particularly in the wake of developments in cultural and literary theory, certain aspects of this re-conceptualization require qualification. To begin with, although feminism and New Historicism succeeded in demythologizing the High Romantic Argument, the emphasis placed by scholars like McGann on the ideological burden of Romanticism also led to a particular kind of stagnation in the critical exegeses of Romantic texts by the end of the twentieth century. In the immediate wake of New Historicism the majority of literary critics of Romanticism, more often than not, gave up criticizing its 'philosophical sublimation of real issues' (Hamilton 2003: 10) and concentrated instead on interpreting the neglected archives – hence the currency, according to Treadwell (2000), of monographs about Romantic economics, Romantic medicine, Romantic law, and the likes. In effect, while New Historicism had guaranteed that critical understandings of Romanticism

would be expanded, the relationship between what W J Bate's (1946) identified as the history of ideas and the history of literature came, somewhat ironically, to be neglected.

Despite the general success of McGann's 'anti-Romantic' criticism, New Historicism also shed light on the fact that such criticism may not be so new at all: that many Romantic writers earnestly debated their own commitment to, or critique of, the Romantic Ideology as vigorously as their modern critics. Seamus Perry (1996) and, more recently, Byron Hawk (2007: 95) argue, for example, that 'anti-Romanticism' can be traced back to Coleridge's development away from his own self-absorption and extreme idealism in his later years. In fact, evidence of 'anti-Romantic' criticism can also be found in the works of scholars criticized by McGann for upholding the Romantic Ideology. In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom discusses Romanticism in terms of a 'central tradition' whose 'vitality [...] appears to inhere in its universality', he also described it as 'a revolt [...] against all unnecessary limitation that presents itself as being necessary' (1973: 324). Romanticism, he argues is 'a doomed tradition, yet a perpetually self-renewing one [...] And no artistic tradition [...] has ever so consistently proclaimed its own immolation' (1973: 324). Even Bloom's critical approach, in breadth and method, is not always as antithetical to the new anti-Romanticism as McGann might like to believe: not only does he contend that the Romantic tradition continued into the works of poets like W B Yeats (1865-1939), D H Lawrence (1885-1930), Hart Crane (1899-1932) and Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) but he also reads canonical Romantic texts 'as

apocalyptic demonstrations that the garments of ideology [...] that we wear must be thrown aside' (1973: 324). In this respect, there may be more to Bloom's claim that 'we are, all of us, largely involuntary Romantics' intensely proclaiming 'our overt beliefs to be anti-Romantic' than contemporary critics have been willing to acknowledge (1973: 324).

Finally, despite what seems to have been an extensive revision of Romanticism over the last three decades, particularly with regard to the deconstruction or reconstruction of the Romantic canon, the 'Big-Six' Romantic poets continue to be represented in anthologies up to and including the present day. Moreover, Alan Richardson claims that he is comfortable with the fact that their canonicity continues to serve as the cognitive reference point in discussions of what qualifies as 'Romantic' (1997). The reason for this is that Richardson does not have an issue with the 'prototypical', as opposed to the canonical nature of poets. His Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' approach to Romanticism enables him to view the category in terms of common features that are distributed disproportionately over the field, rather than critical conditions that must be present in a given work or author – so long as 'the writings of a particular author manifests generic or stylistic or thematic features that significantly overlap with other writers in the category' (1997).

What is most noteworthy about Richardson's contribution to contemporary understandings of Romanticism, however, is not his argument that the now

proverbial expression ‘six-poet Romanticism’ is something of a misnomer – as he claims that Blake, while a Romantic, is not a prototypical Romantic author – but his contention that while there is a good deal of variation from one anthology to another in terms of referencing a particular poet, the five other poets form a sort of group and ‘always dominate’ (1997). According to him, even though the Romantic archive has been expanded, none of these five poets loses central status in any anthology, and no other author ever receives as much space as the average of these ‘central five’ (1997) – even in the ‘revisionary’ anthologies of the late twentieth century, including that of Mellor and Matlak. Therefore, while these six Romantic writers represent a restrictive view of Romanticism, they are also, in another sense, a ‘norm’ (1997).

These ideological, chronological and canonical revisions to Romanticism affect the thesis forwarded in this dissertation in a number of significant ways. Firstly, the critical exegesis of Romantic writings in this dissertation acknowledges both what Louis Montrose describes as ‘the history of texts’ – the cultural specificity, or the social embedment of all modes of writing – and ‘the textuality of history’ – the fact that there is no access to a complete and genuine past, a lived material existence, unmediated by extant textual traces of the society in question (1989: 15-36). However, in light of W J Bate’s (1946) belief that the necessary task of criticism is to examine the relationship between the history of ideas and the history of literature – a belief derided by Paul de Man (1986: 22-25) because of the ideological import of Romanticism – this dissertation positions Pullman’s text within a continuum of

existential questioning that concerns itself with humanity's place in the cosmos, and its relationship to a presumed creator. Chapter Two, '*His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm', works out in detail similarities between Pullman's text and iconoclastic Romantic writings, arguing that *His Dark Materials* is a Romantic, Blakean revision of *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, this dissertation's reading of Romantic texts is also cognisant of the tensions and anxieties, incongruities and oppositions, implicit in the writing of the period. Consequently, Chapter Three, '*His Dark Materials* and Romantic Constructions of Childhood', argues, for example, that running contrary to the development of the 'Quintessential' Romantic Child (Plotz 2001: 4) – a child forever arrested in childhood – is a countermovement, evident in the works of Blake and others, that presents children within a continuous process of development toward adulthood.

Secondly, while Alan Richardson's (1997) argument regarding the 'prototypical' nature of the 'Big-Six' Romantic poets does not legitimize the fact that this dissertation's examination of the similarities between Romantic writings and *His Dark Materials* focuses primarily on the works of these six male canonical poets, it does suggest why these writers feature so prominently in the text's dialogue with Romanticism. Pullman's (2003, March) claim that he was influenced when writing *His Dark Materials* by a 'great deal' of 'classic English poetry' is supported not only by his acknowledgement of indebtedness to a number of these poets in the development of the thematic and philosophical concerns of the text itself but also by the fact that of the thirty-one chapter epigraphs from the works of individual artists

in *The Amber Spyglass*, twenty-nine are from the works of poets. Of these twenty-nine, approximately two-thirds – nineteen – are from the works of Milton, Blake, Coleridge, Byron or Keats. However, because literature is one among many interconnected strands of cultural discourse, this dissertation's critical approach also considers a number of other textual traces of the past in its exploration of similarities *His Dark Materials* shares with Romantic writings. Consequently, while this dissertation focuses mainly on conventional literary sources, such as the imaginative writings of Milton, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, it also acknowledges similarities between *His Dark Materials* and non-literary forms, such as the political treatises of Rousseau, Paine, Godwin and Wollstonecraft.

Thirdly, while the vast majority of texts examined in this dissertation, with the exception of *Paradise Lost*, falls within the temporal range encompassing the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, what is to be learned from the anthologies of the 1990s is that any attempt to delineate a Romantic period must remain wary of the assumption that any coherence exhibited between texts is the inevitable and natural product of a shared cultural heritage. Romanticism refers more to diverse sensibilities, or what Angus Nicholls terms 'modes of thinking' (2002), than it does to an ideological aesthetic, a finite period in literary history, or a definitive canon. For this reason, while this dissertation contends that common features and a degree of coherence are reflected in representative works of a Romantic period loosely delineated by the years 1775 to 1830, it acknowledges that it has often only been a minority of artists – usually male – who are credited as

shaping and reflecting the characteristics of a period; that no individual artist or work can ever exemplify all that is commonly associated with Romanticism; and, that Romantic writings often exhibit continuities with the works of other periods as well as differences among themselves – a fact that is essential to the connection this dissertation makes between the works of Pullman, Romantic writers and Milton.

Finally, but most significantly, in illuminating similarities between *His Dark Materials* and the values associated with a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writing, this dissertation engages in a qualified revival of both Harold Bloom's theory of the 'Anxiety of Influence' (1973) – that authors are engaged in a struggle with the authors of past generations, attempting to complete, creatively misread, or unsuccessfully purge themselves of their influences – and M H Abram's theory of Romanticism, as outlined in both *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1971) and *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953) – that much Romantic literature undertook a secularization of Western religious-philosophical thought-systems.

The New Historicist intention to make connections between texts can result in 'facile associationisms' (LaCapra 1989: 193) – the linking together of an extensive array of texts without critically taking account the real connections or differences between them. Therefore, this dissertation compares *His Dark Materials* to revolutionary and republican Romantic writings by reworking Bloom's theory. In reworking this theory within an open model of literary history, however, this dissertation attempts

to develop a nuanced historicism: one that remains hesitant of the certainty of its own historical assertions and conscious of the variety of ways ideologies function at any given time. Within its own terms, the model of Anxiety offered by Bloom remains more compelling than many of the critiques it has engendered suggest. While some of these critiques are based on a 'misreading' of Bloom's key philosophical, religious and aesthetic terms, Dustin Griffin's *Regaining Paradise* (1986) being a case in point, 'there is nothing more supportive of the argument *The Anxiety of Influence* offers than the reception of *The Anxiety of Influence*' (Newlyn 2001: 14).

In arguing that *His Dark Materials* is evidence of Pullman's deep engagement with imaginative, philosophical and political writings of the Romantic period, however, this dissertation contends that the influence of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century writers on him is characterized not by anxiety but by assuredness. Pullman openly acknowledges the extent of his indebtedness to many of these writers. Furthermore, because this dissertation examines Pullman's individual creativity in relation to a larger historical understanding of intra-literary relations, Bloom's Freudian perspective on the anxiety of influence, which emphasises the unconscious nature of influence, is also reworked in terms of this dissertation's acceptance of the phenomena of intertextuality and verbal borrowing as 'empirical proof of [the] literary influence' (Newlyn 2001: 15) of Romantic writings on *His Dark Materials*.

Both Claudia Moscovici, in *Romanticism and Postromanticism* (2007: 3-6), and Nicholls, in an article 'Goethe, Romanticism and the Anglo-American Critical Tradition' (2002), have recently argued for the contemporary relevance of Abrams's synthetic model of Romanticism. In particular, Nicholls contends that broad literary-historical periodisations like those offered in *Natural Supernaturalism* still retain a 'contingent and provisional theoretical utility, particularly in relation to understanding [...] literary-philosophical movements like Romanticism' (2002). Despite the fact that Abrams's definition of Romanticism was criticised by Anne Mellor, in *English Romantic Irony* (1980), for failing to take into account the phenomenon of Romantic irony, and by McGann for repeating and reifying a number of 'key Romantic self-conceptualisations' (1983: 32), Nicholls argues that, despite the shortcomings of his model, 'Abrams remains one of the most comprehensive historical explicators of Romanticism', as he provides scholars with a 'historical-critical model upon which to contrast and compare the products of [...] Romanticism' (2002) – a fact that McGann (1992) himself has acknowledged since the publication of *The Romantic Ideology*. Therefore, because it can be argued that Romanticism is more an orientation than a cohesive historical movement, this dissertation also offers a qualified revival of Abrams's theory of Romanticism under the aegis of New Historicist criticism.

What Abrams's refers to as the Romantic 'assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideas' (1971: 13) is explored in this dissertation within social and political contexts, just as E P Thompson (1993) helps elucidate Blake's imagery in light of

radical enthusiasm and late-eighteenth-century Antinomianism, or Nicolas Roe (1998) explores the frameworks behind the themes and aesthetics of Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge in terms of rational Dissenting ideas and philosophies. Accordingly, this dissertation contends that the Romantics' and, more importantly, Pullman's secularization of Judeo-Christian patterns of thought was, and is, inseparable from their engagement with Milton as a republican poet.

In light of these recent ideological, chronological and canonical revisions to Romanticism, and the fact that this dissertation argues that the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials* are influenced by or shares notable similarities with a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writing, it is essential to identify the nature of such a strain in Romantic writing, to indicate some of its seminal texts, to expound characteristics and values associated with it, and to identify Pullman's relationship to it. However, in doing so, this dissertation is cognisant of the fact that the propensity of many Romantic writers toward revolutionary and republican ideals was often ambivalent: some writers were more reactionary than revolutionary; few shared a common understanding of what constitutes republicanism.

Structure of the Argument

Before this dissertation examines the influence of Romanticism on the development of the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials*, Chapter One,

'*His Dark Materials* as Children's Fantasy', examines Pullman's personal commentary on *His Dark Materials* not only because he claims that it is his most coherent and thought-out statement of where he is religiously, morally and philosophically but also because his description of himself as a 'Storyteller' (Rayment-Pickard 2004: 21) shares similarities with the Poet-Prophet of Bardic tradition in Romantic writings. Like Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley – who represent this tradition in Romantic writing – Pullman's desire to challenge established authority is inseparable from his attempt to harness the educative potential of story and to instruct his readers in new ways of living in the world. This chapter argues that Pullman's decision to forward his republican agenda in and through a twentieth-century children's fantasy narrative is significant, as it makes a case for the revolutionary, educative potential of literature.

Chapter Two, '*His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm', examines the critique of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism in *His Dark Materials*. Pullman claims both that his text is a revision of *Paradise Lost* for children and that the opinion he has 'formed of Milton [...has] been influenced by Blake's' (2005, October). In light of these claims, this chapter argues that *His Dark Materials* is a 'Blakean redaction of the Miltonic mythos' (Hatlan 2005: 86), which presents the biblical Fall into experience as an ascent into knowledge and wisdom. The republican values that inform the revolutionary hopes of *His Dark Materials* owe much to the influence of *Paradise Lost*: it is *the* intellectual, mythic and literary reference point for Pullman in his challenge to what he sees as the oppressive nature

of Christianity. In particular, similar to its influence on Romantic writings, Milton's poem informs the characterization and verbalization of disobedience towards Christian authority in *His Dark Materials*. However, despite the primacy of *Paradise Lost* to the intertextual discourse of *His Dark Materials*, this chapter also contends that both the text's advocacy of a secular humanist republic of heaven and its attack on ecclesiasticism draw, more generally, on other dissenting strands of Romantic writing, especially the Pantheism of Wordsworth, the Gnosticism of Blake and the iconoclasm of Rousseau, Godwin, Paine, Byron and Shelley.

Chapter Three, entitled '*His Dark Materials* and Romantic Constructions of Childhood', examines the philosophical concern of *His Dark Materials* with the dialectic between innocence and experience, particularly in relation to the transition its protagonists make from childhood to adulthood. In light of Pullman's acknowledged indebtedness to the works of Blake, this chapter argues that, like *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *His Dark Materials* reinterprets traditional Judeo-Christian patterns of thought – Fall, redemption, and the restoration of paradise – in a secular context in order to suggest that experience is a natural replacement for innocence rather than an agent of its inevitable corruption. To this end, *His Dark Materials* positively reinforces Lyra and Will's journey from childhood indifference into the responsibilities and awkwardness of full adolescent awareness. Its Blakean depiction of childhood places it in a Romantic tradition that presents childhood as continuous rather than distinct from adulthood, and which runs antithetical to a more culturally reified tradition – of mostly male Romantic writers,

such as Wordsworth – that developed a life-defining vocational interest in invoking childhood as a ‘fixed’ (Plotz 2001: xiii) permanent state of being, separate to adulthood. The challenge to innocence as a culturally idealized ontology in *His Dark Materials* is inseparable from its republican validation of the need for egalitarianism and partnership in social relations between adults and children.

This dissertation concludes with a chapter that offers a summary of the arguments made both to substantiate the claim that the text is influenced by, or shares similarities with, values held and developed by Romantic writers and to support the thesis: that the text’s thematic and philosophical concerns are expressed through well-established Romantic paradigms; that *His Dark Materials*’ challenge to religious authority and idealized cultural norms is in a tradition of republican revolution.

Chapter One: *His Dark Materials* as Children's Fantasy

In challenging Christian authority and cultural idealizations of childhood innocence, this chapter contends that, similar to the relationship between text and author in the Poet-Prophet or Bardic tradition in Romantic writing, the strong link between the crafting of his work and his hopes for personal and societal transformation suggests that Pullman sees himself as a 'Storyteller': an individual who can represent essential truths of human existence and explicate possible new social realities. This chapter also examines Pullman's decision to write and publish *His Dark Materials* in the form of a children's fantasy narrative. It argues that his attempts to shape *His Dark Materials* into a work of crossover fiction, democratize the language of the text, utilize the generic potential of fantasy to promote a secular humanist worldview, and reposition children's literature within 'general literary conversation' (Pullman 2003, December) are inextricably linked to his desire to disseminate his republican agenda to as wide a readership as possible.

His Dark Materials and the Educative Potential of Story

I don't profess any religion; I don't think it's possible that there is a God; I have the greatest difficulty in understanding what is meant by the words 'spiritual', or 'spirituality'; but I think I can say something about moral education, and I think it has something to do with the way we understand stories (Pullman 2005b)

An anecdote Pullman tells illustrates his understanding of the essential nature and power of story. While on holiday, he decided to amuse his then five-year-old son by telling him a version of Homer's *Odyssey* every night: 'By the end of the story [Pullman recounts], Tom, who was sitting with a glass in his hand, was so galvanized he bit a chunk out of the glass. That's the power of storytelling' (McCrum 2002). This conviction in the ability of story to excite people pervades much of Pullman's writing and is in evidence, most clearly, in *Clockwork or All Wound Up* (1996), which he wrote while working on *His Dark Materials*:

Once you've wound up a clock, there's something frightful in the way it keeps on going at its own relentless pace. Its hands move steadily round the dial as if they had a mind of their own. Tick, tock, tick, tock! Bit by bit they move, and tick us steadily on towards the grave. Some stories are like that. Once you've wound them up, nothing will stop them (Pullman 1996: 8-9).

A formative influence on Pullman in this regard was, arguably, the twelve years he spent teaching at various Oxford middle schools after he graduated from Exeter College, Oxford, and the eight years after that teaching Bachelor of Education students on courses in the Victorian novel and the folk tale at Westminster College, Oxford. According to Pullman, the thing he enjoyed most in 'that difficult and valuable profession' of teaching was 'telling stories, telling folk tales and ghost stories and Greek myths, over and over' (2005b).

The fact that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were two of Pullman's favourite instructive stories highlights that, even at this early stage in his writing career, he was drawn to epic and myth (Miller 2005). In light of his predilection for 'true' stories, it is unsurprising that, as a storyteller, this was so. Myths are metaphorical frameworks or imaginative templates which when laid over the world helps us make meaning of the complexities of human existence. Interestingly, fantasy is imbued with mythic patterns: according to Susan Cooper modern fantasy is the genre that speaks most directly to the imagination because it is the descendent, the inheritor, of the ancient myths (1996: 57-71). In fact, Pullman has referred to *His Dark Materials* as a 'myth' on numerous occasions: at Lexicon, a small literary convention held in Oxford in August 2000 and in interviews with Ilene Cooper for *Booklist* (2000: 355) and Joan Bakewell for the BBC's 'Belief' programme, originally broadcast on Radio 3 (2001). Influenced greatly by his reading of Karen Armstrong's *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (2001), Pullman contends that myth has the power not only to represent the human condition but also of 'apprehending the reality of the world' (2005b). Consequently, he asserts that his primary interest as an author is to say something that he believes 'to be true about the way which [...] we are' (Brown 2000: 81).

Within his fiction and elsewhere, Pullman speaks frequently about the centrality of stories not only to cultures but also to the identity of humanity as a species. In an interview with his publisher he claimed that 'stories are the most important things in

the world'; that without stories 'we wouldn't be human beings at all' (Random House 1996a). While in his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech, he professed that

all stories teach, whether the storyteller intends them to or not. They teach the world we create. They teach the morality we live by. They teach it much more effectively than moral precepts and instructions [...] We don't need lists of rights and wrongs [...] We need books, time and silence. 'Thou shalt not' is soon forgotten, but 'Once upon a time' lasts forever (Random House 1996b).

In light of his reading of the works of Romantic writers like Wordsworth and Blake, Pullman's interest in what he terms the 'educative' potential of story is unsurprising. While he contends that the 'purpose' of story is not a purely educative one, he is interested in the fact that it can be a revolutionary catalyst for change (2005b). Moreover, he claims that the 'education that stories provide' combats that tendency in cultural life that would say that 'meanings are fixed and simple', and 'determined by authority'; that stories have the ability to present established authority as 'ambiguous, complex, subject to development', something to be challenged, particularly 'by experience and by imaginative sympathy' (2005b).

Similar to Shelley, Pullman believes human 'understanding is deepened and enriched by the awakening of [...] imaginative sympathy' (2005b). In 'Miss Goddard's Grave', he claims that stories can 'make a difference', because they form,

collectively, what he describes as a ‘school of morals’ (2005b). He argues that story, in whatever form it takes, fairy tale, drama, film or literature, has the facility to show ‘human beings acting in recognisably human ways’, ways that ‘affect our emotions and our intelligence as life itself affects us’; in particular, he suggests that we can learn ‘what’s good and what’s bad, what’s generous and unselfish, what’s cruel and mean’ from story (2005b). To borrow the passage from Jane Austen’s (1775-1817) *Northanger Abbey* (1817) he quoted in his lecture at the University of East Anglia, literature is, for Pullman, ‘work in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, [and] the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language’ (Austen 2003: 24).

Pullman is both a ‘highly self-conscious storyteller’ (Chabon 2005: 5) and a prolific self-publicist; consequently, his own views on life and literature have been expressed powerfully and frequently in the media. However, while he has discussed, publicly and extensively, his republican agenda, literary allegiances and propensity to intertextuality in writing *His Dark Materials*, he has, on other occasions, claimed for himself the position of simple storyteller:

I tell a story. I see myself as being in an old-fashioned kind of market-place – a little country town if you like – where people are buying and selling food; and farmers coming in; people buying grain and eating and drinking and gossiping and talking; and maybe over there, a fellow with a violin playing a

tune or fiddle; and here's a juggler juggling some things; and maybe there's a pickpocket over there doing something he shouldn't be doing. And here I am sitting in the middle of all this busy activity on my little bit of carpet telling a story (Rayment-Pickard 2004: 21).

At times, Pullman has denied his agenda: 'I'm not making an argument, or preaching a sermon or setting out a political tract: I'm telling a story'; in fact, he has gone so far as to declare that he is 'the servant of the story – the medium in a spiritualist sense' (2002, February). Consequently, he has insisted that he should not be identified with the narrative voice of *His Dark Materials*; that he disappears behind the story, because he does not want his own personality and attitudes to be an issue; and, that his 'one purpose is to make sure the story arrives on the page as clearly and vividly as possible. [...] Without any of [...himself] or [...his] stuff being visible at all' (2000, March). He has claimed that he is a 'passionate believer in the democracy of reading': that an author's 'task' is not 'to tell the reader what a book means'; and, that 'the meaning of a story emerges from the meeting between the words on the page and the thoughts in a reader's mind' (2009d). However, although he has maintained that he cannot escape a sense of obligation, a 'should' (2002) that accompanies the task of storytelling, because 'the story comes to [...him] and wants to be told' (2002, February), he has also emphasised that his responsibility to the story is not a form of servitude, 'not shameful toil mercilessly exacted', but service, freely and fairly entered into, 'a voluntary and honourable thing' – accordingly, when he says he is 'the servant of the story', he says it with

‘pride’ (2002, December).

While Pullman dislikes Platonism, he has spoken of his involvement with stories in a mystical manner: ‘as I write I find myself drifting into a sort of Platonism, as if the story is already there like a pure form in some gaseous elsewhere’ (2002). Hugh Rayment-Pickard claims, for Pullman, ‘the story is not invented or designed by the author; the author’s task, rather, is to bring the story into the world, to give it flesh’ (2004: 24). In fact, Pullman has argued that a writer’s primary responsibility is to ‘protect’ the story until it becomes ‘sure of itself and settles on the form it wants. Because it knows very firmly what it wants to be’ (2000, March). Taken as a whole, his comments not only imply that a writer is a storyteller, rather than a story-maker, but also suggest that he is intent on devaluing himself as a creative artist. In effect, he insinuates that his writing of stories is something over which he is not always master.

The fact that Pullman is a powerful propagandist has led some scholars to accept his insistence that he is a simple teller-of-tales, who just sets out ‘to entertain, to tell a story’ (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2002); his fiction, however, shows him to be someone who wants to communicate a powerful and strongly held worldview. As he himself put it: ‘Harry Potter’s been taking all the flak [...while] I’ve been flying under the radar, saying things that are far more subversive than anything poor old Harry has said. My books are about killing God’ (Meacham 2003). Nevertheless, Nicholas Tucker argues that it is a mistake to censure Pullman for the

critique of Christian authority in *His Dark Materials*, because he is ‘writing a story, not a work of philosophy or history’; consequently, while Pullman’s ‘own strong views’ will form ‘an important part of what he writes’, it is ‘as a work of fiction’ that *His Dark Materials* should be judged (2004: 68). However, it is also true that *His Dark Materials* is a product of Pullman’s making; therefore, as Hugh Rayment Pickard argues,

whether the stories come from the ether or from the imagination, a writer [...] is surely accountable in some way for [...] their creation. [...] Even if we go along with Pullman’s theory that stories are ‘given’ to him, Pullman is nevertheless responsible for how these stories are told. If the story is told badly, we can surely hold Pullman accountable – just as, for example, [...] he holds Lewis [...] responsible (2004: 26).

According to Rayment-Pickard, if there is one thing that can be confidently said about Pullman the novelist, it is that he ‘*never* just writes stories: there is always something more: some message or meaning’ (2004: 4). While Pullman has claimed that he does not ‘set out to persuade or to give a lecture or to teach’ (2002, November) nothing could be more fictional. In light of his republican agenda, as embodied in the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials*, his assertion that the education that stories provide often works ‘most effectively when it does not seem to be taking place at all’ (2005b) requires clarification: his use of the phrase ‘does not seem to be taking place’ suggests that he is aware of the

conscious artistry that often lies behind the education that is ‘seemingly’ implicit in stories. Therefore, while Pullman has maintained that he is ‘not in the message business’ but the “‘Once upon a time” business’ (2009), there is clearly a pedagogical voice resounding through *His Dark Materials* – in fact, the “‘Once upon a time” business’ is a pedagogical and moral one.

During a debate on morality in fiction at the Edinburgh International Book Festival in 2002, Pullman argued that try as an author might, they cannot omit morality from a book because everything humans do has consequences, and the greatest fiction always has ‘a sequence of actions followed by reactions, followed by consequences’ (Chrisafis 2002). In fact, he has claimed his ‘aim’ in writing *His Dark Materials* was ‘to tell a story’ that had ‘resonances [...] some of them being moral’ (Brown 2000: 8). He believes that in a godless and uncertain age literature is a kind of ‘School of Morals’ (Miller 2005): a place ‘where moral conundrums, moral dilemmas, moral puzzles are acted out. Where moral solutions are found. [...] A safe place [...but] also a very truthful place’ (2003, November). However, while he contends that ‘fiction must return to carrying a moral punch’, unless it is to become ‘petty and worthless’ (Chrisafis 2002), he is also aware that such ‘representation’ is often deliberately and consciously shaped by the author – as Chapter Two, ‘*His Dark Materials, Paradise Lost and Romantic Iconoclasm*’, shows, the text’s validation of a secular humanist republic of heaven is a case in point.

Similar to Wordsworth in *Lyrical Ballads* and Blake in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Pullman, in *His Dark Materials*, places himself in a role that enables him to speak with authority on what he sees as the problems faced by contemporary society. Many Romantic writers attempted to attune their readers to the need for personal and social transformation; in effect, their role as artists involved educative and moral responsibilities. In light of this belief in literature as an appropriate medium for political agendas, it is unsurprising that many Romantic poets, but particularly male poets, saw themselves as bards or even prophets: they spoke with an authoritative voice to inspire society towards a better future by encouraging people to break with the antiquated values and norms associated with the past, especially those that limit human freedom.

Most of the male canonical poets embraced the role of poet as prophet to some degree: Blake wrote as a Bard (Lundeen 2000: 59-98); Wordsworth expended great effort in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in answering the question, 'What is a Poet?' (2008: 18); Coleridge, in *Biographia Literaria*, claimed that the poet employs the magical power of the imagination to produce work (Eilenberg 1992: 139-67); Shelley, in *A Defence of Poetry*, ascribes to poets a set of extraordinary qualities which make them the unacknowledged legislators of the world (Sandy 2005); and, Keats, in his letters (1814-1821), wrote extensively about the role of poets and poetry.

In the introductory poems to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Blake places himself in such a position of authority. He undertakes the roles of shepherd, piper and bard in order to show his readers situations that he believed were badly in need of change in Britain in the 1790s. The speaker who introduces *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is identifiable with the poet: he is one who

present, past, and future sees

Whose ears have heard,

The Holy Word,

That walked among the ancient trees (2007: 215. 2-5).

In 'London', a particularly powerful poem because of the terrifying vision presented, Blake is the active figure in the poem: he wanders, meets, and hears. Blake's task is not for the average person; it requires someone special: a prophet or a visionary, someone who sets himself apart from the rest of humanity. The poet sees faces of individuals, bearing 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe' (2007: 161. 4) and observes 'mind-forged manacles' (2007: 161. 8) – a phrase which points to the psychological degradation of the industrial classes. Blake wished to communicate something of the turbulent spirit of the time by using the established and popular genres of ballad and song to examine contradiction and ambiguity in constructions that were supposedly secure – his poetry is a series of public pronouncements.

In the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's radicalism displays not just his awareness of his role as poet but also his strong desire to use this role to educate his readers in new modes of perception, with himself as guide and teacher: a point that he emphasizes when he describes the poet as 'the rock of defence for human nature' (2007: 77. 575). Therefore, while he claims to be employing the language really used by men for poetic composition, he also places himself in a position of authority. The role Wordsworth establishes for himself resembles that of a prophet as well as a poet:

What is a poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected of him? He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them (2008: 18).

Shelley's observations on the arbitrary association of words and ideas in *A Defence of Poetry* endow the writer with enormous power and potential: artists are transformed into political prophets because they are the ones who influence how particular words are decoded: they are the 'institutors of laws, [...] the founders of

Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), where Romantic patriarchal egotism, as embodied in the character Dr Frankenstein, is shown not to be egalitarian but elitist and exclusionary. Byron, too, wished to supplant Romantic imagination with Romantic indignation. An anonymously published poem by him, entitled *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), not only ridiculed specific solemnly held ideas but also placed him at odds with perceived guardians of canonical tradition:

The dull disciple of thy school,
That mild apostate from poetic rule,
The simple Wordsworth, framer of a lay
As soft as evening in his favourite May,
Who warns his friends 'to shake off toil and trouble,
And quit his books, for fear of growing double';
Who, both by precept and example, shows
That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose;
Convincing all, by demonstration plain,
Poetic souls delight in prose insane (Jump 1972: 115. 235-244).

Pullman's positioning of himself and his text among the English Poets, within a Romantic poetic tradition, is an attempt to consolidate his authority as author and *His Dark Materials* as text. In fact, he has gone so far as to claim that he is 'a strong believer in the tyranny, the dictatorship, the absolute authority of the writer' (Good Reads 2010) – a claim that is ironic, considering the emphasis placed on revolution

and the necessity of challenging authority in *His Dark Materials*. Furthermore, while he attacks C S Lewis, he is, ironically, in some ways very like him, and all those writers from Isaac Watts through the Romantics on to the Victorians, but especially the evangelicals, whose work for children aimed to proselytize or convert. In fact, evangelization is exactly what Pullman's secular humanism has him commit his two child protagonists to at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*:

‘We must make enough Dust [conscious matter] for them, Will, and keep the window [from the wand of the dead] open’ [Lyra said...] –

‘And if we do’, he said shakily, ‘if we live our lives properly and think about them as we do, then there’ll be something to tell the harpies about as well. We’ve got to tell the people that, Lyra’.

‘For the true stories, yes,’ she said, ‘the true stories the harpies want to hear in exchange. Yes. So if people live their whole lives and they’ve got nothing to tell about it when they’ve finished, then they’ll never leave the world of the dead. We’ve got to tell them that, Will’ (521).

His Dark Materials is a philosophical and pedagogical text. The claims Pullman made that he is a simple storyteller, a medium for the stories, and that his accountability ends there, were deliberate attempts to force a distinction in the minds of readers between the writer and what is written:

There is a huge gulf between me, the person, and the book I've written. Of course, I believe in it [...] but the idea that I, Philip Pullman, am somehow accountable for what the characters do or say, or everything that the narrator says, is something I don't believe (2002).

The reason Pullman attempts to distance himself from the implications of the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials* is, arguably, to circumvent responsibility for one of the more unfortunate consequences of his desire to instruct his readers in new ways of seeing the world. While Naomi Wood argues that his narrator does not occupy the all-knowing, all-powerful position of Lewis' God/narrator by creating 'ironic discontinuity, highlighting harsh contradictions between ideology and practice, culture and instinct, means and ends' (2001: 246), the text becomes increasingly didactic. Numerous writers, scholars and critics have commented upon the didacticism of *His Dark Materials*: consequently, Angelique Chrisafis claims that Pullman is an 'evangelical atheist' (2002); Jessica Mann, that his moralizing 'is overt' (2000); Erica Wagner, that he has a 'taste for pedagogy' (2000); Sarah Zettel, that he has a need 'to serve his own message no matter what' (2005: 47); and, Susan Matthew, that he is unwilling to give up his own 'narrative authority' (2005: 132).

It is precisely when he tries to promote his secular humanist republic of heaven that 'he violates the rules of his craft' most (Moloney 2005: 171). Over the course of the three volumes, *His Dark Materials* is increasingly burdened by the iconoclastic

musings of minor characters that act as thinly veiled focalizers for Pullman's stated aims in writing the work. In particular, characters that would usually be employed to idealize Christianity, such as angels (*AS*: 33-34) or dead martyrs (*AS*: 335-36), ruminate at length, critiquing Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism, in what are, essentially, author-sanctioned homilies. When Ruta Skada encourages fellow witches to join Lord Asriel's (Lyra's father) insurrection against the Authority of Heaven, for example, the momentum of the narrative is affected by expository detail that serves Pullman's republican agenda and not the story:

'Sisters [...] let me tell you what is happening and who it is that we must fight. [...] It is the Magisterium, the church. For all its history [...] it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. And when it can't control them, it cuts them out. Some of you have seen what they did at Bolvangar. And that was horrible, but it is not the only such place, not the only practice. Sisters, you know only the north: I have travelled in the south lands. There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did – not in the same way, but just as horribly – they cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls – they cut them with knives so that they shan't feel' (*SK*: 52).

In fact, the churches of the south do not feature in the text again. Their principal function is, arguably, to allude to 'real-world' genital mutilation practices that are often inseparable from religious systems of belief.

Pullman's conviction that unless writers wrestle with the 'larger questions of moral conduct' they will become 'useless and irrelevant', their writing 'so stupid and trivial [...] that [...]nobody will] want to read it' (Chrisafis 2002), has led him to inject his own morality into his work to such an extent that the *His Dark Materials* becomes unreasonably biased – something Shelley warned against in *A Defence of Poetry*. In particular, while he has Lyra discover the value of true stories, he, ironically, directs his attack on ecclesiasticism at a false caricature of Christianity – this is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. This is problematic for him because, in an interview with Bel Mooney in 2003, he stated, 'I believe pretty well what I've described in the third book' (131).

The fact that Pullman's attempt to assume the position of simple storyteller coincided with discussions regarding the adaption of *Northern Lights* from book to film is not insignificant either. Fear of alienating a sizeable section of his audience in the United States with a challenge to middle-class conservatism, with the advent of New Line Cinema's 2007 film adaptation of *The Golden Compass* (the US title for *Northern Lights*), is, arguably, one of the reasons for his intense self-promotion of himself as a simple storyteller. However, it is also probable that he viewed the film adaptation of his work as an opportunity to redress what he admitted (2002) was an unrealistic depiction of the Christian churches and their clerics, by simply acquiescing to the removal of all direct references to organised religion from the screenplay. In the film not only does the ecclesiastical Magisterium of *His Dark Materials* become a generic symbol, connoting all forms of oppressive authority, but

the language of the text is also secularised, with words such as 'Pope', 'Papacy', 'Church', 'College of Bishops' and 'Calvin' omitted from the screenplay (NL: 31). While a few subtle references to the once explicit critique of Christian authority remain, in New Line Cinema's film a once subversive work of fiction is stripped of most of its iconoclasm – to watch *The Golden Compass* is to witness Pullman assume the position of simple storyteller.

With regard to Pullman's challenge to cultural idealizations of innocence, too, there is evidence of the effects of didacticism. The desirability of losing innocence and gaining experience is promoted to such an extent in *His Dark Materials* that it becomes an end in itself. Although it is Lyra and Will's fall into adult experience, in an act of sexual love, that saves the world, there is nothing in the text to suggest what it is about their fall that is essentially so different from that of every other couple that enables it to end destiny – it seems important only that they fall. In light of this, Michael Chabon claims that Lyra and Will are 'sacrificed to fulfill the hidden purposes of their creator' (2005: 12), while Sean Hartnett, maintains that, with the desirability of adult experience securely ingrained within his text, it seems that Pullman leaves Lyra and Will to 'drift through the narrative like the ghosts they are sent to liberate [from the Land of the Dead], shorn of all initiative and purpose' (2002).

What Chabon and Hartnett highlight is that, despite Pullman's conviction that story is central to the literary enterprise, his didacticism affects *His Dark Materials*, most

noticeably, in terms of characterization and plot. Chabon's contention that Pullman's 'mounting sense of self-importance' is most evident in 'the swollen bulk of the third volume and in the decreasing roundness of its characters' (2005: 12), is also supported by Zettel. She argues that, although Pullman creates two powerful characters in Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter (Lyra's mother and a research scientist with the Church), in a story that posits the non-existence of God, they become *deus ex machina* (2005: 46). This is ironic, as it is one of the things Pullman criticizes Lewis for (1998: 6-7). While Mrs Coulter is formidable and relentless in her pursuit of Lyra, after she captures her daughter, her role involves giving other characters a chance to explain things to the reader (*AS*: 210-32; *AS*: 339-69). Lord Asriel, too, becomes, more and more, a catalyst for plot development – in fact, two chapters before his death, he not only verbalizes his increasing superfluity to the story but also prophesizes his own death:

'I'm going to destroy Metatron. But my part is nearly over. It's my daughter who has to live, and it's our task to keep all the forces of the kingdom away from her so she has a chance to find her way to a safer world – she and that boy, and their dæmons' (*AS*: 399).

Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter's increasing redundancy in the text is emphasized by the fact that they are killed with more than 100 pages of *His Dark Materials* remaining. However, even though there is evidence in the text to corroborate Zettel's claim that Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter 'can do anything the author needs

them to do whenever he needs them to do it', her conclusion that they 'do not make sense at all and they fit nowhere' (2005: 46) is reached from a narrow epistemological base: not only are both characters depicted as complex humans in the text but they also learn from their mistakes and achieve a kind of redemption in sacrificing their lives for Lyra in a battle with Metatron, the Authority's Regent (*AS*: 424-30).

Pullman's didactic tendencies also affect the plot of *His Dark Materials*. In his eagerness to forward his republican agenda by challenging Christian authority and cultural idealizations of innocence, he sometimes rushes the plot in a clumsy fashion in order to develop the thematic and philosophical concerns of his text. After the passages where Serafina Pekkala eavesdrops on the inquisition of a captured fellow witch, whom she has to kill before she tells her captors about the prophecy concerning Lyra, Pullman's desire to link Lyra's ascent into adult knowledge with the building of a secular humanist republic of heaven is evident in the awkwardness of the transition of the plot:

They [witches] turned south, away from the troubling other-world gleam in the fog, and as they flew a question began to form more clearly in Serafina's mind. What was Lord Asriel doing?

Because all the events that had overturned the world had their origin in his mysterious activities.

The problem was that the usual sources of her knowledge were natural ones. [...]

For knowledge about Lord Asriel, she had to go elsewhere. In the port of Trollesund, [the witches'] consul Dr Lanselius maintained his contact with the world of men and women, and Serafina Pekkala sped there through the fog to see what he could tell her (SK: 42-43).

So determined is Pullman on forwarding his republican agenda that he fails to recognize that, at times, 'his message is warping the weave of the story, and in some places warping it so badly that all you can see is the message' (Zettel 2005: 47). However, perhaps the most serious examples of his attempt to develop the thematic and philosophical concerns of the text, considering that he hoped to shape his story through characters and events, are the awkward transitions that occur in *His Dark Materials* when he tries to re-ignite the story having sacrificed it to forward his agenda. One of the clearest examples of the subjugation of story to agenda occurs in *The Amber Spyglass* in Father MacPhail's address to the Consistorial Court of Discipline. While the inelegance of the writing does not do justice to Pullman's artistry or the work as a whole, his use of demonstrative pronouns, enumerative adverbs, auxiliary verbs and fragmentary sentences in the following extract betrays both his priorities as author and presence as narrator:

Once they were seated, Father MacPhail said:

‘This, then, is the state of things. There seem to be several points to bear in mind.

Firstly, Lord Asriel. A witch friendly to the church reports that he is assembling a great army, including forces that may be angelic. His Intentions, as far as the witch knows, are malevolent towards the church, and towards the Authority Himself.

Secondly, the Oblation Board. Their actions in setting up the research programme at Bolvangar, and in funding Mrs Coulter’s activities, suggest that they are hoping to replace the Consistorial Court of Discipline as the most powerful and effective arm of the Holy Church. We have been out-paced gentlemen. They have acted ruthlessly and skilfully. We should be chastised for our laxity in letting it happen. I shall return to what we might do about it shortly.

Thirdly, the boy on Fra Pavel’s testimony, with the knife that can do extraordinary things. Clearly we must find him and gain possession of it as soon as possible.

Fourthly, Dust. I have taken steps to find out what the Oblation Board has discovered about it. One of the experimental theologians working at Bolvangar has been persuaded to tell us what exactly they discovered. I shall talk to him this afternoon downstairs’ (*AS*: 73-74).

The result of the Bardic leanings of its author is that *His Dark Materials* resonates with the tension between the novelist and the philosopher, the storyteller and the prophet, within Pullman himself. Pullman associates the reality of his story with his moral imperative to tell the 'truth' – for him, his story is both 'real' and 'true' on some level (Moruzi 2005: 56). Consequently, as author, he is inexorably implicated in the 'reality' found in his writing, because his novel not only reflects the reality of the world but also creates that reality. However, by overemphasising the verisimilitudinous nature of *His Dark Materials*, as he does by referring to it as 'stark realism', and by failing to include a stronger sense of ironic counterpoint in his narrative, he not only orientates his readers towards the 'real' world implications of his text but also establishes 'a one-to-one relationship between objects and their representation', which masks 'the processes of textual production of meaning' (Stephens 1992: 4). While it is not consistent with the egalitarian nature of his republican agenda, the 'effacement of readers' subjectivity' (Iser 1978: 108-09) equates 'representation' with 'truth'.

In a not altogether dissimilar manner to the way in which Milton committed himself in *Paradise Lost* to *mythopoesis* (Brazier 2007: 742-75), the construction of new stories to re-express essential Christian 'truths', Pullman, too, believes that his 'truths' are best expressed in story. Like many Romantic writers, Pullman's inclination to draw on mythological grand narratives in his own storytelling is inseparable from his desire to create, in and through *His Dark Materials*, a contemporary mythology for our time. However, the purpose of his *mythopoesis* is

not the defense but the destruction of Christian 'truth'. Despite the unfortunate levels of didacticism that become increasingly evident over the course of the three volumes, Pullman tries not so much to 'out-narrate' Christianity as to tell an alternative story. In this endeavour, Rayment-Pickard believes that Pullman is successful, conceding that *His Dark Materials* is 'a myth that is simply more appealing, more powerful, and more convincing than the Christian narrative' (2004: 16).

Democratizing Language: *His Dark Materials* as Crossover Fiction

I don't write for children: I write books that children read (Pullman 2009c)

Throughout Pullman's career as a professional writer, he has written and published for various audiences. It is, however, with children's literature that he has become most closely associated. As evidenced by the numerous blurbs from reviews that have been used by his publisher Scholastic to promote *His Dark Materials*, the general trend among critics has been to categorise the texts – as the review quoted from S F Said on the jacket of *The Amber Spyglass* does – as among 'the most important children's books of our time'. A fellow writer, Shirley Hughes, recognizes Pullman as a writer 'of extraordinary descriptive power' and claims that his work will be considered by posterity as being among the 'finest children's writing' (McCrum 2002). The practice of reading *His Dark Materials* as children's literature is most evident in Nina Bawden's review of *Northern Lights*, which was used as a blurb for the 1998 edition. While she describes Pullman's text as 'an

impressively realized fantasy, set in a solid and convincing universe', she nevertheless suggests that it is 'the child inside the adult who reads on with bated breath'.

Despite the fact that *His Dark Materials* is published as children's literature, when Pullman was asked why he decided to write for children, or young adults, he claimed that he 'didn't' (March 2000). In fact, he argued that he writes for no-one in particular, and that, if he thinks of an audience at all, he thinks of 'a group that includes adults, children, male, female, old, middle-aged, young: everyone who can read' (Random House 1996b). As if to further emphasize the fact that he does not have a single specific audience in mind when writing, he is also quoted, on the same website, as suggesting that the constitution of his hypothetical audience would include 'horses, dogs, cats [...and] pigeons' (Random House 1996b) if they could read. Although the tone of Pullman's comments appears nonchalant, it arguably captures his exasperation at the categorisation of *His Dark Materials* solely as children's literature – of course, such a categorization is justified by the very fact that it is published as such.

While Pullman contends that he writes for no-one in particular, it is more accurate to say that he writes for no single specific group of readers. In an interview with Robert McCrum for *The Observer*, he maintained that even though his audience 'does not consist just of children, [...it] does of course include children' (2002), while on the *South Bank Show* he told Melvyn Bragg that he had a 'mixed audience in mind'

(March 2003) when writing *His Dark Materials*. This decision of Pullman's to write for such an audience is inseparable both from his perception of the limitations of literature written specifically for either children or adults and from his desire to ensure that *His Dark Materials*' endorsement of personal and social revolution reaches as wide a readership as possible.

On the *South Bank Show*, Pullman claimed that while both story and craftsmanship are integral elements of the literary enterprise they are rarely found unified in a single work for either children or adults: that children's literature is a bastion for the primacy of story in the literary enterprise, while adult fiction exalts craftsmanship (March 2003). From these comments, it seems that Pullman sees story in terms of characters and events, and craftsmanship in terms of literary technique. With reference to adult fiction, especially that of the twentieth century, he contends that a fascination with craftsmanship has frequently superseded an interest in story itself. In his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech for *Northern Lights*, he argued that 'there are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction,' because 'in adult literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more important: technique, style, [or] literary knowingness' (Random House 1996a). His conviction that, since the deaths of William Golding and Graham Greene in the last decade of the twentieth century, the literary novel has lacked the conviction to tackle issues of life, death and morality is founded on his belief that the subjugation of story to craftsmanship in much adult fiction has diminished its ability to engage readers with

fundamental questions concerning the nature and significance of human existence (Chrisafis, 2002).

According to Pullman, while craftsmanship is enormously important, it tends to force readers to ignore the story and ‘to look at the way the story was told or look at the way the words were put together’ (March 2003). The result of this subjugation, he claims, is that readers get left behind, because they are not necessarily interested in craftsmanship; what they seem to hunger for most, he rather sweepingly suggests, is ‘representation’ – stories that question what it means to be human (March 2003). In his Patrick Hardy Lecture, ‘Let’s Write it in Red’, he maintained that ‘representation’ in literature is generally to be found in children’s fiction, which, at this time in our literary history, ‘opens out on wideness and amplitude – a moral and mental spaciousness – that adult fiction seems to have turned its back on’ (January 1998).

Although Pullman argues that ‘children’s literature is the last forum left’ (Ezard 2002) for contesting the centrality of story in the literary enterprise, he also considers the very prominence of story in children’s literature to be limiting. In fact, he claims that there is a kind of liberation in writing for children that stems in part from what he calls their ‘lack of sophistication’ (March 2003). This very lack of sophistication, he suggests, emancipates writers of children’s literature from the necessity of labouring with craftsmanship, because, he claims, children ‘aren’t interested in irony and cleverness. They want the story, what happened next’

(McCrum 2002). Therefore, despite acknowledging that children's literature engages with fundamental questions pertaining to human existence, he also implies that this comes at the expense of craftsmanship.

Pullman's views on adult and children's literature are both controversial and questionable. His claim that children's literature suffers from a poverty of craftsmanship is similar to that expressed by Jacqueline Rose (1992:7), in so far as implicit in his evaluation of the genre is the suggestion that it is regressive, arrested and antipathetic to literary invention in terms of form. However, as Kimberley Reynolds (2007) shows, not only are many textual experiments given their first expression in writing for children but also the innovative quality of a great deal of children's literature is often inseparable from its willingness to foreground language as the medium of meaning. Juliet Dusinberre, too, in her study of the relationship between children's literature and writing for adults, details how Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through The Looking Glass* (1871), marked the beginning of a challenge to language and narrative structure that was to become 'the central concern, not only of children's authors, but of many adult writers – Virginia Woolf, Henry James, Joyce – in the shift of consciousness at the turn of the twentieth century' (1987: xvii).

Pullman's belief that adult literature fails to offer representation is also questionable. A small number of examples from recent publications reveal that adult fiction does open out on a moral and mental spaciousness: Sebastian Barry's *The Secret*

Scripture (2008), for instance, tells of human betrayal, loss and redemption; A L Kennedy's *Day* (2007) explores human frailty, pain and hope; and Stef Penney's *The Tenderness of Wolves* (2006) examines the complexities of human desires, motivations and relationships. Furthermore, while Pullman's more general comments regarding the limitations of adult fiction can be viewed as a polemical diatribe against the oftentimes perceived 'elitist' (Reynolds 2007: 8) nature of much Modernist literature, his statements are problematic, because they imply that craftsmanship is not only separable from aspects such as characterisation and theme but also that craftsmanship is confined to Modernism – in fact, in Modernist literature, style and literary knowingness often constitute the story itself.

Pullman's distaste for much Modernist literature is both understandable and strange: strange in the sense that Modernist literature, like Romantic literature, is characterized by bold experimentation with subject matter, form and genre – a characteristic of Romantic literature that appeals to Pullman; and understandable in the sense that the purpose of this bold experimentation was to challenge the very conventions of Romanticism – conventions that support the ideology behind *His Dark Materials*. However, it is the implication in his argument that Modernist literature does not offer readers 'representation' that is most problematic: again, like Romanticism, Modernism, is inextricably linked to historical moments of great political and cultural upheaval; Modernist literature often reflects this upheaval and, consequently, has the potential to shape readers' understanding of who they are, their relationship with others and their place in society. Conversely, however, there

is always the possibility that Pullman's disregard for much Modernist literature is more straightforward. The charge of elitism that he levels against such literature suggests that, as a writer of popular fiction (children's literature and fantasy), he finds its exalted status unacceptable.

While his views on contemporary adult and children's literature are debatable, and despite the fact that he does not want to be categorised – exclusively – as a writer for children, Pullman does not subscribe to a hierarchy of literary genres. From his Patrick Hardy lecture it is evident that he values children's literature. Moreover, although he does not see himself solely as a children's writer, he claims that he is 'very proud to be counted among writers for children,' as it is 'great company to be in' (2004: 24). Such a contention is also supported by the argument made in an article written shortly after *His Dark Materials* was voted Britain's third favourite book in *The Big Read*, broadcast on BBC Two. Pullman stated that he liked the series because 'it made no distinction between books based on their audience' (December 2003). He contended that until recent times it would have been taken for granted that books for children had to be dealt with separately in such a series. It seems that *The Big Read* appealed to Pullman because it acknowledged a proposition of which he has been a vocal proponent for many years: 'that children's books belong in the general literary conversation' (December 2003).

The development of children's literature, a genre characterized by its specificity for a child readership (Thacker and Webb 2002: 14), has its origins in the Romantic

period. The genre was, to a significant extent, characterized by two opposing fictions: one shaped by the customary fashion of the time for moralistic stories with an evangelical emphasis; the other by an oral tradition that popularized fairy tales and fantasy and found expression in the Gothic. John Locke's (1632-1704) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Rousseau's *Emile or On Education* (1762) were two of the most influential British publications on the development of children's literature in the Romantic period and after. While Locke acknowledged and valued children's natural inquisitiveness, sense of liberty and propensity for rationality, he also proposed that the purpose of education, and by extension literature, is to train children to serve in society: to suggest ways of instilling good habits into children through reason, so that they may develop the characteristics necessary to become 'virtuous, useful, and able' (2009: lxiii). In *Emile or On Education* (1762), Rousseau challenged Locke's view of children as potential adults. Although he also celebrated the natural tendencies of childhood, he argued that these should be nurtured, rather than directed toward adult values and knowledge. Rousseau claimed that 'Nature wants children to be children before being men [...] Childhood has its ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling which are proper to it' (2008: 78). Consequently, his belief that children should be allowed to grow naturally without adult indoctrination, is one of the main reasons why he did not espouse literature, particularly that of a pedagogical nature, for children.

The philosophical underpinnings of a great many prose publications for children in the eighteenth-century owe much to Lockean and Rousseauian thought, especially

the fear-inducing qualities they associated with Gothic horrors and chapbooks. The anonymously authored *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes* (1765), published by Mr Newbery (1713-1767), suggests superstitious or supernatural fears are the product of an irrational mind (1977: 19); Anna Laetitia Barbauld's (1742-1825) *Hymns in Prose for Children* (1781) attempted to 'impress devotional feelings as early as possible on the infant mind' (v); Mary Wollstonecraft's (1759-1797) *Original Stories from Real Life* are, as the subtitle states, '*Conversations Calculated to Regulate the Affections and Form the Mind to Truth and Goodness*' (1788); while Maria Edgeworth's (1767-1849) *The Parent's Assistant* (1796) assures that steps have been taken to avoid inflaming the mind. In fact, the idealised relationship between adult author and child reader, formed out of this Romantic aesthetic, 'serves as a model for subsequent writing for children in English' (Thacker and Webb 2002: 13). However, what is also striking about the children's writings of Wollstonecraft, Barbauld and Edgeworth is the fact that the Gothic, of which all three were skilful exponents, was deemed, in many quarters, inappropriate subject matter for children. Consequently, much of the revolutionary potential of literature, evident in the Gothic's concern with the forbidden, adult sexuality and religious heresy, for example, became the property of adult fiction. This established a literary hierarchy between adult and children's fiction, with the latter subordinate to the former.

While its intended readership is unclear, perhaps one of the most egalitarian publications of the Romantic period, in terms of its potential to present a revolutionary socio-political agenda to a dual audience of children and adults, is

Songs of Innocence and of Experience – originally published separately as *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794). In fact, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* does not make a distinction between literatures deemed suitable for either an adult or child audience. The poems of the collection, which are examined in greater detail in the chapter ‘*His Dark Material*, Blake and Romantic Constructions of Childhood’, are lyrics, presenting a single speaker expressing a state of mind. Evidence for the collection being deliberately shaped for both children and adults lies in the fact that the uncomplicated cadences and rhymes of *Songs of Innocence* are accessible to less sophisticated readers, even though the collection as a whole is multivocal, allusive and philosophical; and, that the subject matter and rhythm of the poems are simple, although they embody complex religious and mythological associations, which form an elaborate framework for the collection – there is intertextual reference to the Bible and Milton, as well as moralizing children’s poetry and hymnody.

In the light of Pullman’s perceptions of the shortcomings of both adult and children’s fiction, *His Dark Materials* gives evidence of his attempt to coalesce story and craftsmanship into a work of fiction so as to appeal to as wide a readership as possible. This convergence of story and craftsmanship in his writing goes some way to explaining why, if it is not thought of as children’s literature, *His Dark Materials* can be considered ‘crossover fiction’ (Beckett 2009: 27). This term is generally used for a children’s story whose literary knowingness or intertextuality places it among adult literature that acknowledges the power of language to shape reality, or

for adult fiction whose stylised narrative displays a commitment to story often found only in children's literature. The fact that *The Amber Spyglass* was the first book to receive both 2001 Whitbread Awards, for Children's Book and for Book of the Year, is further evidence of the liminality of *His Dark Materials* between adult and children's fiction.

Pullman's claim in his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech that adults who truly take pleasure in 'books in which the events matter [...] but] which at the same time are works of literary art, [and] where the writers have used all the resources of their craft, could hardly do better than to look among [...] children's books' (Random House, 1996a), therefore, is not as unequivocal as it may first read. His choice of words when arguing that such readers 'could *hardly* do better than look *among* children's books', as opposed to 'could do *no* better than to *read* children's books', is telling. The use of the word 'among' suggests that Pullman is referring to works of crossover fiction.

Deliberately positioning *His Dark Materials* in a liminal space between adult and children's fiction, Pullman attempts to appeal to as wide a readership as possible – to offer his readers what he terms 'representation'. His own literary history is one that has, for a long time, occupied a liminal space between adult and child audiences. While teaching, for example, the plays he wrote for his students to perform were written for a dual audience: the child performers and their parents. In fact, some of these plays later became novels in their own right: *Count Karlstein* (1982), *The Ruby*

in the Smoke (1985) and *The Firework Maker's Daughter* (1995). As Michael Chabon argues, Pullman has built his 'literary house on the borderlands' between 'childhood and adulthood, [...] "serious" and "genre" literature'. According to Chabon, though the borderlands is a place that is 'at worst [...] invisible and at best [...] inhospitable', it is also the place from which 'the truest stories have always drawn their power' (2005: 1).

His Dark Materials' promotion of adult experience as a natural replacement for childhood innocence is inseparable from Pullman's adult empiricism and, as such, is adult in conception and orientation. However, the fact that *His Dark Materials* is published as children's literature suggests that he is keen to promote the desirability of using language that is accessible to children in order to end naïve views of childhood innocence; he realises that young readers represent a natural audience for such a concern. While a minority of critics has argued that *His Dark Materials* should 'be considered strictly adult fiction' (Grenier 2001: 40), because its individual volumes are adult books 'disguised as children's' (Hartnett 2002), Polly Shulman captured the subtlety of Pullman's agenda best when she argued that while *His Dark Materials* is 'caught up in adult theology [...and philosophy] he keeps the swooping plots and passionate characters that make his earlier books so appealing to young readers' (2000).

Pullman's interest in narrating adult experience as a natural replacement for childhood innocence, in a linguistically accessible manner, is evidence of his

republican agenda: to craft his story in such a manner so as to disseminate the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials* to as wide a readership as possible. In order to illustrate this technique, close consideration of some fairly lengthy extracts from the text is required.

Pullman attempts to shape *His Dark Materials* through story and the democratisation of language is evident in his use of dæmons in the text. In the opening lines of *Northern Lights*, for instance, his craftsmanship lies in enabling the story itself to develop readers' understandings of the nature and purpose of dæmons, rather than directly stating their significance:

Lyra and her dæmon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen.

[...] Lyra stopped beside the Master's chair and flicked the biggest glass gently with her fingernail. The sound rang clearly through the Hall.

You're not taking this seriously', whispered her dæmon. 'Behave yourself'.

Her dæmon's name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the Hall (3).

In this concise opening, the portrayal of the characters and events, presented in language that is immediate, implicitly informs readers that dæmons exist, that they

can change shape, that they are connected to humans in some kind of relationship, that they have their own names and personalities, that they converse with their human counterparts, and that they comment upon the actions and behaviour of these humans. The effect of such an opening is both to intrigue and inform readers of all ages.

In other passages, however, Pullman's eagerness to write in language that is accessible to children may also have the potential to alienate an adult readership – and some young adults too. His depiction of Lyra and Will's first kiss, for example, which acts as a prelude to a later, more intimate, sexual experience is a case in point:

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

And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth.

She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak. Her fingers were still at his lips, and he felt them tremble, and he put his own hand up to hold hers there, and then neither of them could look; they were confused; they were brimming with happiness.

Like two moths clumsily bumping together, with no more weight than that, their lips touched. Then before they knew how it happened, they were clinging together, blindly pressing their faces towards each other.

‘Like Mary said’ – he whispered – ‘you know straight away when you like someone – when you were asleep, on the mountain, before she took you away, I told Pan –’

‘I heard’, she whispered, ‘I was awake and I wanted to tell you the same and now I know what I must have felt all the time: I love you, Will, I love you – ‘

The word *love* set his nerves ablaze. All his body thrilled with it, and he answered her in the same words, kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body and her warm honey-fragrant hair and her sweet moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit.

Around them there was nothing but silence, as if all the world was holding its breath (*AS*: 492).

Pullman’s description of this kiss imbues the event with something approaching a level of sentimentality appropriate to a younger teenage readership, which may well be captivated by the emphasis on the protagonists’ physical sensations. While adult readers might find themselves less immediately entranced, however, the words that indicate the inexperience of Lyra and Will (‘clumsily’, ‘before they knew how it happened’, ‘blindly’), together with the complex symbolism and Will’s attempt to verbalise the experience, all suggest that there is enough in the passage to interest more sophisticated readers.

Evidence of Pullman's skill at employing language that is artistically sophisticated yet, at the same time, free of specialised discourse is to be found in other passages, such as those that advance the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials*. In the extract from *The Amber Spyglass* where, figuratively, God is killed, Pullman keeps characters and events to the fore, and the language accessible, despite the philosophical complexity and the richness of the provocative adjectival description:

She [Lyra] was gazing into the crystal litter. [...] It lay tilted crazily among the rocks, and inside it –

‘Oh, Will, he’s alive! But – the poor thing...’

Will saw her hands pressing against the crystal, trying to reach to the angel [the ‘Authority’] and comfort him; because he was so old, and he was terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner.

‘He must be so old – I’ve never seen anyone suffering like that – oh, Will, can’t we let him out?’

Will cut through the crystal in one movement and reached into help the angel out. [...]

‘It’s all right’, Will said, ‘we can help you hide, at least. Come on, we won’t hurt you’.

The shaking hand seized his and feebly held on. The old one was uttering a wordless groaning whimper that went on and on, and grinding his teeth, and compulsively plucking at himself with his free hand; but as Lyra

reached in too to help him out, he tried to smile, and to bow, and his ancient eyes deep in their wrinkles blinked at her with innocent wonder. [...]

Then he was gone: a mystery dissolving in mystery (431-32).

This final clause represents the only time in the passage where the diction becomes overtly philosophical, but the way that it is preceded by a description of the actions and empathetic responses of Will and Lyra means that readers are well prepared for this poetic abstraction.

Passages like these show not only Pullman's attempt to address a child readership but also his desire to depict his child protagonists as suitable subjects for serious literature. However, he also employs the 'ordinary' language of his child protagonists to forward the philosophical concern of the text with the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience. In the following extract from *Northern Lights*, Pullman employs Lyra's emotionally laden vernacular language to convey her sense of betrayal at the hands of her father, Lord Asriel, and thus to display the kinds of experiences, or awakenings, that lead her from childhood innocence towards a deeper adult knowledge of herself:

'I brought you the bloody alethiometer [a truth-telling instrument of thirty-six multivalent symbols that forecasts the consequences to actions], didn't I?', Lyra burst out. She was very near to tears. 'I looked after it all the way from Jordan, I hid it and I treasured it, all through what's happened to us, and

I learned about using it, and I carried it all this bloody way when I could've just given up and been safe, and you en't even said thank you, nor shown any sign that you're glad to see me. I don't know why I ever done it. But I did, and I kept on going [...] so's I could come on here for your sake...And when you *did* see me you like to fainted, as if I was some horrible thing you never wanted to see again. You en't human, Lord Asriel. You en't my *father*. My *father* wouldn't treat me like that. Fathers are supposed to love their daughters, en't they? You don't love me, and I don't love you, and that's a fact' (368).

While Lyra's repeated use of the word 'bloody' as an expletive might be regarded as a childish outburst, a sign of her lack of maturity, it is, in the context of the passage as a whole, an act of verbal transgression into a more adult exchange, where she not only talks to her father as an adult but also chastises him for failing to act as a father should. In fact, it is this latter act of castigation, more than anything else, that is the marker of her gradual transition into adulthood – her experiences of life up until this point have endowed her with a knowledge of familial responsibilities that belies childhood innocence.

The child reader is not a mere pretext for Pullman; although there is some truth in Zohar Shavit's contention that many children's books with an 'ambivalent status' address two implied readers – a 'pseudo addressee' child and a 'real' adult one – her assertion that 'the child, the official reader of the text, is not meant to realise it fully

and is much more an excuse for the text rather than its genuine addressee,' is not applicable to *His Dark Materials* (1987: 71). Moreover, Pullman's opinions on the strengths and limitations of fictions that are written exclusively for children or adults, and his attempt to craft *His Dark Materials* into a successful work of crossover fiction, suggest that he is interested in utilizing established literary genres and modes of expression to forward the thematic and philosophical concerns of his text. While *His Dark Materials* is the product of Pullman's desire to craft what he terms the 'technically difficult' story (2003, March), in which there is no artificial division between story and craftsmanship, the thematic and philosophical concerns of his crossover fiction are presented in a form whose story and accessible language appeal to as inclusive a readership as possible.

It seems that the dual audience Pullman had in mind when writing *His Dark Materials* included children in a meaningful manner; however, his decision to publish his text as children's literature is also inextricably linked to his attempt to forward his own republican agenda. Despite his questionable claim that children's literature is arrested at the level of form, Pullman is aware of its subversive potential as a catalyst for personal and social change.

Of all the literatures, 'children's literature is the only body of writing to be defined by and named for its audience' (Reynolds 2007: 180). According to Rose, the 'acknowledged difference, [...the] rupture almost, between writer and addressee' (1984: 4) in children's literature not only characterizes its generic distinction but

also betrays the fact that ‘there is no child behind the category “children’s fiction”, other than the one the category sets in place, the one which it needs to believe is there for its own purposes’ (1984: 10). In *The Case of Peter Pan, or The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction* (1984), she argues that children’s literature upholds the status quo:

It is assumed that children’s fiction has grown away from this moment [a time when conceptualization of childhood was dominated by the philosophical writing of Locke and Rousseau], whereas in fact, children’s fiction has constantly returned to this moment, repeated it, and reproduced its fundamental conception of the child. Children’s fiction has never completely severed its links with a philosophy that sets up the child as a pure point of origin in relation to language, sexuality and the state (8).

While children’s writing – writing by young people for young people – is finding a readership on the Internet through fanfiction sites, children’s literature is, for the most part, the product of adult craftsmanship. Rose claims that children’s literature is an arrested art form: because of the subject position of the child as reader, there is ‘no disturbance at the level of language, no challenge to [...adult] sexuality, no threat to [...adults’] status as critics, and no question of [...adults’] relation to the child’ (1984: 20). Rose is not alone in questioning the legitimacy of children’s literature as a construct: scholars like Jack Zipes (1991: 9) and Robert McCallum (1999) argue

that children's literature is part of an ideological programme of acculturation, transmitting adult cultural values into the lives of children.

Despite the continuing impact Rose's argument has on children's literature criticism (see Reynolds 2007) the 'rupture' that it suggests exists between adult writer and child reader does not necessarily equate to the impossibility of children's fiction. Imaginative writers have the ability to 'inhabit' different subject positions; imaginative fiction has the facility to capture the essence of the 'reality' it contemplates. Elizabeth Berg makes such a claim for author and text when she argues that the real success of Roddy Doyle's *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors* (1996) lies in Doyle's ability to allow his protagonist Paula Spencer to tell her own story:

In the very finest fiction the author disappears, sometimes even along with his or her gender. It doesn't happen very often. But it does here. You don't see a man, telling a woman's story with an accuracy and sensitivity you might not have thought possible. You see a woman telling her own story. You only see her (1996).

While it is true that most stories of childhood are narrative reconstructions, it is still possible for adult writers to recapture 'authentic' flashes of childhood – even though it may be difficult, as Nancy Watson contends, to 'get beyond memory to the actual consciousness of what it was like to experience remembered events as a child'

(2009: 7). In attempting to do so, adult writers of children's literature are challenged to bring visionary innocence to their writing: to renew their adult perspectives on the world. The ability of these writers to enable adult readers to see things from new perspectives, but particularly from the potential of a child reader's different viewpoint, makes it possible to question cultural assumptions through new eyes. However, it is not *compulsory* nor a *fait accompli* that the child be *used* as 'a concept to buttress different arguments and positions in the establishment of our [adult] relationship to changing cultural forms' (Watson 2009: x). The endeavour of writers of children's literature to see possibilities in that which has become customary also has the potential to encourage child readers to recognize and engage with the complexities, difficulties and ambiguities of the world they inhabit.

Children's literature occupies a paradoxical cultural space: a space that is 'simultaneously highly regulated and overlooked, orthodox and radical, didactic and subversive' (Reynolds 2007: 3). However, from the evidence of the literature written for children, it is difficult to concur with Rose's assertion that children's literature, and the child embodied in it, is necessarily conservative: such literature often embodies Jean-François Lyotard's 'monster-child': a child who is 'not the father of the man; [...who] in the midst of man, throws him off course; [...who represents] the possibility or risk of being set adrift' (Burman 1998: 72). The ambivalent nature of the depiction of children and childhood in much contemporary children's literature – including Melvin Burgess's *Junk* (1997), Shaun Tan's *The*

Red Tree (2004) and *His Dark Materials*, for example – is evidence that much of this writing is counterculturalist or, at least, subversive rather than conservative.

Reynolds argues that it is not coincidental that at crucial moments in social history writing for children has been ‘put into the service of those who are trying to disseminate new world views, values, and social models’ (2007: 2). Dusiinberre, in *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art*, explores how those who wish to bring about ‘great change’ often locate their ‘radical ideas about what the future ought to be like in the books which are written for the new generation’ (1987: 34); Lindsay Myers (2003), in a paper entitled ‘The influence of post-war Italian socio-politics on the structure of the Italian fantasy for children between 1945 and 1955’, argued that, immediately following the Second World War, the structure of Italian fantasy for children changed dramatically to subversively critique the socio-political order in the country, especially in works like Dino Buzzati’s *La famosa invasione degli orsi in Sicilia* (1945), Carmen Gentile’s *La Repubblica Pinguinina* (1950) and Gianni Rodari’s *Le Avventure di Cipollino* (1955); while, Julia Mickenberg, in *Learning from the Left: Children’s Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (2006), elucidates the role that children’s literature played in the United States in enshrining and disseminating left-wing politics in the light of McCarthyism and the Cold War.

What these scholars claim is that at times of cultural transformation children’s literature can act as a medium not only for visionary thought but also for political

engagement, encouraging children to think critically but optimistically about the future and the unique roles they might play in changing society for the better. This ability to envisage and engage children with possibilities for new world orders is, according to Reynolds (2007: 14), central to the transformative power of children's literature, both socially and aesthetically. She argues that, while the stories told to children are 'blueprints for living in culture as it exists,' they are also 'where *alternative* ways of living are often piloted in recognition of the fact that children will not just inherit the future, but need to participate in shaping it' (2007: 14).

Children's literature has always been an arena for artistic innovation and social commentary. While it has often been perceived as 'belonging to a separate sub-culture' (Dusinberre 1987: xvii) that has no place in discussions of 'high' literature, it is no less accomplished or technical as an art form, no less critical and subversive in its social commentary, than adult literature – it needs to be integrated into 'mainstream' literary discourse: children's literature belongs to the general literary conversation.

The Fantasticality of *His Dark Materials* as a Work of 'Stark Realism'

I found myself inexorably – helplessly – bound into the writing of a fantasy, a genre of story I neither enjoyed nor approved of. I didn't think much of fantasy because most fantasy I'd read seemed to take no interest in human psychology, which for me was the central point of fiction. It was only when I realised that Paradise Lost, a poem I loved and admired more than any other,

was itself a sort of fantasy, [...] that I felt free to go ahead with my ideas [...]. I could use the apparatus of fantasy to say something that I thought was truthful and hoped was interesting about what it was like to be a human being. Milton had showed me that (Pullman 2005, October).

Pullman's decision to write *His Dark Materials* as a work of fantasy is another example of his utilization of established literary genres to forward the thematic and philosophical concerns of the text and to ensure that these concerns are as accessible to as wide a section of the reading public as possible – the subsequent two chapters examine the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials* in detail; this section focuses on Pullman's claim that fantasy is both a 'versatile mode' and medium for 'ideas' (Chrisafis 2002).

Fantasy appeals to Pullman because *His Dark Materials* is a work that is published as children's literature though adult in orientation. While John Stephens (1992: 241-42) argues that the association of 'seriousness' with realism in literature resulted in the concurrent consigning of fantasy to 'non-serious' or popular literature for audiences, such as children, considered incapable of complex aesthetic responses, Pullman is aware of the genre's crossover appeal. Sandra Beckett asserts that 'in the minds of many, crossover literature is synonymous with fantasy' (2009: 135); Melvin Burgess, that 'fantasy shelves are the only part of [...a] bookshop which is browsed freely by kids, teenagers, adults' (Rees 2003); Farah Mendlesohn, that

readers of fantasy are ‘notoriously uninterested in the adult-child divide’ (2005: xiii); and, Ursula Le Guin, that fantasy is ‘the great age-equalizer (1979: 55).

Fantasy is a category of imaginative fiction involving fantastic stories, often in a magical pseudo-historical setting, offering liberation from the constraints of what is known. *His Dark Materials* also displays what Karen Patricia Smith (2005: 136) argues are the five key conventions of high fantasy – a subgenre of fantasy fiction, which is serious in tone and epic in scope, concerning a battle between good and evil (Martin 2002: 34): young protagonists, whose significant life missions are addressed through crucial, other-worldly adventures; invented worlds, with either well-defined boundaries or more abstract configurations; hazardous events, which have life-altering consequences; adult guides, who offer information and assistance; and, a return to a primary world, with new knowledge and experience. Consequently, *His Dark Materials* is often read (Hatlan 2005; Marr 2002; Wood 2001) in relation to works of high fantasy, particularly C S Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Apart from the many shared characteristics that can be explained by the fact that both authors write within the conventions of high fantasy, Naomi Wood also draws attention to Pullman’s ‘deliberate rewriting of crucial moments and characters’ (2001: 238-39) from Lewis’ fiction. Both *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* begin with children – Lyra and Lucy – hiding in wardrobes, children who find themselves responsible for the destiny of the world, who are tempted and betrayed by beautiful, but treacherous, women wearing furs – Mrs Coulter and the

White Witch – and whose special relationships with powerful beasts – Iorek and Aslan – play significant roles in their salvation.

According to Burton Hatlan (2005: 82), aside from the numerous similarities between the works of both writers that exist in terms of tropes and images, the rewriting of such moments and characters from *The Chronicles of Narnia* is a mark of Pullman's desire 'to create a new kind of fantasy, a secular humanist fantasy' by 'assertively, even aggressively', challenging Lewis' text – despite the suggestion in Hatlan's claim that a secular humanist fantasy would be a new kind of fantasy, the discourse of late-twentieth-century fantasy has 'characteristically' embodied 'humanist ideologies' (Stephens 1992: 243). Nevertheless, Hatlan contends that rather than simply rejecting Lewis as a model worth emulating, Pullman, through *His Dark Materials*, offers a kind of 'inverted homage to his predecessor, deliberately composing a kind of "anti-Narnia", a secular humanist alternative to Lewis' Christian fantasy' (2005: 76). However, while the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with building a republic of heaven is antithetical to the Christianity of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, what is questionable is the extent to which Pullman is deliberately interested in rewriting Lewis' text to create a new kind of fantasy.

To begin with, Pullman contends that it is only 'hasty critics', who read *His Dark Materials* without 'enough attention', who suggest that it is similar to *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2000, August). To take one particular example, he claims that it is Lyra's hiding rather than the fact that her adventures begin in a wardrobe that is

important in his text (2004: 22-27). Although there are echoes of characters and events from *The Chronicles of Narnia* in *His Dark Materials*, he suggests that this intertextuality is, in fact, slight and infrequent. Furthermore, regardless of Pullman's disparagement of Lewis' narrative technique, which he has also described as 'superficial' and 'bustling' (1998, October), in most articles, interviews and speeches, it is the ideology that supports Lewis' text that is the particular focus of his criticism. In fact, he claims that he 'passionately disagrees' (2003, March) with Lewis' Christian worldview.

Pullman has described Lewis as a 'dangerous' (de Bertadano 2002) writer and *The Chronicles of Narnia* as 'one of the most ugly and poisonous things' (1998: 6-7) he has ever read. His reaction to one of the final scenes of the entire series, from *The Last Battle* (1956), emphasises his aversion to the Christian ideology behind Lewis' writing. In the scene, Aslan reveals to the children Edmund, Peter and Lucy that they are all dead, killed in a railway accident, and have thereby entered the Kingdom of Heaven from the Shadowlands. According to Pullman, rather than allowing them to return to the 'real' world to be reunited with their families, Lewis' Christianity deems the Kingdom of Heaven a more truthful or appropriate home for the protagonists of his story. For Pullman, the ideology that informs this episode is 'detestable' because it implies that 'this world, this physical universe [...] is] a fallen state created by God but marked and weakened and spoiled by sin' (2002, March). His real difficulty with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, therefore, is that he reads the text as the work of a Christian apologist or, in his words, as 'propaganda in the service of

a life-hating ideology' (1998, October). For him, this ideology demeans human existence by willingly subordinating knowledge to innocence as an ontological imperative.

While Pullman's text does offer a challenge to the ideology that supports *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Hatlan's contention that he was deliberately attempting to compose a kind of 'anti-Narnia' is overstated. Although Pullman claims the 'profoundly world-hating emotion' in Lewis' writing is 'repulsive' (2003, March), what he specifically identifies as abhorrent in *The Chronicles of Narnia* is the Christian ideology that informs the text, and it is this, rather than Lewis' text itself, that he is primarily interested in discrediting in and through *His Dark Materials*. That the secular humanism of *His Dark Materials* should offer a challenge to the Christianity of *The Chronicles of Narnia* is the inevitable consequence of Pullman and Lewis' polarized worldviews – as Eugene Woodbury (2009) contends, the fact that they created not parallel but alternative worlds is the reason why readers' views of both are dichotomous. More significantly, however, according to Pullman, is the fact that he claims to be uninterested in writing fantasy or developing it as a genre: the fantasy, he argues, is 'there to support and embody [...] not for its own sake' (1998, December). This claim supports Lisa Hopkins' (2005: 55) contention that, while *His Dark Materials* may appear to be primarily interested in fantasy, it shows its hand in this too early for readers to have any sense that Pullman's relationship with the genre is going to provide the text with its ultimate narrative telos.

Pullman works, therefore, within a pre-existent literary tradition for radically different purposes than simply mastering or reinventing the genre. He employs fantasy as the medium through which to forward his republican agenda with questioning the authority of the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall in Western culture and the reification of innocence as an idealized ontology because he recognizes the revolutionary potential of the genre. His knowledge of this potential is implicit in his admission that he ‘realised slightly to [...his] consternation that it [*His Dark Materials*] was going to have to be a fantasy’ (2003, March). In fact, he showed his perspicacious understanding of fantasy as a genre when he claimed that he did not like to be called a fantasy writer because fantasy in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries was a disappointment: he argued that, while fantasy ‘has unlimited potential to explore all sorts of metaphysical and moral questions’, because it is such a versatile mode, it is not being used by writers as a medium for ‘ideas’ (Chrisafis 2002).

Implicit in Pullman’s critique of contemporary fantasy is his understanding that, although fantasy is sometimes commonly misunderstood as being significantly detached from reality, it has the potential to be the ‘most philosophical, the most ideological, the most political of forms of writing [...and] it is from fantasy that [...] people may most readily, in the long term, absorb ideas about how the world [...might] be’ (Leeson 1984: 5). The ‘metaphoric’ discourse mode of fantasy is allegorical (Stephens 1992: 7); it is a genre that ‘exists in a symbiotic relationship with reality and its conventional representation, depending on it for its existence but

at the same time commenting upon it, criticizing it and illuminating it' (Zanger 1982: 277). Therefore, the assertion that Pullman made on the *South Bank Show*, that the text had to be a fantasy, is evidence that he understands the genre enough for him to recognize that it was the appropriate medium through which to forward his own republican agenda – a potentially revolutionary genre for an intentionally revolutionary text.

According to Pullman (2000, August), though he uses 'the mechanism of fantasy', the focus of *His Dark Materials* is on a 'realistic subject' – that he is 'trying to [...] tell a story about what it means to [...] become adult'. This statement is also consistent with the more contentiously worded claim he made to Wendy Parsons and Catriona Nicholson (1999: 116), when he argued that *His Dark Materials* 'is not a fantasy [...] but] a work of stark realism'. While it is a strange term, 'stark realism' captures the fact that, in its truest form, fantasy strives to achieve a version of the Romantic, Coleridgean ambition of harmonizing the relationship between subject and object – as detailed in *Biographia Literaria* (2001: 191-206). In the best fantasy writing, this involves bringing together the real world of the subject and the ideal world of the object through the faculty of the imagination. The fact that the imagination encourages an unconstrained appreciation of the complexity and wonder of the world, and possible worlds, is highlighted emphatically in *His Dark Materials* itself.

As Lyra and Will are about to return to their separate worlds, the angel Xaphania tells them that the way to travel between worlds is to use ‘the faculty of [...] imagination. But that does not mean *making things up*. It is a form of seeing...No...nothing like pretend. Pretending is easy. This way is hard, but much truer’ (AS: 494). Like the Romantics, Pullman depicts the capacity for intellectual openness as being accessed by the imagination. In *Galatea*, where he first developed a general literary theory of the imagination, he suggests not only that ‘the subtle powerful strength of the imagination is that it deals directly with the real world’ (1978: 160) but also that ‘the stronger the imagination, the closer to the reality are the forms it imagines’ (1978: 44; 111). In the novel, Pullman explores – through the protagonist Martin Browning – the idea that we are connected to reality, even to the reality of our human nature, through the imagination: that we must imagine ourselves and our world into reality. Therefore, Xaphania’s claim that the imagination facilitates travel between worlds is significant, as it applies not just to the protagonists of *His Dark Materials* but also to the reader, who must make journeys between the worlds of Pullman’s fantasy and their own ‘real’ one in the act of reading.

When one considers the philosophical concern of *His Dark Materials* with the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience, the phrase ‘stark realism’ refers to those aspects of the text that correspond closely to a ‘metonymic’ (Stephens 1992: 7) discourse mode that concerns itself with the conditions of childhood and adolescence; that asks readers to embrace the possibilities growing up

offers; that values and celebrates the power of the imagination and encourages readers to break free from mental and social limitations imposed by the self and society; that emphasizes, positively, transformation and the need for change, particularly in relation to the growth of the body and the mind – including sexual desire; that requires readers accept the improbable by mirroring the mental adjustments young people make as they undergo new experiences and encounter new ideas; that offers reassurance that the transition to maturity does not herald the end of all innocence or necessitate the loss of imagination; and, that calls for changes in the power dynamics in relationships between children and adults – these are examined in greater detail in Chapter Three, ‘*His Dark Materials* and Romantic Constructions of Childhood’.

While Pullman believes that the text had to be a fantasy, Naomi Wood argues that the form of *His Dark Materials*, ironically, undercuts the very basis of the text itself, which argues for the here-and-now rather than imagined utopias. Wood contends that the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with building a secular humanist republic of heaven in the ‘real’ world suggests that we should read and write realism alone, based on the possibilities inherent in what we are; it does no good to escape to wonderful imaginary places filled with satisfactions we can only yearn for but never experience; and, if we are to create a democracy, we have no business naturalizing hierarchies or imagining children of destiny. However, fantasy’s interdependent relationship with reality challenges Wood’s argument:

Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context [...] The forms taken by any particular fantastic text are determined by a number of forces which intersect and interact in different ways in each individual work. Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to the literary tradition of fantasy, and makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously 'outside' time altogether (Jackson 1981: 3).

Pullman's insistence that *His Dark Materials* is a work of stark realism is intrinsically linked not only to his awareness of the revolutionary potential of fantasy as a genre but also to the fact that it actively promotes comparison between the written and the real, as he argued in an article entitled 'The Republic of Heaven':

If the republic [of heaven] doesn't include fantasy, it won't be worth living in. It won't be a Heaven of any sort. But inclusiveness is the whole point: the fantasy and the realism must connect [...] Part of the connection a republican story has to have with our lives [...] is psychological (2001c: 661-62).

In 'Miss Goddard's Grave', a lecture he gave at the University of East Anglia, Pullman claimed that he valued 'true' stories above all others – those stories that tell of the human condition and show the reader 'human beings acting in recognisably

human ways' (2005b). In particular, he asserted that 'the stories we call the greatest are great because they are most like life, and the ones we think not so good are correspondingly less so'; the characters in the former are 'rich and complex and unpredictable, like real people', while those in the latter are 'stereotypical' and 'two-dimensional' (2005b). In 'true' stories, therefore, the fantasy and the realism connect: these stories encourage the reader into imaginative human experiences that highlight the complex and unpredictable nature of humanity. Furthermore, while he is aware that some strands of contemporary cultural theory would suggest that 'truth is provisional' and that 'there is no such thing as human nature', because 'meanings shift and are contingent', he claims that the centrality of story in human existence proves that 'there are some truths that endure long enough to be as good as permanent, and that human nature is certainly constant enough to be worth talking about' (2005b).

Pullman's interest in 'true' stories, but also his Romantic awareness of the power of these kinds of stories to bring about personal or societal transformation, is illustrated in *The Tiger in the Well*. The novel's protagonist holds back a rioting crowd by telling them stories that represent and reflect their lives:

What a lucky bugger I am, he said to himself.

Talk for your life, Danny Boy. Tell'em a story.

‘I need a chair’, he said loudly...They didn’t know what to make of it, but in the face of his brazen confidence they felt their anger tremble a little, uncertainly (1991: 347-48).

Goldberg stills the crowd by identifying the many stories of oppression that lie behind each individual’s discontent: he ‘knew that the people are hungry to have their own experience voiced; he was saying all this for them’ (1991: 349). Such is the nature of the storytelling of Lyra in *His Dark Materials*, where the effects of storytelling become not just liberating but also salvific.

When Lyra is first introduced to the reader in *Northern Lights*, she is depicted as a child with a natural aptitude for deception and storytelling, for which she eventually earns the name ‘Silvertongue’ (348): she pretends that she knows all about the General Oblation Board when talking with Lord Boreal – a minor character in *Northern Lights*, but an antagonist in *The Subtle Knife* (NL: 94-97); she lies about her name in Bolvangar, the Church-sponsored science station, when she is captured by the Gobblers (NL: 236-40); and, she tricks the armoured-bear Iofur Raknison into believing that she is Iorek Byrnison’s dæmon (NL: 340-43). In the chapter entitled ‘No Way Out’ (321-48), in *The Amber Spyglass*, however, Lyra’s emancipation of the dead from the underworld involves her narration of simple, but truthful, stories of her life to the harpies – vulture-sized birds with women’s heads and breasts that have been in the Land of the Dead ever since the first ghosts arrived. The harpies, who have the ability to see the worst in everyone, breed an atmosphere of fear,

repulsion and hatefulness by psychologically torturing the ghosts of the dead, because they have been deprived of 'real' experiences themselves.

In the evocative passage where Lyra recounts to the harpies the great battle between the Oxford townies and the clay-burners, the text exploits the sensuous nature of existence, of being fully alive, by assaulting the reader's senses with an oxymoronic blend of sights, sounds, smells and tastes, in Lyra's deceptively simple description of the Oxford landscape:

The smells around the place: the smoke from the kilns, rotten-leaf-mould smell of the river when the wind was in the south-west, the warm smell of the baking potatoes the clay-burners used to eat; and the sound of the water slipping slickly over the sluices' (*AS*: 330).

Although these 'true' stories – based on her material experience rather than preposterous romancing disconnected from reality – nourish the ghosts and the harpies, who are calmed by her storytelling, they also enable Lyra to come to the realisation that the richness of her 'real' life is more important than any she can imagine. Lyra's epiphany, that the 'truth is more compelling than lies' (Frost 2007: 277), however, is not a critique of the fictional nature of imaginative literature like fantasy, but an indication by Pullman as to how he wishes Lyra and, indeed, all of his other characters to be perceived: that is, as fictional representations of what it might mean to be human.

Pullman is aware that ‘truthfulness in a novel is never simply a question of reporting facts or realities [...] Telling the truth in a story requires *fiction*’ (Rayment-Pickard 2004: 27) – a kind of make-believe or lying or fantasy. Nonetheless, for Pullman, fiction will only ‘satisfy us and feed us and nourish us’ if it has a ‘substratum of genuine truth’ in it (Lenz 2001: 151). Lyra is the primary example of this need for truth in *His Dark Materials*. While she is adept at fabricating stories in *Northern Lights*, by the time her journey ends in *The Amber Spyglass*, she has learned that telling the truth is a moral imperative: ‘I can’t do it anymore – I can’t do it! I can’t tell lies! I thought it was so easy – but it didn’t work – it’s all I can do, and it doesn’t work!’ (309). Lyra satisfies the harpies in the end not with the ‘lies and fantasies’ of a falsely constructed grand narrative of her life but with the ‘true story’ of her life (AS: 332, 542). According to the harpy No-Name Lyra’s story resonates with them because ‘it was true [...] Because she spoke the truth. Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us. Because we couldn’t help it. Because it was true. [...] Because it brought us news of the world’ (AS: 332-33).

Whatever his proclivity for the phrase ‘stark realism’, *His Dark Materials* is the evidence that Pullman has reached the conclusion that ‘truth’ can be communicated effectively through fantasy. However, by stressing the realistic dimensions of his fantasy, he develops the thematic and philosophical concerns of his text not only through characterization, events and social practices but also through allegory – thereby utilizing effectively the metonymic discourse mode of realism and the metaphoric discourse mode of fantasy to bridge the gap between fantasy and

realism: ‘the single most important generic distinction in children’s fiction’ (Stephens 1992: 7). In challenging the legitimacy of Christian authority and the nature and place of the individual, but particularly the child, in society, Pullman harnesses the power of story to effect change through the creative influences and imaginative potential of literature. His decision to present his revolutionary and republican agenda in the form he does is intrinsically linked to his awareness of the subversive power of children’s fantasy literature. By utilizing established literary modes of expression for his own purpose, he attempts to promote his secular humanism to as wide a readership as possible.

The next chapter examines the challenge *His Dark Materials* offers to Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism through its thematic concern with building a secular humanist republic of heaven. The fact that Pullman’s retelling of the myth of ‘*Paradise Lost* [...] in 1200 pages’ (Nelson 2005) takes the form of a children’s fantasy highlights that the mythological and the fantastical, craftsmanship and story, need not be antithetical. As Micheal Chabon argues, ‘any list of [...] works of epic fantasy must begin with *Paradise Lost*, with its dark lord, cursed tree, invented cosmology and ringing battle scenes, its armoured angelic cavalries shattered by demonic engines of war’ (2005: 2).

Chapter Two: *His Dark Materials*, *Paradise Lost* and Romantic Iconoclasm

This chapter examines the critique of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism in *His Dark Materials*, in light of Pullman's attempt to rewrite the Miltonic myth of *Paradise Lost* in a tradition of Romantic-Gnostic heresy. Consequently, it argues that the characterization of disobedience to Christian authority in *His Dark Materials* is influenced greatly by *Paradise Lost*; that, Pullman, like Shelley, believes in the necessity of atheism; that, the Authority of *His Dark Material* is a Blakean revision of the Old Testament God of Christianity as a demiurge; that, the text's philosophy of Dust is a secularized revision of the Gnostic concepts of *pneuma* and *gnosis* and Wordsworthian Pantheism; and, that its portrayal of the ecclesiastical clerics of the Magisterium shares similarities with the anticlericalism evident in some of the writings of Rousseau, Paine and Shelley. Before this chapter explores these issues it addresses *Paradise Lost* and its influence on a selection of Romantic writings; the iconoclastic Gnosticism of Blake's *The Book of Urizen* (1794) and Wordsworthian Pantheism; and, the anticlericalism evident in the Romantic writings of Rousseau, Paine and Shelley. This section informs the analysis, in the subsequent sections of the chapter, of *His Dark Materials* and its relationship to *Paradise Lost* and a selection of Romantic texts. While the discussion of *Paradise Lost* that follows is the longest of its kind in the dissertation, it is justified because *His Dark Materials* is, according to Pullman, a rewriting of the Miltonic myth.

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Heresy and Anti-Clericalism in Romantic Writings

In *Paradise Lost*, Milton elaborates on the biblical story of the Fall as described in the Old Testament Book of Genesis, in pursuit of his great, and somewhat conceited, ambition to 'justify the wayes of God to men' (I. 26). According to Robert Davis (2007: 123), in so doing, Milton lends authoritative imaginative form to the classical Christian architecture of Fall and Redemption, in which a prelapsarian condition of human innocence and harmony, corrupted by a fallout from a still more primeval angelic insurrection against the sovereignty of God, degenerates into temptation, disobedience, exile and death. Like any myth of origins, the biblical story of the Fall encodes many of the basic assumptions of the culture in which it was created: in this case, ideas regarding the relationship of human beings to the cosmos and its supposed creator, as well as their relationship to one another. Although there is also a strong sense in which *Paradise Lost* reflects the tensions within Western culture at the moment of its creation in the late seventeenth century, and, in particular, Milton's attempt to understand the moral issues raised by the Restoration (c. 1660), what unites *Paradise Lost* with his other great poems – 'Lycidas' (1638), *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671) – are the themes of temptation and disobedience.

While prior to the mid-1640s Milton can be seen to align himself politically – rather than doctrinally – with the Calvinists, his heretical progression from the late 1640s to the early 1660s 'begins in anticlericalism', moves to an Arminian tolerationist

stance that ‘shuns the use of civil power in matters of conscience’, before ending in an expressly ‘Arian endorsement of antitrinitarian tenets’ (Rumrich 1998: 150). Composed between 1658 and 1663, a period of great political turmoil and transition, during which he both vigorously opposed the oncoming Restoration and lamented its inevitable realization, Milton’s epic spiritual poem connects his politics to his religious convictions in ways that are sharply polemical.

The metaphysical conflicts embodied in *Paradise Lost* reflect Milton’s ‘steadfast hatred of tyranny and characteristic espousal of individual freedom and authority’ (Rumrich 1996: 11). Regardless of the fact that many seventeenth-century readers suspected *Paradise Lost* of harbouring both Milton’s Arian beliefs and his republican sympathies, it was generally held, as Symmons put it in 1806, that his theological opinions were ‘orthodox and consistent with the creed of the Church of England’ (414). For a century after its author’s death, most readers of *Paradise Lost* seem to have accepted Milton’s poem as being grounded in orthodox Christian doctrine – not least of all because of the biographical assumption that his apparent belief in and respect for Christianity was related to ‘the moral and intellectual integrity’ that was held to be such ‘a prominent feature of [...his] own character’ (Campbell 1995: xlvi). However, by the time his writings came to be read by writers of the Romantic period ‘orthodox’ readings of *Paradise Lost* were already being challenged.

Despite the fact that 'orthodox' readings of Milton's epic poem were to remain popular in the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, many writers of the Romantic period were influenced by what they saw as the heretical dimensions of his work. In particular, Romantic writers argued that the author of *Paradise Lost* was a radical who was much more engaged with the social and intellectual possibilities that opened up in the seventeenth century than proponents of a conformist Milton would have had readers believe. In 1762, David Hume, in his *History of England*, claimed that the 'greatest genius' of the age had not only engaged with 'fanatics' but also 'prostituted his pen in theological controversy' (Shawcross 1972: 237). Convinced at the importance of *Paradise Lost* as a great epic poem, many writers of the period believed that Milton's imagination transcended his Christian beliefs. Romantic poets, especially, came to see Milton as an unknowing iconoclast or, in the words of Blake, 'a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it' (1982: 35).

Blake, in particular, considered Milton's God as an unjust and arbitrary tyrant and deemed Satan the true hero of *Paradise Lost* – a gallant rebel, fighting a cause he knows to be doomed but still proclaiming it just. For Blake, the fact that God is so distant from humanity in *Paradise Lost*, while Satan is a being of such magnificent vitality, meant that Milton, in spite of his consciously different purpose, glorified the Apostate Angel. Therefore, although Blake regarded Milton as the greatest and most inspired artist in England, he also believed he had gone astray: misled by his

classical learning, his puritanical religious beliefs, and his commitment to a rational philosophy.

More controversially, Shelley argued that from the evidence of *Paradise Lost*, Milton might not actually have been a Christian at all, but merely conforming under the extreme pressures of the time, his poem containing 'within itself a philosophical refutation of that system of which [...] it has been a chief support' (2007: 62). In fact, in *Queen Mab*, Shelley speculates how, when the ridiculousness of the 'miserable tale of the Devil, and Eve, and the Intercessor' perishes with the age that gave it sustenance, 'Milton's poem alone will give permanency to the remembrance of its absurdities' (Wittreich 1970: 529), while in his 'On the Devil, and Devils' (c. 1819), and, again, in *A Defence of Poetry*, he credits Milton with fleshing out the absurdities of the Christian tradition of the Devil by creating a Satan who exudes grandeur and energy:

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments (2007:63).

While Milton's Satan fascinated Romantic writers in numerous ways, one characteristic that interested them particularly was the Apostate Angel's republican disobedience. Milton daringly begins *Paradise Lost* in hell with Satan's 'bold words' assaulting the 'tyranny of heaven' (I. 82, 124). Unrepentant in defeat, the Fallen Angel is depicted not only as a courageous military leader, rousing rebel angels from their abject state but also as a skilful politician, a master of verbal and political ambiguousness. Satan's address to his comrades in the aftermath of their eviction from Heaven exemplifies his republican convictions:

That Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deifie his power
Who from the terrour of this Arm so late
Doubted his Empire, [...]
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the Tyranny of Heav'n (I. 110-114, 123-124).

Godwin wrote, in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, that Satan's rebellion occurred because 'he saw no sufficient reason for that extreme inequality of rank and power which the creator assumed [...] because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith' (1798: 323-24). However, for many writers of the period, the tremendous figure of Satan came to represent not just the untamed and passionate will of the individual in revolt against a God who was more the

Abstract Reason or First Cause of philosophy than the personal Deity of the Hebrews but also a magnificent poetical achievement. According to Coleridge, Milton had thrown around Satan 'a singularity of daring, a grandeur of suffering and a ruined splendour, which constitute the very height of poetic sublimity' (Wittreich 1970: 244). Consequently, many Romantic writers not only attempted to define their own creative identities through their allusions to Milton's writing but also rewrote *Paradise Lost* for their own time and circumstances.

In rewriting *Paradise Lost* for their own age, many writers of the period were keen to recast Satan in a leading role. However, although there was a tendency to glamorise the Apostate Angel among Romantic writers, the common notion that the poets of the period celebrated wholeheartedly the satanic energies and republican disobedience of Milton's adversary is not accurate. While Blake, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, represents Satan as energy opposing all repressive codes – philosophical, religious, and sexual – he also rewrites the story of the fall of Satan in a complex style in *Milton*, where he clearly depicts Satan's error as assuming activities that are not rightly his. Coleridge, too, held such a contention: he argued that Milton had 'carefully marked in his Satan the intense selfishness, the alcohol of egotism, which would rather reign in Hell than serve in Heaven' (Wittreich 1970: 244).

Shelley, who was also not entirely satisfied with the heroism of Milton's Satan, preferred a figure who would rather suffer than inflict misery upon others, even in

revenge. He found the character of Prometheus, who combines the power, energy and grandeur of Satan with the benevolence and suffering of Christ more amenable to his tastes. In his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, he comments that

the only imaginary being resembling in any degree Prometheus, is Satan; and Prometheus is [...] a more poetical character than Satan, because, in addition to courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force, he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement, which, in the Hero of *Paradise Lost*, interfere with the interest [...] Prometheus, is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends (2003: 229-30).

Despite being attracted to his indomitable will, Satan came, for many Romantic writers, to symbolise the power of a mind cut off from human sympathy and finding in its own desires the supreme motive for action. Consequently, some of these writers re-imagined the abstraction of Satan in terms of Romantic and Gothic hero-villains. From Wordsworth's Rivers in *The Borderers* through Ann Radcliffe's Schedoni in *The Italian* (1797), these hero-villains are Satanic figures who commit great crimes to justify intense egotism: alienated individuals whose sense of self becomes their only moral reference point.

One of the most obvious incarnations of Milton's Satan in Romantic writing is the Byronic hero – a figure who recurs throughout Byron's poetic works, including *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1816), *The Giaour* (1813), *The Bride of Abydos* (1813), *The Corsair* (1814), *Lara* (1814), *The Siege of Corinth* (1816), *Manfred* (1817), *Cain: A Mystery* (1821), and *Don Juan*. Harold Bloom's (1986: 2-10) assessment of the Byronic hero as an untrammelled egotist, whose tempestuous life involves the ruthless quest for power and knowledge, as well as a refutation of the boundaries of the self and the limitations of the finite, offers a fitting depiction of Byron's eponymous dramatic hero-villain Manfred. Manfred presents readers with a tormented figure who rejects all aid and solace, human or otherwise, and expires declaiming lines highly allusive to the soliloquies of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, where the Fallen Angel asserts that 'The mind is its own place, and in it self | Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n' (l. 254-525):

I bear within
A torture which could nothing gain from thine.
The mind which is immortal makes itself
Requital for its good or evil thoughts,
Its own origin of ill and end,
And its own place and time (1817: III. iv. 132-137).

What writers of the Romantic period found in the character of Satan was a presentation on the origin of evil that resonated with their moral and political

concerns in the aftermath of the disappointing degeneration of the French Revolution. According to Lucy Newlyn, 'Satan provided the focus for what turned out to be the sequence of psychological studies in motivation' (2001: 97) in the characters of Falkland, Rivers, Frankenstein, Cain, and Manfred. She also claims that these studies raised for the writers of the Romantic period the same question asked by Milton in *Paradise Lost*: 'if the miscarriage of revolutionary ideals lies in the transition from good to bad motivation, who is [...] to be held responsible – the individuals who wield [...] power, the circumstances which act upon their characters, or the divinity which shapes their end?' (2001: 97).

While the sympathy held by Romantic writers for Satan was problematic, he was not the object of Milton's admiration or sympathy either. There is scarcely a great speech of Satan's that he does not in some way correct, damp down or neutralize with deflating comment. In effect, he deliberately forces his readers to re-examine their opinions of, and responses to, Satan – particularly at the times when the inherently illogical philosophies behind his rhetoric are most insidiously hidden. The narrator, therefore, acts as a device enabling Milton to rebuke readers captivated by the Father of Lies.

In its totality, *Paradise Lost* presents its readers with a character in whom Milton brilliantly depicts the horrible co-existence of subtle and incessant intellectual activity with the incapacity to really understand oneself or one's situation. *Paradise Lost* charts Satan's attempt to maintain the heresy that is at the root of his whole

predicament: the doctrine that he is a self-existent, rather than a derived, being – a creature. In an expression of unbridled individualism, Satan contends that he and his legions are ‘self-begot, self-rai’d’ (V. 856). His monomaniacal concern with himself, and his supposed rights and wrongs, defines the Satanic predicament: he has wished to be himself, in himself, and for himself – and his wish has been granted.

What Milton makes clear, however, is that no one has done anything to Satan: he only thinks himself impaired. Satan’s revolt is tangled in inconsistencies from the outset, and he cannot even raise the banner of freedom and equality without admitting in telltale parenthesis that ‘Order and degrees | Jarr not with liberty’ (V. 789-790) – he wants hierarchy and does not want hierarchy. To extend the argument made by C S Lewis (1961: 102), to admire Satan is to admire a world of misery: a world of lies and propaganda, of wastefully wishful thinking, of incessant autobiography – yet the choice is possible. In the end, it is Satan himself who destroys his own myth as a great tragic figure – he becomes more a lie than a liar: a personified self-contradiction.

While Milton’s republicanism is inseparable from *Paradise Lost* (Hadfield 2008: 60-61), it is also problematic. His own republicanism was limited by numerous ‘boundaries’: from an ideology about Ireland that ‘reveals the depth of Milton’s English nationalism, [and] his long-standing justification of hegemony in the cause of Protestant reform’ (Fenton 2006: 67), to his belief in the legitimacy of the monarchy of God (Loewenstein 2001: 230). However, in *Paradise Lost* his

detestation of monarchy manifests itself in his depiction of Satan rather than God. In the poem, God's kingship is unlike any other kind of kingship – including 'an earthly Stuart monarchy' (Loewenstein 2001: 230). This is emphasised explicitly by the Seraphim Abdiel in his rebuke of Satan, who attempts to depict God as a tyrant:

Yet by experience taught we know how good,
And of our good, and of our dignitie
How provident he is, how farr from thought
To make us less, bent rather to exalt
Our happie state under one Head more neer
United (V. 823-828).

In fact, as early as Book IV, Satan himself admits that God's monarchy is no state of tyranny and arbitrary power:

His good
Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.
What could be less then to afford him praise,
The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,
How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,
And wrought but malice (44-49).

Ironically, it is Satan, whom the reader finds ensconced ‘High on Throne of Royal State’ (1) at the beginning of Book II, who is depicted as a conservative royalist. In political language, marked by inconsistency, he both appeals to ‘the fixt Laws of Heav’n’, which made him leader of the fallen angels, and urges his princes and potentates to ‘return | To claim [...] their] just inheritance of old’ (II. 18, 37-38). These are hardly the words of a rebellious political radical – a ‘Deliver from new Lords’ (VI. 451) – renouncing the old social and political order. At the moments when Satan asserts his imperial ambitions, Milton unmask him as the ‘Artificer of fraud’, exposing the ‘counterfet’ Satan as ‘the first | That practis’d falsehood under saintly shew, | Deep malice to conceale’ (IV. 121, 117, 121-123).

Newlyn contends that in the face of the text’s multiple indeterminacies, it is too ‘simplistic [...] to argue either that Milton made Satan heroic by aligning him with republican ideals or that he wished to “frame” republicanism by making Satan its mouthpiece’ (2001: 97). In fact, Blair Worden suggests that Milton has ‘taken [...] pains both to implant his republicanism in *Paradise Lost* and to expose the falsity of Satan’s application of it’ (1993: 246) due to the Fallen Angel’s propensity towards usurpation and tyranny: though Satan has wished to ‘seem [...] a Patron of liberty’ (IV. 957-959), his ‘high words [...] have] Semblance of worth, not substance’ (I. 528-529).

If Milton can be seen to locate republican hopes, more so than ideals, anywhere within *Paradise Lost*, it is in his portrayal of Adam and Eve. In a sense, the story of

the Fall in Book IX can be read as intimating that humanity was actually freed by the transgression of our mythological parents: Adam and Eve exercise their faculty of reason, and their free will, in the Fall, and, in losing their innocence, *realise* their capacity to be fully human. This is made all the more triumphant by the fact that it is suggested in *Paradise Lost* that Eden is not the paradise it might seem to be: not only is Satan, the enemy of humankind, permitted to move freely within its confines but the happiness of Adam and Eve is also imperfect there. As Eve cautions Adam in Book XIII,

If this be our condition, thus to dwell
In narrow circuit strait'nd by a Foe,
Suttle or violent, we not endu'd
Single with like defence, wherever met,
How are we happie, still in fear of harm? [...]
Let us not then suspect our happie State
Left so imperfet by the Maker wise,
As not secure to single or combin'd.
Fraile is our happiness, if this be so,
And EDEN were no EDEN thus expos'd (322-326, 337-341).

While Eve, in particular, comes to realise the negative aspects of the Fall, in both in her ability to hurt God and her selfishness in resolving to bring Adam with her, she, more so than Adam, also senses the opportunity the Fall presents for transcending

the limitations of their prelapsarian state. This is the moment when Eve decides to act out of 'disobedience' (Wood 2001: 237) and realise her potential as a human. With Adam's decision to join Eve in the tasting of the fruit, out of the vehemence of love he possesses for her, the couple awaken into human potentiality. *Paradise Lost* can be read as ending on a moment of hope and possibility: Adam and Eve's leaving of Eden secures for them a wealth of opportunity and a sense of freedom that they might not otherwise have had – the Fall was the result of choice, and their leaving of the Garden seems to promise an eternity of making choices. At the end of *Paradise Lost*, there appears to be a preference for 'the adventure of *gnosis* [...] to the uniform bliss of Eden' (Nuttall 1998: 188). After Adam and Eve are escorted from the Garden and are situated outside its gate of 'dreadful Faces throng'd and fierie Armes' (X. 1535), Milton subtly employs the word 'Eden' to signify not the Garden but the surrounding countryside, as if to emphasise the freedom that is bestowed upon the human partners with the Fall:

Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through EDEN took thir solitarie way (X. 1536-1540).

It was Milton's 'republicanism' that drew him into sympathy, consciously or unconsciously, with Eve's bid for power. Satan's criticism of God is similar in kind

to Eve's, because 'God repeats His practice of arbitrary subjection [...] by constructing a human hierarchy, in which woman is placed below man' (Newlyn 2001: 153). In effect, Milton gives Eve the same ambitious potential but a more legitimate cause for grievance than Satan. However, as with his characterization of Satan, any sense of Milton's republican values – which manifest themselves in his espousal of individual freedom – in his depiction of Adam and Eve must be tempered by the fact that their leaving of the Garden is preceded by the Archangel Michael's tale regarding the future of humankind.

The Archangel's tale, which tells of the Tower of Babel, Abraham, the Tribes of Israel, Moses, and Jesus Christ, indicates that human history is predetermined. Therefore, no matter where Adam and Eve choose to live, history, including their own, will proceed along a predestined route. However, Worden (1993: 241) argues that it is Milton's Arminianism – the poet's certainty that human salvation rests upon the free and rational exercise of choice – which prevents both the text from subscribing to Calvinist predestination theology and God from being depicted as the author of sin. Nonetheless, it is difficult to leave *Paradise Lost* without feeling that Milton's poem represents its author's struggle, to harmonize his religious and political ideologies – to reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable: his commitment to earthly republicanism and his belief in the legitimacy of the monarchy of God. As Newlyn argues, readings of *Paradise Lost* that stress 'the fortunate fall' do not represent 'a misreading' but 'a careful amplification of the ambiguities that Milton himself presents' (2001: 155).

Romantic writers responded to Milton's depiction of Eve in different ways. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), Wollstonecraft uses Milton's portrayal to demonstrate all that is harmful and limiting in male preconceptions of the 'feminine' (Newlyn 2001: 153):

For contemplation hee and valour formd,
For softness shee and sweet attractive Grace,
Hee for God only, shee for God in him (*Paradise Lost*: IV. 297-299).

Conversely, however, influenced by their readings of *Paradise Lost*, Blake's *The Book of Thel* and Coleridge's *Christabel* (1797-1800) employ female consciousness and sexuality to explore the potential of the human mind for liberation. Although there was a distrust of the world of the imagination, as well as female creative activity, in the works of some early-eighteenth-century male poets (Fairer 1984: 82-112), certain strains of Romanticism turned this mistrust to revisionary ends and placed female consciousness at the centre of the programme for humanity's emancipation (Newlyn 2001: 165). While Coleridge parallels Milton to a greater extent – by making his heroine an ambiguous figure – both he and Blake explore sexuality in terms of the dialectic between innocence and experience. In particular, both *Thel* and *Christabel* offer contrasting perspectives on innocence: *Thel* refuses the humanity that Experience would give her, while *Christabel* moves out of stasis, into a higher, though more painful, consciousness. However, regardless of their contrasting perspectives, both Blake and Coleridge, according to Lucy Newlyn

(2001: 166), suggest qualified preferences for the 'fallen' over the 'unfallen' state on their respective poems.

Milton's 'ambiguous and flexible' poetic language was powerful enough to 'erode orthodoxies' and establish a pro-feminist sympathy in *Paradise Lost*, which influenced a male line of pro-feminist writing in Romantic poets such as 'Blake, Coleridge, Keats, and even Byron' (Newlyn 2001: 154-57). While there are inconsistencies in Milton's presentation of Eve, for eighteenth-century readers, *Paradise Lost* was 'a forging ground for their own ideal of educated and responsible womanhood' and Milton an ally in 'rising up against the patriarchal tradition of scripture' (Wittreich 1987: 4-7). Susanne Woods (1988: 19) discriminates between Milton's intention and textual indeterminacy in her claim that

Milton's profound respect for human liberty has the ultimate effect of subverting patriarchal assumptions. He is too thoughtful to accept cultural assumptions without question, yet he has no frame of reference for responding to biblical authority in this matter. The curious result is that the dignity and intelligence he gives his female characters strain against the inferior social position in which they find themselves.

The fact that the impact of *Paradise Lost* can be read in the works of every one of the major Romantic poets, for whom it claimed an undeniable importance, even pre-eminence, lends weight to the claim that, more than any other literary forebear,

Milton's epic poem stands alone as the mythic, intellectual, religious, and political reference point for imaginative writers of the Romantic period (Kitson 2005: 465; Griffin 1986: 7). Romantic mythmakers, cynical of conventional religious belief and averse to the perceived oppressiveness of Christian morality, 'wrestled with the literary weight of the Miltonic sublime in part as a means of contesting the dogmatic claims of orthodox Christianity to which *Paradise Lost* had given seemingly final epic expression' (Davis 2007: 123). Despite the complexities of the text itself and the ambiguous nature of Milton's relationship to its themes and characters, *Paradise Lost* was for many Romantic writers the crucible for powerful and heterodox myth making of a commonly anti-Christian kind (Davis 2007: 123).

Apart from the iconoclastic influence of *Paradise Lost*, three other influences on *His Dark Materials* are the early-Christian heresies of Gnosticism and Pantheism, as well as the anticlericalism of Romantic imaginative writings. While its origins are pre-Christian, Gnosticism is also regarded as a corruption of orthodox Christianity (King 2005: 171; Russell 2004: 306). Therefore, the heterogeneous and fragmentary counter-theologies that constitute Gnosticism offer a challenge to the dominant Judeo-Christian narratives of Creation and Fall. Gnosticism claims that there is a transcendent God, who is beyond all created universes and above all other gods (Hoeller 2009). This True God emanated, rather than created, from within Him the substance of all the worlds, visible and invisible; therefore, all is God, for all consists of the substance of God. Gnosticism also depicts Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, as 'a flawed consciousness' (Hoeller 2009): a demonic demiurge, an

impostor, whose rule is without legitimacy (Jonas 1992: 42-84). Although this demiurge is the creator of the material and psychic cosmos, he is only one of the intermediate deific beings that exist between the ultimate True God and humanity. Consequently, to worship the cosmos is to worship alienated corruptions of the Divine essence.

Yahweh's creation, the flawed imitation of an original state of perfection, traps within itself sparks of the primordial Divine *pneuma*, spirit or soul, in the corrupt fabric of its matter (King 2005: 20-55). This divine *pneuma*, imbued in the fabric of the material cosmos and in human beings, longs to return to its original state of perfection in the True God. Gnosticism claims that such a return can be achieved not through conventional acts of faith or religious obedience but 'by the individual accession of a divine gnosis, or knowledge, which represents the exiled soul's realization of its true identity and the nature of the false creation in which it finds itself imprisoned' (Davis 2007: 124) – as in the form of Adam's disobedience of the demiurge.

Whereas orthodox Christianity often blames Eve for the Fall of humankind, Gnosticism understands Eve, or the feminine spiritual power she represents, as the source of spiritual awakening, because it does not hold that human desire for knowledge is the root of evil in the world (Pagels 1988: 68). To embrace Gnosticism, therefore, involves heretical, counter-cultural self-discovery, which involves a rejection of the world and constructions of religious and secular authority

– it promises an overthrow of the false divinity and his representative institutions, release after death, and reunification with the primal source.

Writers of the Romantic period, but particularly Blake, Shelley and Keats turned to Gnosticism as a means by which to challenge the authority of a normative belief system regularly damned by radical opinion for delineating human freedom. It is claimed (Bloom 1982: 101-44; Curran 1975: 64-98), Gnosticism conferred a specialized diction for the subversion of institutional Christianity and for the negation of the sensibility of fear and prohibition on which these writers came to believe the claims of established religions depended. In particular, Gnosticism provided Romantic writers with visionary mythic content not only to expose the God of Christianity as the origin of evil, since He is the creator of a repressive order that invites rebellion (Newlyn 2001: 100), but also to challenge despotism in all its forms.

As with *Paradise Lost*, however, the writers of the Romantic period did not take on board the theology of Gnosticism unaltered: ‘Romanticism, in certain important respects, performs on Gnosticism an act of reinterpretation parallel to that which Gnosticism practises on Christianity’ (Davis 2007: 125). Gnostic antinomianism’s perception of the natural world as corrupt, along with its profound aversion to the physical body and sexuality, for example, are rejected by Romanticism’s exultation of naturalism and the redemptive qualities of erotic love (Hagstrum 1985: 46-94). Furthermore, in the poetry of Blake the desire for sexual and psychological

liberation is inseparable from the desire for political freedom – a fact mythologized in the character of the reactionary, frozen patriarch Urizen.

While Blake remained fascinated throughout his life with ‘contraries’, his complex redefinition of Emanuel Swedenborg’s (1688-1772) ‘new’ Christian cosmology in later life, which he critiqued in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, approached more closely the obscure Gnostic mysticism of the seventeenth-century German theosophist Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), who argued that God the Father was the indefinable matter of the universe, neither good nor evil, but the origin of both. Blake’s Gnosticism found its most coherent expression in *The Book of Urizen*, an epic creation story. Blake’s work is an unprecedented and confounding critique of the very cornerstones of Judeo-Christian civilization, as well as its limiting monotheism: evil, embodied in Urizen, is depicted as a seed in the very foundations of the universe, and the Word and the Law are presented as closing the boundless possibility it might have offered.

The poem’s allusions to the Bible are many. However, Urizen, the bearded patriarch who denotes the most stable Western representation of Yahweh, is a demiurge whose purpose is flawed and whose world is broken. The poem, which does not articulate the profound faith Blake displays in ‘Jerusalem’ (1804) – the preface to ‘Milton’ – of a new world of loving brothers and sisters, opens with Urizen in the chaos that precedes Creation amongst the other Eternals. In the opening lines the

Eternals note Urizen's disappearance into a self-imposed void of solitude, from which he later emerges with the manifesto,

One command, one joy, one desire
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law (4. 34-36).

The Eternals refuse to accept Urizen's Law and cast him down like Milton's Satan because he seeks to redefine himself as one – a tyrant – opposed to their multitude. His attempt to create a Manichean division between himself and the Eternals sees Urizen being isolated and shunned. It is in this broken state that he begins to shape the universe; however, when he awakens and explores the world he has crafted, he sees that none of his creatures obeys his law. As retribution, Urizen binds humans to the laws of science and religion and, in so doing, limits the infinite possibilities the universe held for humanity before the application of 'Law' (4. 36). In Blake's poem, an already flawed universe is ruined completely the moment the demiurge restricts the endless possibilities previously open to humanity by restricting human choice to an 'either/or' between science and faith, good and evil, life and death:

the shrunken eyes, clouded over,
Discern'd not the woven hypocrisy;
But the streaky slime in their heavens,
Brought together by narrowing perceptions,

Appeard transparent air; [...]
Six days they shrunk up from existence,
And on the seventh day they rested,
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope:
And forgot their Eternal life (2. 9-13; 3. 17-20).

While Blake was drawn to Gnostic heresy, Wordsworth developed an interest in Pantheism, especially in his early intellectual life. Pantheism is a metaphysical and religious position, a form of non-theistic monotheism or even non-personal theism, which holds that 'God is everything' (Owen 1971: 74) or that 'everything that exists constitutes a 'unity' that is in some sense divine (MacIntyre 1967: 34). Although Wordsworth turned from nature to humanity and from immanent to transcendent conceptions of godhead in later life, his 'early religious beliefs were pantheistic' (Ulmer 2001: 36).

Wordsworth's Pantheism, however, was also influenced by Coleridge's pantheistic version of the 'One Life'. The One Life is a theory, which originated in Enlightenment France, and came to Coleridge through the Unitarianism of Joseph Priestly. It supposes a divine power or unity of love, 'permeating and ontologically underlying all natural creation' (Ulmer 2001: 37):

O the one life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,

A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,

Rhythm in all thought, and joyance every where (Coleridge 1997, 87. 26-29)

While the One Life generates feelings of universal unity and love in humankind, often through contemplation of ‘natural phenomena’ (Taussig 2002: 256), it should not be confused with Romantic ‘transcendence’: an intense visionary experience, achieved through a contemplation of nature, which enables individuals burdened by the mechanism and empiricism of terrestrial experience to go beyond these limits so as to catch a momentary glimpse of a better world. The influence of the One Life on Wordsworth is affirmed in ‘Lines Written at a Small Distance from my House, and Sent by my Little Boy to the Person to Whom they are Addressed’ (1798):

There is a blessing in the air,

Which seems a sense of joy to yield

To the bare trees, the mountain bare,

And grass in the green field [...]

Love, now an universal birth,

From heart to heart is stealing,

From earth to man, from man to earth,

– It is the hour of feeling (2000: 55. 5-8, 21-24)

While a certain ‘residual Christianity’, ingrained in Wordsworth’s ‘habitual moral responses’, changed his attitude toward the ‘One Life’ over time, it enabled him to

avoid 'a conceptually rigorous' Pantheism, with its 'denial of divine transcendence and compounding of God and Nature' (Ulmer 2001: 36). In 'Tintern Abbey' (1798), for example, Wordsworth seems to suggest that the immanent and universal presence might exist beyond the world it informs. However, although it does not demand Pantheistic interpretation, the spiritual intuitions of 'Tintern Abbey' are, to a significant extent, compatible with Pantheism: nature is not presented as an inanimate object but a force alive and active, and it is infused with a mysterious power that impresses itself upon the human consciousness to mould and shape the human intellect:

And I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things (2000: 134. 94-103).

While heresies such as Gnosticism and Pantheism provided Romantic writers, such as Blake and Wordsworth, with a symbolic language for fiercely ironic and parodic revisions of Christian mythology, the anti-clericalism of much writing in the period

also offered a seditious language to critique organized religion. Many Romantic prose writers portrayed the prevalence of institutional religion as ‘evidence of a sinister conspiracy by a ruling caste that, in all ages and in all civilisations, cynically uses the mystifications of religion as instruments of policy’ (Butler 1998: 122).

Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason; being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (1794) focus, more directly, on religion and argue that every national church has established itself as a powerful political institution not just by pretending to be the recipient of ‘some special mission’ from a dubiously posited deity but also by exploiting the fact that people are often easily ‘hood-winked [...and] held in superstitious ignorance’ (1998a: 124; 1998b: 116). In essence, Paine claims that all national institutions of churches are nothing more than ‘human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind’ so as to monopolize power’ (1998a: 124). The claims of Paine owe much to the earlier writings of Rousseau, but, particularly, *On the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right*, where he stated that ‘Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence. Its spirit [...] too favourable to tyranny for tyranny not to take advantage of it [...With the consequence being that true] Christians are made to be slaves’ (1987: 225). Rousseau depicted ecclesiastical religion as ‘the most violent of earthly despotisms’ and its clerics as ‘ministers of tyranny, who, in order to support the pretended rights of God, that is to say their own interests, have been so much the less sparing of human blood, as they were more hopeful their own in particular would be always respected’ (1986a: 301).

Influenced by the anti-clericalism of Romantic political prose, Shelley created works whose iconoclastic nature offered a critique of both theology and theocracy. The daring and inventiveness of Shelley's prophetic poem *Queen Mab* and his drama *Prometheus Unbound* depict a world in which God is not a divinity but a usurper and oppressor, and where religions and churches are the enemies of human freedom. Through the characters of Mab and Prometheus, Shelley declares that there is no omnipotent God but also, more significantly, decries institutional religion and codified morality as the roots of social evil and political despotism.

Subjected to repeated legal challenges, *Queen Mab's* harshly anti-Christian rationalism denounces God as a cruel tyrant, the depraved creation of the human mind, and 'kings, and priests, and statesmen' (2004: 191. VI. 80) as the instruments of human greed:

Commerce has set the mark of selfishness,
signet of its all-enslaving power,
Upon a shining ore, and called it gold:
Before whose image bow the vulgar great,
The vainly rich, the miserable proud,
The mob of peasants, nobles, priests, and kings,
And with blind feelings reverence the power
That grinds them to the dust of misery.
But in the temple of their hireling hearts

Gold is a living god, and rules in scorn

All earthly things but virtue (2004: 199. V. 53-63).

Shelley's eponymous heroine prophesizes that, 'under the rule of the goddess Necessity, all such institutions must wither away, before humanity can return to its natural condition of goodness and felicity' (Abrams et al 1993: 644). *Prometheus Unbound* also suggests that most political evils are fashioned by human intelligence, and are, therefore, subject to human control. However, it implies that, while the institutionalised and deeply entrenched nature of human evil necessitates more than just a change of attitude, the revolt against such oppression is only the initial stage of humanity's revolutionary transformation towards self-understanding.

In light of the iconoclastic potential of *Paradise Lost* and the heretical tendencies of certain Romantic writings, the remaining sections of this chapter examine the influence of Milton's poem on *His Dark Materials*, as well as the similarities Pullman's text shares with the Gnosticism, Pantheism and anticlericalism evident in writings of the Romantic period.

Characterizing Republican Disobedience and Liberty in *His Dark Materials*

As the narrative [His Dark Materials] began to form itself on the page, I found that – perhaps drawn by the gravitational attraction of a much greater mass – I was beginning to tell the same story. [...] I wasn't worried about that, because I was well aware that there are many ways of telling the same

story, and that this story [Paradise Lost] was a very good one in the first place, and could take a great deal of re-telling (Pullman 2005a: 9).

Just as Robert Ryan contends that poems of the Romantic period should be ‘considered as acts of Miltonic engagement in the religious culture of the time’, rather than ‘meditations in retirement from social realities’ (1997: 5), *His Dark Materials* is Pullman’s deliberate revision of the Miltonic myth of the Fall, so as to critique Christian authority, past and present. While the principal argument of Blake’s prose work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – ‘that the ultimate aim of all humans should be to enter the New Jerusalem of the redeemed imagination [through a] denial of [...] ultimate authority’ (Tucker 2003: 157) – has strong connections to *His Dark Materials*, it is Pullman’s reading of *Paradise Lost* that ultimately shapes its characterization of disobedience and validation of personal liberty.

Like many Romantic writers before him, Pullman is fascinated with Milton’s characterization of Satan’s disobedience. In fact, his fascination with, and admiration for, the Apostate Angel is in evidence in his introduction to the 2005 Oxford University Press edition of *Paradise Lost* (1-10), where he retells a story he was once told of ‘a bibulous, semi-literate, ageing country squire sitting by his fireside listening to *Paradise Lost* being read aloud’. The squire has never read Milton’s poem; he does not know the story at all; but as he listens ‘he finds himself transfixed’. Not long into the story, he ‘bangs the arm of his chair, and exclaims “By

God! I know not what the outcome may be, but this Lucifer is a damned fine fellow, and I hope he may win” – to which Pullman adds ‘my sentiments exactly’ (2005a: 1). Later in this same introduction, his reading of Satan as hero is apparent in his summation of the opening passages Book I:

When the story of *Paradise Lost* begins, after the invocation to the ‘heavenly muse’, we find ourselves in Hell, with the fallen angels groaning on the burning lake. And from then on, part of our awareness is always affected by that. This is a story about devils. It’s not a story about God. The fallen angels with their leader are our protagonists, and the unfallen angels, and God the Father and the Son, and Adam and Eve, are all supporting players (2005a: 4-5).

Unsurprisingly, Pullman quotes Blake in claiming membership ‘of the devil’s party’ (de Bertadano 2002). Influenced by *Paradise Lost*, Pullman begins *His Dark Materials* with the seemingly satanic figure of Lord Asriel, the leader of an insurrection against the Kingdom of Heaven. A politically sophisticated leader, Lord Asriel not only manages to convince beings from numerous worlds to join his rebellion against the Authority but also persuades the witch-clan queen Ruta Skadi to fight for his republic of heaven. He insists that it is both ‘right and just’ for her to rebel, considering the fact that witches, in some worlds, had been burned alive in the name of the Authority (*AS*: 282-83). The republican diction, evident in the speeches of Lord Asriel, as well as a number of different characters in *His Dark Materials*,

constitutes a language of liberty that is reminiscent of that used by Satan in *Paradise Lost* – especially, in his address to the Fallen Angels after their expulsion from Heaven in Book I.

The main advocate for a republic of heaven in *Northern Lights* and *The Amber Spyglass*, Lord Asriel, like Satan in Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*, attempts to build his own republic apart from and in defiance of God, and, like Satan in Books V and VI of Milton's poem, he commands a rebel army against the Kingdom of God. In fact, the description of Lord Asriel's basalt fortress, where he gathers armies in preparation for his rebellion against the Kingdom of Heaven, is reminiscent of Satan's Pandemonium: one need only compare his fortress with its 'atmosphere [...] hot and sulphur laden', its air ringing with the 'pounding of mighty hammers and the clangorous screech of iron on metal', where 'miners toiled with picks and spades to hack the bright metals from the mother-rock' (*AS*: 224-25), with Milton's Pandemonium:

whose griesly top
Belch'd fire and rowling smoak; the rest entire
Shon with a glossie scurff, undoubted sign
That in his womb was hid metallic Ore,
The work of Sulphur. Thither wing'd with speed
A numerous Brigad hasten'd. As when bands
Of Pioners with Spade and Pickaxe arm'd

Forerun the Royal Camp, to trench a Field,

Or cast a Rampart (I. 670-678).

Although the similarities between the characterizations of Lord Asriel and Satan might seem to suggest that the thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* are situated in the ambitious republican aspirations of Lord Asriel, the reality is more complicated. *Northern Lights* begins with a series of 'identifications and revelations that magnifies the readerly process of Books I and II of *Paradise Lost*' only to replicate the process Milton employs in *Paradise Lost* of 'enticing initial readerly assent to a character's [in this instance, Lord Asriel's] errant desires' (Shohet 2005: 24-25). Just as Satan is not the true hero of *Paradise Lost*, Lord Asriel is not the hero of *His Dark Materials*.

While Lord Asriel's attempt to build a republic of heaven is an act of disobedience, it is characterized not by the values of republicanism but by self-interest. This is nowhere more clearly depicted than at the end of *Northern Lights*, where he is prepared to take the life of the child Roger, Lyra's friend, in order to harness the energy needed to open a portal to another world. In these passages the phonetic similarity of Lord Asriel's name with that of 'Asra'el, the Hebraic word for the angel of death, who separates the soul from the body in Jewish and Muslim tradition, is powerfully resonant. Lord Asriel attempts to justify his actions by stressing the fact that he is trying to seek a way to obliterate 'the origin of all the Dust, all the death, the sin, the misery, the destructiveness in the world' (NL: 377); however, for

Lyra, her father's actions lack humanity: 'no matter how important it was to find out about original sin, it was too cruel to do what [...he'd] just done. [...] Nothing justified that' (NL: 376).

The character of Lord Asriel, therefore, also shares a number of significant similarities with the Byronic hero. Lord Asriel's 'sense of injured merit and defiance in the face of [...] enemies' (Hatlan 2005: 87) are hallmarks of the Byronic hero. He is also mysterious (NL: 6); immensely superior in his passions and powers to the other human characters, whom he regards with disdain (NL: 24); absolutely self-reliant (NL: 29); inflexible in the pursuit of his own ends (NL: 379); and the author of a self-generated moral code (NL: 390-94). Unsurprisingly, while he does redeem himself somewhat at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* in his self-sacrifice for Lyra, Lord Asriel is not the character through whom Pullman builds the case for a republic of heaven: in fact, in an interview in 2002, Pullman stated categorically that 'the Satan figure is [...] not Lord Asriel' (February).

Like many writers of the Romantic period who were not completely satisfied with Milton's depiction of Satan, Pullman develops his own version of the Apostate Angel in the character of Dr Mary Malone. A principal investigator at the Dark Matter Research Unit, Oxford University, and an ex-nun, Malone became a scientist in order to escape having to think about the nature of good and evil. According to Pullman, she is 'a very important character [...with] an important task in [...the] book' (2000, August). He contends 'the whole reason she's been brought through

the book is to tell [...the] story' (2000, August) of her own sexual awakening to Lyra. In recounting the story of how she fell in love, and her movement from celibacy to joyful sexuality, Malone fulfils her role as 'serpent' (Russell 2005: 217). She not only enables Lyra to understand her feelings for Will, and his for her, but also tempts Lyra into tasting the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge by embracing her sexual maturity. Pullman claims that 'the Satan figure is Mary Malone' (2002, February), because he wishes to depict the Temptation and Fall 'not as the source of all woe and misery' but as 'the beginning of true human freedom, something to be celebrated, not lamented' (Scholastic 2009). As a character that has always searched for the knowledge that experience brings, Malone is an appropriate instigator of disobedience in the revision of the Fall offered in *His Dark Materials*. She enables the temptation of Lyra to be read as 'wholly beneficent' (Pullman 2002, February). In the character of Malone 'the Tempter [...becomes] not an evil being like Satan, prompted by malice and envy, but a figure who might stand for Wisdom' (Random House 1996c).

It is in the characters of Will and Lyra, his new Adam and Eve, that Pullman locates his republican values: Will tells Lyra, 'we have to build the republic of heaven [...not] Lord Asriel, [...] you and me' (AS: 516). Their movement from innocence to experience, which enables them to discover who they are as individuals and their place in the world, is celebrated as a symbolic re-enactment of the original biblical act of disobedience. Pullman reads the myth of the Fall as a prohibition against autonomous adulthood. He suggests that 'God's prohibition demeans both God and

man: warning Adam and Eve away from the Tree of Knowledge, God seems only to want them ignorant to protect his own status' (Wood 2001: 248). Consequently, he rejects the manner in which innocence has been sanctified in Christianity, as he believes individuals should 'welcome and celebrate' (2002, November) experience, knowledge and wisdom. As he claimed in an interview with Dave Weich,

I knew it would end in a garden. And I knew I would use a variation on the temptation motif, when Lyra falls in love. It's the story in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis, but here it's seen from another angle, through other eyes, this moment of revelation and sudden understanding, sudden self-consciousness, knowledge. I knew it would happen like that from the very beginning, seven years ago (2000, August).

The movement towards experience in *His Dark Materials* is, therefore, in Pullman's own words, 'a fall into grace, towards wisdom, not something that leads to sin, death, misery, hell – and Christianity' (2002, February). In an interview with Kerry Fried, Pullman discussed his indebtedness to von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' for his understanding of what a 'fall into grace' entails. Written a year before von Kleist committed suicide in 1812, 'On the Marionette Theatre' is an essay on a conversation he had with a dancer about 'how consciousness can disturb natural grace'. Pullman's summation of one of the central arguments of von Kleist's essay indicates that he reads 'On the Marionette Theatre' as a validation of the 'superiority' of 'learned grace' over 'unconscious grace' (King 2005: 121):

We live in a dark valley, on a spectrum between the unconscious grace of the puppet and the fully conscious grace of the god. But the only way out of this impasse, [...] is not back towards childhood: as with the Garden of Eden, an angel with a fiery sword guards the way; there is no going back. We have to go forward, through the travails and difficulties of life's embarrassment and doubt, and hope that as we grow older and wiser we may approach paradise again from the back, as it were, and enter grace which lies at the other end of the spectrum (2009).

It is no surprise, therefore, that *His Dark Materials* focuses upon the 'knowledge' aspect of the Genesis archetype, where the serpent tells Eve that the act of becoming knowledgeable about good and evil will separate her from the rest of creation, making her different and, potentially, 'a rival to the Authority himself' (Wood 2001: 248). Similarly, in *His Dark Materials*, Lord Asriel tells Lyra a version of the myth where the serpent tells Eve, '*if you eat the fruit [...] your eyes shall be opened, and your dæmons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*' (NL: 372) – italics are original.

Running parallel to the central narrative of Lyra and Will's re-enactment of the Fall, *His Dark Materials* contains sub-narratives that reinforce its revision of the biblical myth. In *The Amber Spyglass*, the Mulefa – sharp-horned invertebrates from one of the worlds of *His Dark Materials* that use seed-pods as wheels – have a creation

myth that is similar to that of the Old Testament. However, their myth depicts the fall of their species from innocence into experience as a celebratory event – one that led the Mulefa to self-consciousness, free will and moral responsibility:

One day a creature with no name discovered a seed-pod and began to play [...]

She saw a snake coiling itself through the hole in the seed-pod, and the snake said – [...]

What do you know? What do you remember? What do you see ahead? And she said Nothing, nothing, nothing. So the snake said, Put your foot through the hole in the seed-pod where I was playing, and you will become wise. So she put a foot in where the snake had been. And the oil entered her foot and made her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the sraf [Dust: conscious matter]. It was so strange and pleasant that she wanted to share it at once with all her kindred. So she and her mate took the first ones, and they discovered they knew who they were, they knew they were Mulefa and not grazers. They named the seed-tree, and all the creatures and plants (236-37).

The fact that the concept of a *felix culpa* is focalized through one of the Mulefa, Atal, who recounts the myth to Mary Malone, is significant. The Mulefa live in Edenic harmony with their environment, crafting what they need to enhance their lives in a communal society; consequently, the positive outcome of their movement

from innocence to experience encourages readers to endorse Will and Lyra in their roles as a new Adam and Eve and their hope of building a republic of heaven.

That it is Lyra and Will, as opposed to Lord Asriel, who are charged with the building of the republic of heaven, ensures that, while it espouses revolution and self-realisation, *His Dark Materials* does not give credence to anarchic self-indulgence. Lyra recognizes that 'her own moral choices, her compassion, and her sense of responsibility do in fact impact the universe' (Wood 2001: 253). At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra realises, in a phrase that indicts her newfound adult maturity, no one can build a republic of heaven 'if they put themselves first' (AS: 548). The values that support Lyra's disobedience and search for personal liberty, therefore, include a belief in civic virtue and an abhorrence of corruption, all of which enable *His Dark Materials* to dialogue with a Romantic 'republican' tradition. In a manner not altogether dissimilar to the way in which the French Revolution, at its most idealistic, promoted an insurgence of ideas, an explosion of hope that ordinary men and women, empowered by democracy, could build a just society based on the premise that all humans were created equal, *His Dark Materials* advocates a philosophy of partnership, where personal responsibility is a fundamental prerequisite to an egalitarian society.

According to Bernard Schweizer, Pullman's project resembles that of Mary Daly, the feminist reform theologian whose book *Beyond God the Father* (1985) contains a sustained attack against 'the God who is the judge of "sin", who confirms the

rightness of rules and roles of the reigning system, maintaining false conscience and self-destructive guilt feelings' (31). However, taking into account the facts that Pullman's 'heroine is a female prophetess, that his withes are powerful and dignified characters, and that the only positive god figure [...] is Xaphania', it is also possible to identify Pullman's 'antireligious animus with a feminist rejection of patriarchal theological doctrines' (Schweizer 2005: 168). Furthermore, the fact that, in the void created by its iconoclasm, the text suggests that gender equality is one of the values that might define a republic of heaven also makes it possible to identify connect Pullman's utopian proposals with those of a Romanic writer like Wollstonecraft who argued for gender equality between the sexes.

The influence of *Paradise Lost* on *His Dark Materials* sees Pullman's text advocating, over and over again, that the disobedient pursuit of knowledge is the key to personal liberty only when individuals choose not to put themselves first. *His Dark Materials'* republican revision of the story of humanity's Fall positively reinforces Lyra's disobedience, as she assumes the role of rebellious liberator of humanity. Naomi Wood contends that, in *Northern Lights*, 'Lyra is more successful when she disobeys than when she submits (2001: 249). However, similar to the ambiguous treatment of Adam and Eve in Books IX and X of *Paradise Lost*, particularly in relation to whether our mythological parents were free to wilfully choose their own futures or were predestined to fate, *His Dark Materials* ends by complicating what, up until this point, seemed a clear validation of Lyra and Will's liberty.

Throughout *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Will resist notions of fate by insisting on their individual agency. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra begins to use the alethiometer not as a way to negotiate the future but as a way to pursue goals she has independently chosen – in doing so, the alethiometer becomes ‘an advisor to but not a determiner of her fate’ (Wood 2001: 253). Will vocalizes his ability to make independent choices most clearly in a declaration to his father, Stanislaus Grumman, which marks his maturation into adulthood: ‘I can’t choose my nature, but I can choose what I do. And I *will* choose, because now I’m free’ (*AS*: 373). However, there are limits to Lyra and Will’s freedom to make independent choices: the most obvious being the limitations posed by the protagonists’ own sense of civic duty in their hope of building a republic of heaven. Although the children’s disobedience brings them wisdom, they are quickly forced out of the paradise of their newfound knowledge of each other, because, in tasting the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, they have gained not just knowledge of their relationship to one another but also knowledge of their relationship to other human beings and their respective worlds. In light of this, they painfully realise that they cannot remain together, that they must close the portal between their worlds and return separately to their own for the sake of the future of all worlds; if they do not, Spectres – ghost-like entities that consume Dust and bring death to adults – will travel freely between worlds consuming all conscious matter (*AS*: 520-21).

The price that must be paid for the possibility of a republic of heaven, therefore, is the separation of Lyra and Will at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*: an expulsion from

Eden that is ‘worse than that of the first parents, who at least faced up to their loss in the state of companionship that forms the biblical template of human solidarity’ (Davis 2007: 131-32). It is ironic that, while Pullman expresses nothing but contempt for religious asceticism, his ending appeals to something very similar: Lyra and Will are forced to abandon the emotional and physical pleasure of their new-found love, almost as soon as they have discovered it, for a ‘higher love’.

This is not the only aspect of *His Dark Materials* in which the disobedient pursuit of knowledge is shown to have negative consequences. For all the emphasis placed on the desirability of gaining knowledge in the text, Giacomo Paradisi, an old knife-bearer in Torre degli Angeli, tells Will that

Spectres are our fault, our fault alone. They came because my predecessors, alchemists, philosophers, men of learning, were making an inquiry into the deepest nature of things. They became curious about the bonds that hold the smallest particles of matter together...About these binds we were wrong. We undid them and let the Spectres in (SK: 180).

Interestingly, although *His Dark Materials* gives evidence for Pullman’s interest and considerable knowledge of science – its references to string theory, spacetime, quantum physics, chaos, symbiosis, entanglement and cold dark matter are explored in detail by Mary and John Gribbin in *The Science of Philip Pullman’s ‘His Dark Materials’* (2003) – Pullman’s text is cautionary, if not ‘skeptical’ (Marksman

20005: 61), in its stance on the benefits of science or technology. Although Jonathan and Kenneth Padley argue that the Church's General Oblation Board oversees the severing of children from their dæmons at Bolvangar for 'the ostensibly noble but contextually horrific purpose of researching a way to free humanity from being subject to Dust and the trappings of Original Sin' (2006: 326), there is nothing, even ostensibly, noble about the Board's behaviour. The Church hopes that by separating children from their dæmons children will remain endlessly in childhood, innocent of the worldly knowledge that adulthood brings, and malleable. Furthermore, Lyra chastises Dr Mary Malone not just for her 'blind' faith in science but also for the way it has made her indifferent to moral questions:

‘D’you know how embarrassing it is to mention good and evil in a scientific laboratory? [asked Mary Malone.] Have you any idea? One of the reasons I became a scientist was not to have to think about that kind of thing’.

‘You got to think about it’, Lyra said severely. ‘You can’t investigate Shadows, Dust, whatever it is, without thinking about that kind of thing, good and evil and such’ (SK: 100-01).

Lyra and Will's freedom is also limited in other more fundamentally troubling ways in the text, however. According to the character Dr Lanselius, the witches' consort in Trollheim, Lyra is a child of prophecy, long anticipated by the witch clans: the liberator of humankind from the chains of destiny (NL: 176). Although this sense of

destiny is somewhat qualified by his belief that Lyra must 'fulfil [her] destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can [...the material world] be saved. [...] She must be free to make mistakes' (NL: 176), the extent of her postlapsarian freedom is questionable. It becomes clear that it is only by 'succumbing to temptation' (O'Hanlon 2004: 153) that Lyra can fulfil her destiny (NL: 310) as the New Eve.

While it is true that Lyra and Will each assert their increasing wisdom and maturity by believing they are making independent choices, and that Lyra, in particular, is always 'acting against her destiny' (Hines 2005: 40), there is still an uncertainty surrounding the actual extent of their freedom. Despite the fact that the alethiometer cannot tell Lyra whether she will succeed or not in a particular endeavour, and though it does become more tentative in its guidance as she becomes more decisive, it still has the ability to tell her that her choices are the correct one; therefore, what seems to be simple advice is guided counsel – shaping her choices and predetermining her fate. Furthermore, in *The Amber Spyglass*, Will's declaration that he must act in ignorance rather than obedience to a predetermined story, is one that implicitly acknowledges the role of prophecy, destiny and fate in his life:

'What work have I got to do, then', said Will, but went on at once, 'No, on second thought, don't tell me. I shall decide what I do. If you say my work is fighting, or healing, or exploring, or whatever you might say, I'll always be thinking about it. And if I do end up doing that, I'll be resentful because it'll

feel as if I didn't have a choice, and if I don't do it, I'll feel guilty because I should. Whatever I do, I will choose it, no one else' (496).

This sense of predestination is also evident in Stanislaus Grumman's conversation with Will regarding his role as bearer of *Æsahættr*: 'If you're the bearer of the knife [...] you're a warrior. That's what you are. Argue with anything else, but don't argue with your own nature' (*AS*: 334-35).

In light of the strength and explicit nature of Pullman's intentions in arguing for a republic rather than a Kingdom of heaven, the text's acceptance of predestination sits rather uncomfortably alongside its more consistent exaltation of personal liberty. This sense of destiny is evident in Serafina Pekkala's pronouncements that, 'we are all subjects to the fates. But we must all act as if we are not [...] or die of despair' (*NL*: 310); and, that 'we have no more choice' in things 'than in whether or not to be born' (*NL*: 310). Therefore, while *His Dark Materials* promotes individual agency in its challenge to Christian authority, the text contains echoes of the latter's mythological proclivity for prophecy, destiny and fate, which is difficult to disregard. What is more troubling is the fact that there is no explanation offered in *His Dark Materials* for who or what authorizes this predestination – this is strange when one considers Pullman's expressed atheism and the death, in the text, of the counterfeit God-like Authority.

So results the bittersweet ending of *The Amber Spyglass*, with the angel Xaphania ascetically explaining to Will and Lyra that they must spend a lifetime apart, despite their newfound mutual love:

there is no comfort, but believe me, every single being who knows of your dilemma wishes things could be otherwise; but there are fates that even the most powerful have to submit to. There is nothing I can do to help you change the way things are (*AS*: 519).

While *His Dark Materials* stresses repeatedly that ‘pre-ordination is connected with the forces that want to promote mindless obedience’ (Zettel 2005: 47), the ending of *The Amber Spyglass* subverts this by providing only one viable option for its child protagonists: they must close all the openings between worlds except for the one leading out of the Land of the Dead and end their relationship by returning separately to their own worlds. The absence of any reasonable alternatives for Lyra and Will means that the only other choices they have involve death – as Kristine Moruzi argues, ‘these are not real options’ (2005: 62). In fact, even Pullman himself does not offer a convincing argument for their separation; instead – as discussed in the previous chapter – he blames it on the story:

The reason they have to part in the end is a curious one and it’s hard to explain except in terms of the compulsion of the story. I knew from the very beginning that it would have to end in that sort of renunciation (I don’t know

how I know these things, but I knew). [...] I tried all sorts of ways to prevent it, but the story made me do it. That was what had to happen' (Moloney 2005: 184).

Shaped by Pullman's Romantic reading of *Paradise Lost*, the characterization of republican disobedience in *His Dark Materials* challenges the established authority of Christian mythology, especially its delineation of human freedom; however, like Milton's poem, Pullman's work of fiction seems to, inadvertently almost, place limitations on its more general advocacy of human liberty.

The Authority, Dust and the Republic of Heaven in *His Dark Materials*

'I am all for the death of God' (Pullman 2002, August)

'I cannot believe in the God who is described by churches and in holy books. So I'm conscious of God only as an absence, but an absence which is full of echoes, troubling echoes and unhappy ones, consoling ones and kindly ones, chastening ones and wise ones. These echoes fill my mental universe just as the background radiation which apparently fills the cosmos is the echo of an original Big Bang. Echoes in the space where God has been' (qtd. in Lenz 2005: 10-11).

Like Shelley's, many of Pullman's public pronouncements promote the necessity of atheism: 'the idea that there is a personal God [...] is dead. Intellectually, the life's

gone out of it. It's hollow [...] and empty. God is dead' (Billen: 2003: 14-15). The fact that he is an atheist is something he has readily stated in talking about religious belief: on *The South Bank Show*, he argued that, although religious belief is something 'very hard to live without', it is something 'we have to give up' the moment we come to realise that 'God is dead or never existed' (2003, March). However, like many of his public comments, his declarations of atheism are far from straightforward. In an interview with Susan Roberts, he claimed that he is in fact caught between the words 'atheistic' and 'agnostic' (2002, November), while in another interview with Huw Spanner he maintained that he is an atheist or an agnostic depending on context:

The totality of what I know is no more than the tiniest pinprick of light in an enormous encircling darkness of all the things I don't know [...]. In this illimitable darkness there may be God [...] I don't know [...]

But if we look at this pinprick of light and come closer to it, [...] so that it gradually expands until here we are, sitting in this room, surrounded by all the things we do know – such as [...] what we've read about history and what we can find out about science – nowhere in this knowledge that's available to me do I see the slightest evidence for God.

So, within this tiny circle of light I'm a convinced atheist; but when I step back I can see that the totality of what I know is very small compared to the totality of what I don't know. So, that's my position (2002, February).

Unlike Milton, whose commitment to earthly republicanism did not affect his belief in the monarchy of God, Pullman rejects all claimed manifestations of a monotheistic God of the type recorded in the Bible or premised by other systems of faith, principally because they involve a superhuman and controlling power that is to be worshipped as omnipotent (2003, March) – Pullman’s commitment to earthly republicanism is limited to a critique of ecclesiastical authority, as the next section of this chapter highlights. His contention that if there is a God ‘he hasn’t shown himself on earth’ (2002, November) is focalized in *His Dark Materials* through the character Mrs Coulter in her questioning of the silent absence of God from human affairs:

Well, where is God [...] if he's alive? And why doesn't he speak any more? At the beginning of the world, God walked in the garden and spoke with Adam and Eve. Then he began to withdraw, and Moses only heard his voice. Later, in the time of Daniel, he was aged - he was the Ancient of Days. Where is he now? Is he still alive, at some inconceivable age, decrepit and demented, unable to think or act or speak and unable to die? (AS: 334-35).

The tension that exists between Pullman’s atheism and agnosticism is, according to Jonathan and Kenneth Padley, evident in his ‘confusingly oscillating opinions of the cosmology’ (2006: 331) and theology of *His Dark Materials*. In an interview with Bel Mooney, Pullman claimed that ‘maybe there was a creator’ (2003: 128), while in a debate on *His Dark Materials* at the National Theatre he argued that ‘there never

was a Creator' (Pullman et al 2004: 86). Unsurprisingly, *His Dark Materials*, as a text, is ambiguous with regard to the possibility of a transcendent deity: King Ogunwe claims that there 'may have been a creator, or there may not' (SK: 221-22), while Dr Mary Malone states that she used to be a nun until she realised that 'there wasn't any God at all' and that 'the Christian religion' was 'a very powerful and convincing mistake' (AS: 464).

Although the worlds of *His Dark Materials* contain a range of belief systems, including armoured bears that do not worship any god, witches who acknowledge a polytheistic pantheon of patriarchal and matriarchal deities, and pantheistic Tartar tribes that worship numerous deities, including tigers, the figure thought to be God by most of the characters in the text is the Authority – though, he is not, in fact, a divinity. The angels Baruch and Balthamos, in sharing their knowledge of the heavenly powers with Will and Lyra, claim that the Authority is nothing other than the oldest form of self-comprehending matter: 'He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself' (AS: 33). The Authority of *His Dark Materials* set himself above other angels by claiming that 'he had created them' and gave himself the names 'God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty' (AS: 33-34). While the Authority is not God, he is godlike: according to Pullman, he is 'an ancient IDEA of God kept alive artificially by those who benefit from his continued existence' (Readerville 2001). For him, God no longer denotes a personal figure in need of

iconoclastic destruction but rather a system of ideas, a social construct that has to be attacked from an ideological point of view (Schweizer 2005: 169). Nonetheless, although he has argued that the Authority of *His Dark Materials* is a symbol for ‘the God of the burners of heretics, the hangers of witches, the persecutors of Jews, the officials who [...] flogged [...] the] girl in Nigeria who had become pregnant after having been forced to have sex’ (Readerville 2001), the names attributed to the Authority are Judeo-Christian in nature.

The depiction of the Authority in *His Dark Materials* is also drawn from ‘Christian scripture, theology, and history’ (Wood 2001: 239): the Authority instigates inquisitions in numerous worlds, he creates a Land of the Dead, a purgatory-like Hades, and he rules the Kingdom of Heaven. However, it is not the degree to which Pullman depicts the Authority as a despotic fraud that has led critics like Sarah Johnson to argue that *His Dark Materials* is ‘the most savage attack on [...] religion [...] ever’ (2000) but the fact that the names he attributes to Him are from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Jonathan and Kenneth Padley contend, however, that while Pullman applies to the Authority many Christian titles, the Authority in *His Dark Materials* ‘bears no relation to the ‘classical’ view of God shared by the ‘Abrahamic faiths’ of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, ‘except through titular misappropriations’ (2006: 331). More particularly, they claim that *His Dark Materials* undercuts the classical theistic principles of God’s omnipresence and omnipotence to such an extent that the

Authority comes to represent not the God of Christianity but Satan in *Paradise Lost* (2006: 331) – a once powerful creature, a fallen angel, and an egotistical liar. Nevertheless, although Jonathan and Kenneth Padley contend that he purposively ignores scriptural passages that proclaim God's non-corporeal existence (2006: 328-29), Pullman defends his depiction of the Authority by highlighting the fact that in the Bible itself, in the Book of Genesis, 'God walks around with Adam and Eve; they can see him. [...] Then he gradually withdraws', until by the Book of Daniel, 'he's called the Ancient of Days – in other words, he's 'shown growing older' (Cooper 2000: 355). Even though their arguments are cognisant of the fact that the theology of *His Dark Materials* negatively represents Christianity by subtle reconstructions of its traditional doctrines, Padley and Padley fail to recognize that this in itself is Pullman's intention: to (mis)represent the God of Christianity for his own purposes.

Pullman challenges the dominant Judeo-Christian theology of a benevolent, omnipotent God, as well as its myths of Creation and Fall, through his Gnostic representation of the God of Christianity and by accurately quoting Christian scripture against itself. According to Robert Davis, the presence of this compound Romantic-Gnostic heresy is evident throughout *His Dark Materials*, positioning it in 'a lineage of Gnostic difference that is a recognized trope of the English Protestant imagination' (2007: 122).

Like Blake's Urizen, Pullman's Authority is a usurper of the material universe: ruling through oppression and falsehood, he is essentially a despot, who, due to his inconceivable age, has to delegate much of his work to a regent, Metatron, another tyrannical angel, who longs for totalitarian domination of the universe. Baruch tells Lord Asriel that the Authority believes that conscious beings 'have become dangerously independent' from churches that are 'corrupt and weak', and that he wants to set up 'a permanent inquisition in every world, run directly from the Kingdom' (AS: 63).

The cataclysmic overthrow of the Authority 'realizes both the Gnostic dream of a universe free from tyranny and the Romantic goal of a secular apocalypse in which the boundlessness of human desire will mark the horizon of newfound liberty' (Davis 2007: 130). Consequently, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the annihilation of the Authority comes, fittingly, at the hands not of Lord Asriel's revolutionary army but of Pullman's child protagonists. The manner in which the Authority dies emphasises his growing redundancy and meaninglessness not only to the beings of the worlds of *His Dark Materials* but also to the increasingly secularized Western culture of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries:

Demented and powerless, the aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery. [...]

Between them they helped the ancient of days out of his crystal cell; it wasn't hard, for he was as light as paper, and he would have followed them anywhere, having no will of his own, and responding to simple kindness like a flower to the sun. But in the open air there was nothing to stop the wind from damaging him, and to their dismay he began to loosen and dissolve. Only a few moments later he had vanished completely, and their last impression was of those eyes, blinking in wonder, and a sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief (*AS*: 431-32).

Despite his deicidal intentions, however, Pullman is adamant that what his story is not condemning is the impulse that is 'at the root of religion: the impulse to wonder, to celebrate' (2003, March). Therefore, because he acknowledges the need within many human beings to seek out a particular system of faith, and from this develop a religious sensibility, it is difficult to concur with Andrew Marr's assertion that 'Pullman does for atheism what C S Lewis did for God' by establishing, in and through *His Dark Materials*, a powerful and seditious 'anti-religious myth' (2002, January). On his website, Pullman writes that

The religious impulse – which includes the sense of awe and mystery we feel when we look at the universe, the urge to find meaning and a purpose in our lives, our sense of a moral kinship with other human beings – is part of being human, and I value it (2009e).

Anne-Marie Bird argues that, in and through *His Dark Materials*, Pullman presents his readers with what she describes as ‘an alternative theological vision’ (2005: 189) – a theology of Dust; while Naomi Wood contends that Dust, ‘directed by a combination of chance and consciousness, supplants a personal deity’ (2001: 253). Dust, also referred to as Dark Matter and Rusakov particles in *His Dark Materials* (SK: 90; NL: 373), is the collective term for the mysterious invisible particles that are powerfully attracted to adult human beings. Although Dust is not attracted to children, it is ‘inextricably associated with the process of physical, emotional and sexual maturation in older children’ (Davis 2007: 128): to the acquisition of knowledge and the movement of individuals from states of innocence to those of experience. Consequently, for the Church of *His Dark Materials* the existence of Dust clustering around adults is evidence of the fallout of Original Sin – ‘that something happened when innocence turned into experience’ (NL: 373); for Lord Asriel, initially at least, it is the essence of ‘all the death, the sin, the misery, the destructiveness, in the world’ (NL: 377); and, for Mrs Coulter, whose is employed by the Church to research Dust, it is the ‘physical proof’ of ‘something bad, something wrong, something evil and wicked’ (NL: 284).

The relationship between Dust and humanity is ‘symbiotic’; therefore, because Dust is ‘attracted’ to self-conscious adult experience, it will ‘either survive or perish depending on the choices made by conscious beings’ (Wood 2001: 253). In these terms, this relationship can also be thought of as constituting a quasi-Pantheistic revision of *gnosis* in terms of secular material existence. According to Pullman

Dust permeates everything in the universe, and existed before we individuals did and will continue after us. Dust enriches us and is nurtured in turn by us; it brings wisdom and it is kept alive by love and curiosity and diligent enquiry and kindness and patience and hope. The relationship we have with Dust is mutually beneficial. Instead of being the dependent children of an all-powerful king, we are partners and equals with Dust in the great project of keeping the universe alive (Readerville 2001).

The fact that Pullman has a serious interest in Gnosticism is evident in his claim that he read A D Nuttall's *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* to elucidate the relationship between Milton and Blake (2005, October), while his knowledge of the poetry of Wordsworth is clearly displayed in his introduction to the Oxford edition of *Paradise Lost* (2005: 9). However, although Danijela Petkovic argues that *His Dark Materials* gives evidence of Pullman's 'preference for [...] Wordsworthian pantheism' (2008: 97), important differences exist in how Pantheism influences, and is employed, in the writings of both authors. While Pullman endorses the interconnectedness of all matter, he does not, as Wordsworth does in his *One Life*, accept that God is immanent in all things. Furthermore, the fact that Gnosticism promotes the learning of esoteric spiritual truths, as a means for individuals to free themselves from the profanity of the material world, is antithetical to Pullman's representation of the natural world in *His Dark Materials*. He contends that his

myth [...] is Gnostic to the degree that it tells of a secret and hidden truth contradicting the official doctrines of the church, but passionately anti-Gnostic in that it celebrates the materiality of the universe. Matter loves matter – that's the basis of it (Davis 2007: 126).

Pullman is aware of the tension inherent in his writing: while he is drawn as he is to the transgressive possibilities of Gnostic theodicy, he is strongly averse to its underlying material pessimism. Any system of belief that implies that 'this world, this physical universe [...] is] a fallen state [...] marked and weakened and spoiled by sin' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2002) is anathema to him. Consequently, Pullman's Dust is not divine but material *pneuma* – elements of the universe that are in a state of conscious self-awareness. Unlike the divine *pneuma* of traditional Gnosticism, which longs to escape the corrupt material world and return to an original state of spiritual perfection in the True God, Dust is attracted to Dust – conscious matter seeking out conscious matter in a quasi-Pantheistic celebration of the interdependence of material existence, in light of the non-existence of God.

The fact that Dust is not constant but made when conscious beings 'learn and understand about themselves and each other' (AS: 520) emphasises that Dust is created, kept alive and renewed by each individual's accession to knowledge. The angel Xaphania explains to Lyra and Will, the realization of each individual's true identity involves 'thinking and feeling and reflecting, [...] gaining wisdom and passing it on' (AS: 520).

Despite the claims of Bird and Wood, Dust represents more of a philosophical than a theological vision: it is not a substitute for a personal god, and it does not have a grand Telos to which it tends. In fact, the origins of Dust are addressed in *His Dark Materials* through evolutionary theory: the physicist Dr Mary Malone muses, 'some lucky chance in our worlds long ago must have meant that creatures with backbones had it a bit easier' (AS: 461); Dust coalesced in the same way, becoming aware of itself and gravitating toward other conscious beings over tens of thousands of years (Wood 2001: 244).

While the influence of Gnosticism on Pullman is evident in his positive portrayal of the liberating effects of knowledge and the disobedience of Lyra, his atheistic revision of Gnostic and Pantheistic patterns of thought in a secular context is also found in the passages of *His Dark Materials* that deal with death. The most significant of these passages are found in *The Amber Spyglass* and give evidence of his rewriting of the Harrowing of Hell as found in the Arian creeds of the East. In the Christian version of the *descensus ad infernos*, the risen Jesus triumphantly enters Hell and liberates the dead from the subjugation of Satan (Fourth Synod of Sirmium: 359); while in Pullman's version, Lyra journeys to the Land of the Dead and frees its captives from the terror of the place prepared for them by the Authority. However, in 'keeping with Pullman's passionately professed atheism', the victory that Lyra achieves over death does not culminate in the Christian promise of an 'eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven' (Petkovic 2008: 97).

Contrary to Christian myth, and despite its concern with building a republic of heaven, ‘there is no Heaven or Hell, [...] no glorious rewards and well-deserved punishments’ (Petkovic 2008: 100) in *His Dark Materials* – just a featureless, colourless, lifeless world, where the dead are sentenced to an eternity of nothingness. Lyra frees these ghosts by enabling them to exit the Land of the Dead and become one with the material world. The quasi-Pantheistic nature of this union is evident in the assurance she gives to the ghosts:

When you go out of here, all the particles that make you up will loosen and float apart, just like your dæmons did [at the moment of death]. If you’ve seen people dying, you know what it looks like. But your dæmons en’t just *nothing* now; they’re part of everything. All the atoms that were them, they’ve gone into the air and the wind and the trees and the earth and all the living things. They’ll never vanish. They’re just part of everything. And that’s what will happen to you, I swear to you, I promise on my honour. You’ll drift apart, it’s true, but you’ll be out in the open, part of everything alive again (AS: 335).

At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra’s understanding of her own death, and the possibility it will afford her and Will to be together again, also suggests a quasi-Pantheistic afterlife where individuals are conscious and aware:

‘I will love you for ever, whatever happens. Till I die and after I die, and when I find my way out of the land of the dead I’ll drift about for ever, all my atoms, till I find you again...’

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

The purpose of Pullman’s quasi-Gnostic and quasi-Pantheistic philosophy of life and death is, principally, to challenge Christian belief in an eschatological Kingdom of Heaven. His rejection of this Christian hope is focalized by one the ghosts from the Land of the Dead, a former martyr:

When we were alive, they told us that when we died we’d go to heaven. And they said that heaven was a place of joy and glory and we should 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 us to give our lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around us, and we never knew.

Because the land of the dead isn't a place of reward or punishment. It's a place of nothing. The good come here as well as the wicked, and all of us languish in this gloom for ever, with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep or rest or peace (AS: 335-36).

After supporting Pullman's demythologization of the concept of a Kingdom of Heaven so well, Gnostic anti-materialism, in the end, is incompatible with his hope of building the republic of heaven in the here-and-now 'real' world. The principal thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with promoting a republic of heaven, independent of Telos, centres on the here-and-now 'real' world, because Pullman wants 'to emphasize [...] the absolute primacy of the material life, rather than the spiritual or afterlife' (2000, November). According to him, although chance and change are characteristics of the world we live in,

the physical world is our home, [...] where we live, we're not creatures from somewhere else or in exile. This is our home and we have to make our homes here and understand that we are physical too, we are material creatures, we are born and we will die [...]. There ain't no elsewhere, this is where we are. [...] We have to [...build] a republic of heaven in this world' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2002).

Despite the fact that John Cornwell claims that *His Dark Materials* ends with 'the toppling of the kingdom of heaven and the establishment of a celestial atheistic

republic' (2004), the text's replacement for the loss of a Heavenly Kingdom is the very Miltonic 'Paradise within' (X. 1478). Furthermore, while *His Dark Materials* challenges Christian mythology and theology, its envisaged republic is still a *heaven* in some sense. In fact, Lyra tells her dæmon Pantalaimon that people 'have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient, and [...they've] got to study and think, and work hard, all of [...them], in all [...their] different worlds' (AS: 548) if they are to build the republic of heaven. Therefore, somewhat ironically, *His Dark Materials*' secular humanist republic of heaven upholds values that are in keeping with those of Christianity: 'freedom, loyalty, courage, compassion, duty, sacrifice and a sense of calling' (Watkins 2004). Pullman, himself, believes that 'we need all the things that heaven meant [...] all the things that the kingdom of heaven used to promise [...] but failed to deliver': things such as 'joy', 'a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives', and 'a connection with the universe' (Hitchens 2002: 63).

While its republican validation of liberty, egalitarianism and partnership is inspiring, *The Amber Spyglass* concludes with the last two lines of the entire series indicating that the task of building the republic of heaven is only beginning – it is nothing more than an internalized value system in the minds of Lyra and others. Consequently, it appears that *His Dark Materials* is a text that is more concerned with undermining the basis of Christian belief than working out in detail an alternative secular humanist vision for humanity – like Milton's, Pullman's republicanism involves the eloquent rehearsal not of a republican argument but of republican values.

The Ecclesiastical Magisterium of *His Dark Materials*

All too often in human history, churches and priesthoods have set themselves up to rule people's lives in the name of some invisible god (and they're all invisible, because they don't exist) – and done terrible damage. In the name of their god, they have burned, hanged, tortured, maimed, robbed, violated, and enslaved millions of their fellow-creatures, and done so with the happy conviction that they were doing the will of God, and they would go to Heaven for it (Pullman 2009e).

Pullman stands at one end of a process that extends back through Romantic iconoclasts to seventeenth-century dissenters: while once the word 'God' signified a powerful and vivid presence in people's lives, this God has been dying for centuries, and 'all that is left is the machinery of repression and self-aggrandisement' created in his name – 'the universal Church of Lyra's world, or the various churches of our world' (Hatlan 2005: 88-89).

In *His Dark Materials*, it is suggested that dangerous and corrupt possibilities arise when people manipulate and misuse the delicate but innate link that exists between the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of government, particularly when knowledge is used as the basis for the egocentric perpetuity of power. The angel Xaphania contends that 'the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity' (AS: 506), while Stanislaus Grumman, tells Will, that:

Every advance in human life, every scrap of knowledge and wisdom and decency we have has been torn by one side from the teeth of the other. Every little increase in human freedom has been fought over ferociously between those who want us to know more and be wiser and stronger, and those who want us to obey (SK: 335).

Like Shelley's *Queen Mab*, *His Dark Materials* calls for a reassessment of religious norms: even King Ogunwe declares, 'No kings, no bishops, no priests. [...] We intend to be free citizens of the republic of heaven' (AS: 222). However, sharing a similar republican agenda with Rousseau, Paine and Godwin, but influenced directly by *Paradise Lost* and the writings of the iconoclasts Blake and Shelley, Pullman, through *His Dark Materials*, explores the possibility of establishing a new world to replace tyrannical systems of ecclesiastical oppression.

When individual religious impulses become organised into faith collectives, religion, for Pullman, becomes reprehensible. Similar to *Queen Mab*, *His Dark Materials* depicts a world in which religions and churches are the enemies of human freedom: their codified morality the roots of social evil and political despotism. According to him, *His Dark Materials* condemns religious authority because 'churches of every sort and of every religion have [...established] a very good way of controlling human lives for reasons that are ultimately selfish and cruel' (2003, March). He contends that, by 'borrow[ing] an authority from a non-existent God [...] in order to wield power over human lives' (2003, March), organised religions force individuals

to act as subjects rather than responsible citizens. Like the writings of Milton, Blake and Shelley, *His Dark Materials* displays 'great cynicism' regarding the role of churches in society: it suggests that through 'corruption' and the 'destructive use of power' churches 'seduce [...] people from the truth' (Scott 2005: 97).

While Pullman argues that every single religion that has a monotheistic god ends up persecuting other people, the condemnation in *His Dark Materials* of what he generally describes as 'the evils of organised religion' is, in fact, directed more specifically at ecclesiastical authority (2003, March). It is difficult to read *His Dark Materials* without coming to the conclusion that 'Christianity is a powerful and convincing mistake that has adversely shaped Western culture ever since it was first adopted' (Tucker 2003: 128). Nevertheless, Andrew Leet argues that, while it possesses 'a form similar to that of Anglicanism or Catholicism', the Church depicted by Pullman is actually 'non-Christian in nature', as 'there is no mention of a Christ figure or incarnation and there is no sense of the Holy Spirit at work' (2005: 176). Although it is true that the Church of *His Dark Materials* is without a Christ, it is depicted as such so as to suggest that the premise upon which it holds power is questionable: the fact that there is no substantive empirical evidence given to legitimize theocratic authority in *His Dark Materials* enables the text to exhibit a deep scepticism about divine power as it is employed by ecclesiastical religion.

Aside from the explicit references to Christian scripture, doctrine, symbolism and ritual, the Church of *His Dark Materials* is Christian in numerous ways. Its

depiction of a Church that not only sanctioned the burning of heretics and the hanging of witches (*AS*: 393) but also ordered the deaths of children (*NL*: 91) is an allusion to the Spanish Inquisition and to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564); the titles attributed to the most dangerous agencies of the church in *His Dark Materials*, most notably, the College of Bishops, the Society of the Work of the Holy Spirit, and the Consistorial Court of Discipline (*NL*: 31), are reminiscent of contemporary branches of the Christian Churches – namely, Roman Catholicism’s College of Cardinals and its Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, as well as Calvinism’s Consistorial Court of the Church of Geneva. However, while the Church of *His Dark Materials* appears to be ‘identical’ in many respects to real-world Christian churches, its ‘evolution and history’ have taken different courses. In *His Dark Materials*, during the Reformation,

the Holy See was transferred from Rome to Geneva; at some point John Calvin became pope. Somehow this, and a number of other premises, most of which Pullman leaves unstated, form a syllogism whose conclusion is a world united under the rule of a powerful repressive Church Triumphant that is fatally divided into warring factions of bishops and prelates banded in orders whose names are at once bland, grand, and horrible (Chabon 2005: 4).

What is certain is that the Church of *His Dark Materials* embodies the most negative aspects of authority, oppression and exploitation, as it illegitimately controls a world it seeks not to understand but to exploit. As with the writings of Rousseau, Paine

and Godwin, the extent of the insidious effect ecclesiastical religion has over matters relating to interests of authority in society is stated clearly in text. In *His Dark Materials* 'every philosophical research establishment' has to include on its staff 'a representative of the Magisterium', the office of authority representing the official teaching of the Church, to act as 'a censor' to suppress news of 'heretical discoveries' (SK: 130). In truth, these 'heretical' discoveries are no more than advancements in secular knowledge, both scientific and existential; nonetheless, they threaten the status quo by enabling 'conscious beings' (AS: 63) to become 'dangerously independent' (AS: 63) from a church that believes human beings should obsequiously 'obey, be humble and submit' (SK: 335).

The power of the Church to impose intellectual conformity is also evident in the discussion between the Master and Librarian of Jordan College regarding two 'renegade' theologians, Barnard and Stokes, whose postulation of 'the existence of numerous other worlds' is 'silenced' as an 'abominable heresy' (NL: 31-32). Furthermore, in a conversation with Mrs Coulter, Dr Cooper, who works at Bolvangar, states that the Consistorial Court of Discipline refuses to 'allow any other interpretation than the authorized one' (NL: 275). Therefore, the distinction between interpretations that are 'heretical' and those that are 'authorized' demonstrates 'that scholarship can become an instrument of institutional authority', complicit in the disciplining of human experience (King 2005: 120) – in effect, the Church of *His Dark Materials* is one that rules out all form of 'otherness' (Bird 2005: 193).

In *His Dark Materials*, the insidious influence that ecclesiastical authority wields over society is shown to negatively affect its own inner structures. The abolition of a papacy does not mark the collapse of hierarchical oppression but rather promotes the growth of a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, each vying to be the most powerful agency of the Magisterium. In *The Amber Spyglass*, it is stated that the Magisterium is always 'alive with speculation' (60): one branch saying one thing, another investigating something else, but each trying to keep its discoveries secret from the rest. The structural fragmentation of the Magisterium promotes not only a climate conducive to 'bitter rivalry' (NL: 31) and to the intentional withholding of knowledge but also a despotic ambition to control the dissemination of this knowledge so as to secure oppressive governance over people's lives. Essentially, ecclesiastical religion in *His Dark Materials* is depicted attempting to prevent individuals moving from states of innocence to those of experience through sophistry and obfuscation.

The dangerously inhumane ideology behind the ecclesiastical tyranny in *His Dark Materials* finds its most extreme expression, however, in the Church's doctrines of pre-emptive penance and absolution, which involve its ministers securing atonement for a sin not yet committed through 'scourging and flagellation' (AS: 75). The purpose for this 'intense and fervent' reparation is to build up 'a store of credit', as it was 'sometimes necessary to kill people, for example: and it was so much less troubling for the assassin if he could do so in a state of grace and was granted absolution in advance' (AS: 75). The fact that Father Gomez is sent by the

Consistorial Court of Discipline to kill Lyra so as to prevent her enacting a second Fall emphasises that the Church 'believes in murder without mercy in its desire to keep individuals ignorant' (Padley and Padley 2006: 326).

This inhumane ideology is also evident in the actions of Father Hugh MacPhail, the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, particularly in his willingness to sacrifice his own life in order to destroy Lyra's and preserve the status quo (AS: 361-69). MacPhail's readiness to sacrifice his life in attempting to kill Mrs Coulter and Lyra is a perverse enactment of the biblical declaration in John 15. 13, that greater love hath no man than he lay down his life for another. The fanatical, almost inhuman, quality of MacPhail's actions is depicted dramatically in the following extract from *The Amber Spyglass*:

The President turned to look over his shoulder, and [...] his expression [...] was so fixed and intense that he looked more like a mask than a man. His lips were moving in prayer, his eyes were turned up wide open as the rain beat into them, and altogether he looked like some gloomy Spanish painting of a saint in ecstasy [...It was obvious] what he intended: he was going to sacrifice himself (364-65).

His Dark Materials depicts how malicious and tyrannical designs manifest through artifice and often in the form of religious authority. It is asserted in the text that, in all time and in all ages, churches have tried to suppress every natural impulse so as

to 'control, destroy, [and] obliterate' (SK: 52) individual consciousness. It is also clearly stated that 'it's death among [...] people [...] to challenge the church' (SK: 47), and those contemplating rebellion would do well to remember that 'killing is not difficult for them' (AS: 217). Furthermore, while the oppressive nature of organised religion is evident in the interaction of Church and State in *His Dark Materials*, it is also suggested that, in this seemingly balanced power alliance, priestly interest will always remain stronger than that of the State: that 'the Church's power over every aspect of life [is] absolute' (NL: 31). Those in positions of ecclesiastical power in *His Dark Materials* maintain their status through lies, propaganda, cruelty and deceit. In essence, the text depicts a 'debased church plagued by a Machiavellianism of the basest kind' (Scott 2005: 96). In *His Dark Materials* the Christian concept of the Kingdom of Heaven is presented as nothing more than an authoritarian attempt to secure control over people's lives for the benefit of a self-serving Church hierarchy.

Similar to the writings of Milton, Rousseau and Shelley, *His Dark Materials'* critique of ecclesiastical religion focuses on anticlericalism. The clerics of the Magisterium in *His Dark Materials* are portrayed as either refusing to allow for the derivation of satisfaction from worldly existence, discernible in the figure of Father Hugh MacPhail and the brutal discipline he imposes on his body (AS: 73), or, conversely, consenting to the excessive gratification of the senses, as is evident in the character of Otyets Semyon Borisovitch, a priest of the Holy Church, whose slovenly physical appearance bears all the marks of over-indulgence (AS: 106).

However, the real force of the critique of ecclesiasticism in *His Dark Materials* lies in the disturbingly strong sense of sexual perversion, particularly with regard to paedophilia, that is associated with the ministers of the Church (Fitzherbert 2002). This perversion is made explicit by Mrs Coulter in her refusal to turn Lyra over to Church authorities. It is the language that she uses in protecting her daughter that illustrates unambiguously how she perceives the clerics of the Magisterium:

If you thought for one moment that I would release my daughter into the care - the *care!* - of a body of men with a feverish obsession with sexuality, men with dirty fingernails, reeking of ancient sweat, men whose furtive imaginations would crawl over her body like cockroaches – if you thought I would expose my child to *that* [...] you are more stupid than you take *me* for (AS: 342-43).

There are other less explicit passages in *His Dark Materials* that contain the same, or other, perversions, though they may at first seem innocuous. This fact is nowhere more evident than the meeting of Will and Otyets Semyon Borisovitch (AS: 101-07). From the moment of their initial encounter, when Borisovitch's 'restless eyes [...moved] over Will's face and body, taking everything in' (AS: 101), a subtle, but sinister, nuance is initiated. This acts as the catalyst for a textual ambiguity with regards to the exact nature of the priest's interest in the boy. In fact, it is difficult to read Borisovitch's offer of respite and hospitality to the young traveller as an act

motivated by altruism as there are just too many words in the text that suggest a sense of violation.

The extent to which Borisovitch's interaction with Will is characterised by excessive and inappropriate physical contact is evident in the fact that it made Will feel 'hideously uneasy' (*AS*: 105) and uncomfortable enough to feel 'the need to distract' (*AS*: 103) the priest at every opportunity. However, it is the moment of Will's departure from Borisovitch's house that accentuates the adult's infringement of the child's personal space most strikingly: 'the priest's hands moved behind Will's shoulders, and then Semyon Borisovitch was hugging him tightly and kissing his cheeks, right, left, right again [...Will's] head was swimming, his stomach lurching, but he didn't move. Finally, it was over' (*AS*: 107).

While it would seem important to remember that the thematic and philosophical concerns of a text are not always or necessarily synonymous with those of its author, it is clear that Christianity and its ecclesiastical denominations are legitimate targets of attack for Pullman. In an interview with Bel Mooney he claimed that a

large proportion of what the Christian Church has done has been intolerant, cruel, fanatical, whichever part of the spectrum you look at, whether it's the Inquisition with the Catholics burning the heretics, or whether it's the other end of the spectrum – the Puritans in New England, burning the witches or

hanging the witches, rather. Wherever you look you see intolerance, cruelty, fanaticism, narrow-mindedness. It's an ugly, ugly spectacle (2003: 125-26).

Although Pullman's use of the phrase 'a large proportion' implies that he accepts that Christian churches are not entirely corrupt or without redemption, this qualification must be seen in light of the fact that there are no positive depictions of the Church or its clerics in *His Dark Materials*. In fact, his biased presentation of the clerics of the Magisterium is something that Pullman himself has commented upon: in an interview with Huw Spanner he stated, 'I accept that if I'd had more time to think about it, no doubt I would have put in a good priest here or there, just to show they're not all horrible' (2002).

Regardless of Pullman's comments, however, reviewers, critics and scholars alike are united in their conviction that the extent of his critique of ecclesiastical authority is one that should not be underestimated. L S Hitchens argues that Pullman's text 'should carry a strong warning, pointing out [...its] deliberate anti-Christian propaganda' (2002), while Michael Dirda goes further, stressing that, in another time, *The Amber Spyglass* 'would have made the [Catholic] Index' of prohibited texts, and in still another era 'gotten its author condemned to the stake as a heretic' (2000).

Despite the fact that *His Dark Materials* contains various historical and contemporary truths relating to the Christian churches' detrimental involvement in

human affairs, it is the *extent* of its attack on ecclesiastical religion that highlights Pullman's failure to develop his text beyond a sensationalised critique of institutional religion. In fact, because it can be argued that *His Dark Materials* is unreasonably prejudiced and intolerant of the Christian churches and their clerics, it is, to a certain extent, a bigoted text: 'bigoted' being defined as 'unreasonably prejudiced and intolerant' (*OED*: 125).

Contrary to Carole Scott's contention that Pullman differs from Milton and Blake in refusing to create a 'clear division between figures of good and evil' (2005: 97-98), the most contentious aspects of *His Dark Materials*' critique of ecclesiastical authority centres on its bigoted depiction of the clerics of the Magisterium. Claudia Fitzherbert argues that 'nearly all of the villains [...] have moments of pathos [...] or greatness, except for the priests' (2002), while Nick Thorpe (2002) asserts that the 'almost pantomime evil of the churchmen conspicuously lacks 'the redeeming features' or 'the nuanced psychology' that make the heroes of *His Dark Materials* so compelling. Even with regard to the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline's attempted homicide and suicide the episode, while certainly dramatic, is also dehumanized to a point where the obscenity of the act is threatened by a sense of histrionics. However, although the Church portrayed becomes so over-the-top wicked that 'it threatens to tip into caricature' (Wagner 2002), it does not degenerate into farce. Nicholas Tucker offers the clearest summation of the gravity of the situation when he argues that like the caricatures found in 'the atheistic propaganda

of the pre-war Soviet Union' the characters in *His Dark Materials* suggest that 'good clergy have never existed' (2003: 127).

Despite Pullman's claims to the contrary, the portrayal of ecclesiastical authority in *His Dark Materials* is 'propagandist' (Padley and Padley 2006: 328). Even readers who do not know that he calls himself an atheist will sense that the 'systematic voicing of anti-ecclesiastical views' in *His Dark Materials* comes with 'authorial approval' (Schweizer 2005: 164). In this regard, Pullman falls foul to the very theocracies that he publically admonishes. He claims that his charge against theocracies, 'atheist or religious', is their 'failure to read properly', because 'the act of true reading is in its very essence democratic': there is no 'final, unquestionable, unchanging authority' (2004). Despite his republican aspirations, Pullman has written *His Dark Materials* undemocratically, by deliberately misrepresenting that which he wishes to critique: ecclesiastical religion. His stereotypical, caricatured and propagandist depictions of the Christian Churches and its clerics give evidence of what he claims is the hallmark of a 'theocratic cast of mind': the 'tendency to be 'reductive' (2004).

While it is true that Pullman draws upon the real lexis and imagery of Christianity to effect a confusion of fantasy with actual organisations (Gooderman 2003: 159), 'the fictive Church of *His Dark Materials*, described in an orthodox manner as the Body of God, is similar enough to the Christian Churches for characterizations to be pointed' (Wood 2001: 243). In fact, his 'use of an ecclesiastical discourse [...] ties

the reader too closely to the conventions of realism' (Gooderham 2004: 159) and, therefore, inhibits a free range of imaginative responses beyond Christianity. Fundamentally, the Church of *His Dark Materials* combines the most 'authoritarian' and 'formidable' aspects of 'Protestant Calvinism and Roman Catholicism' (Wood 2001: 243).

Pullman's negative representation of Christianity by subtle reconstructions of traditional doctrines is an attempt to fulfil not only his principal contentions about reality, that Christianity is inherently evil, but also his stated aim of undermining the basis of Christian belief. However, while he has been labelled 'a heretical fantasist' (Eccleshare 2000); a 'militant atheist', (Mann 2000), and an 'anti-Christian fundamentalist' (Thorpe 2002), Pullman argues that the reason that the form of religion in *His Dark Materials* 'seems to be Christian' is because 'that is the world [...he] is 'familiar with' (2000, November). Nevertheless, although his challenge to the authority of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism might have been revolutionary at the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, in the twenty-first, it seems somewhat anachronistic: particularly, as it is a time when Christianity, at least in the Western world, appears to be on the decline, and when one of the other great religions is so prominent in world events.

Like many Romantic writers, Pullman employs his work to question the authority of spiritual and temporal powers that 'police and exploit the boundaries between innocence and experience' – often in the name of a deity (Wood 2005: 17). Through

his own doctrine of the transformative power of storytelling, Pullman, like many Romantic anti-clericalists, strives to forward his own agenda by attempting to shape a text that evokes a republican spirit in its expressed distaste for authoritarian political systems, especially ecclesiasticism. However, his desire to write a secular mythology for our time is thwarted by his inability to imbue his critique of ecclesiastical religion with any real degree of balance.

By leaving the text open to the allegation of being unreasonably prejudiced, intolerant, and narrow-minded in the presentation and development of its thematic concern, Pullman not only allows the discerning reader to feel aggrieved but also enables *His Dark Materials* to be read as a bigoted text. While the fundamental values upon which Pullman's attempts to develop story purport to be sympathetic to equitable values, the philosophical critique of institutional religion evident in *His Dark Materials* is characterised by a savage indignation. This raises questions as to whether its judgement upon ecclesiastical religion displays the same sense of justice, fairness and impartiality that it deems absent from the institutions it so readily challenges. Like Satan's speeches in Milton's epic poem, Pullman's text gives evidence of 'calumnious Art | Of counterfeted truth' (*Paradise Lost*, V. 767-768);

Chapter Three: *His Dark Materials* and Romanticized Childhoods

In light of Pullman's acknowledged indebtedness to the works of Blake, this chapter examines the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience in *His Dark Materials*. It argues that, in the text, childhood is not a state of idealized innocence, nostalgically sealed from the world of adulthood; that moral and sexual awareness, symbolized by the fixed form of dæmons, is inextricably linked to adult consciousness; and, that childhood innocence and adult experience are shown to be two dialectically contrary but essential states of the human soul. Due to the influence of Romantic and Blakean constructions of childhood on Pullman, this chapter includes a section that considers Romantic reinterpretations of the Judeo-Christian and Miltonic narratives of the Fall in secular contexts; the Quintessential Child of Wordsworthian poetics; and, Blake's treatment of sexuality and morality in *Visions*, as well as the shifting perceptions of childhood and adulthood in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

Wordsworthian and Blakean Constructions of the Child

In *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, Abrams claims that the course of Western thought since the Renaissance has been one of progressive secularization. However, he also contends that

secular thinkers have no more been able to work free of the centuries-old Judeo-Christian culture than Christian authors were able to work free of their inheritance of classical and pagan thought. The process [...] has not been the deletion and replacement of religious ideas but rather the assimilation and reinterpretation of religious ideas, as constitutive elements in a worldview founded on secular premises (1971: 67-68).

Consequently, according to Abrams, there is a loose but unifying tendency among writers of the Romantic period to reinterpret traditional Judeo-Christian patterns of thought – Fall, redemption, and the restoration of paradise – in a secular context. In particular, he argues that Romantic poetry secularizes the Miltonic myth of the Fall by reconfiguring the relationship between man and God as a dialectical interchange between the perceiving self and the objects of nature (1971: 68). By internalising the narrative of *Paradise Lost*, and substituting the powers of the mind for its divine and Satanic energies, Romantic poetry outlines a pattern of ‘Natural Supernaturalism’, a phrase made famous by Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1834), in which an initial period of innocence (naturalism) is followed by a fall into conflict before a return to higher innocence (supernaturalism) is possible in the end. The mind’s eventual restoration with the powers of nature constitutes a higher state of consciousness that verges on the transcendental, because it comes to an awareness of the workings of nature and the affinity between subject and object.

This pattern of Natural Supernaturalism, as well as the influence of *Paradise Lost*, is evident in Wordsworth's 'Prospectus' to *The Recluse* (1814), where he rewrites Milton's poem by situating its story within the human mind, thereby establishing its status as the founding myth of human psychological development. In Wordsworthian theodicy, paradise may be regained in this world, but only when the 'discerning intellect of Man' is 'wedded to this goodly universe | In love and holy passion' (2009: 53). This theodicy is developed further in *The Prelude* (1805), where he argues for a recovery of the innocent vision of childhood in the rational adult. From the opening lines, where the poet claims that 'the earth is all before [...him]!', to his decision against taking for his epic 'some old | Romantic tale by Milton left unsung', the poem is suffused with Miltonic allusions (2000: 375-79). In the poem, the young Wordsworth falls from a childhood in which his sense of self is merged with that of nature, into a period of adult division and alienation fuelled by his experiences of the city of London and his disillusionment with the outcome of the French Revolution, and from that, again, into a period of redemption, where the rupture between self and nature is healed through the reclaimed visionary innocence of childhood.

Wordsworth's poetry gives evidence of his Romantic interest in childhood and children as subjects not just for theodicy but also for literature. In fact, he is the 'founding father' (Myers 1999: 45) of a 'Quintessential Child' (Plotz 2001: 4) that has come to symbolize 'idyllic childhood innocence' (Nodelman 1992: 31). While the diverse representations of childhood in the literature of the period make

‘nonsense of a single Romantic type of child’ (Plotz 2001: 4), Wordsworth’s writing is part of a discourse that is ‘intelligible, self-consistent, and effective’ at reproducing a Quintessential Child, which figures not only in his poetry but also in imaginative writings up to and beyond children’s literature of the Golden Age, but especially male-authored fantasy fiction. This Quintessential Child, the creation not just of Wordsworth but also of Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey and others, contributes to a literature that seeks to reconstruct childhood as ‘an ordered, legible, normative and moralized text in its own right’ (Richardson 1994: 141).

The Romantic discourse of the Quintessential Child is ‘*honorific*’ (Plotz 2001: 24). While ‘Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood’ (1807) famously depicts the Child ‘trailing clouds of glory’ that are dimmed only by the ‘prison house’ of experience (2000: 299), *The Prelude* privileges the Child as the emanation of nature and the embodiment of autonomous, unitary consciousness. The identification of the Child with nature universalises and essentializes it as a figure of spiritual wholeness outside of culture, where it can achieve transcendental awareness of the sublime – unitary visions of a world replete with meaning:

For him, in one dear Presence, there exists

A virtue which irradiates and exalts

Objects through wildest intercourse of sense (2000: 398).

The 'Presence' of nature as an emanation of the Child's own power of feelings, however, contrasts with its absence in those of adults who have fallen out of communion with it. The Quintessential Child, the recognizable figure about whom Wordsworth writes, is identifiable, therefore, not only by its abstraction from culture but also by its 'difference' to adults. In *Lyrical Ballads* the autonomous, unitary consciousness of the Child of 'We are Seven', who denies death any dominion over her resolutely intact family, contrasts sharply with the limited, empirical observations of the unnamed adult narrator.

'We are Seven' presents the unimaginative narrator's confrontation with the intuitive vision and imaginative instinct of the Child, who insists that there are seven in her family. The rational narrator, obsessed by mathematical accuracy, counters with the assertion that two of them are dead; therefore, there are five. His frustration serves to indicate the distance between himself and the Child, who has developed an intimate relationship with the natural world that is not disturbed by such considerations as death. The poem depicts the difference between the educated, sophisticated adult narrator, who appears with conventional, learned expectations about nature, and the Child, whose power and wisdom stems from feelings and beliefs to which the adult has no access:

'How many are you then,' said I,

'If they are two in heaven?'

The little Maiden did reply,

‘O Master! we are seven!’
‘But they are dead; those two are dead!’
Their spirits are in heaven!’
‘Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, ‘Nay, we are seven!’ (2000: 85).

The disconnection between the Quintessential Child and the adult also has a darker aspect that lays bare the inadequacies of the pervasive clichés of ‘idyllic childhood innocence’ (Nodelman 1992:31) so often associated with Wordsworth’s poetry. ‘Lucy Gray’ (1798) and ‘Ruth: or The Influences of Nature’ (1800) juxtapose the seeming tranquil innocence of childhood with the emotional emptiness that results from parental ineptitude and adult betrayal: in the former, the Child, who is sent out by her father into a storm with a lantern to light her mother through the snow, is scared and lost (2000: 149-50); while in the latter, the Child, who is abandoned by her father at the age of six after he takes a new mate, is homeless and mentally ill (2000: 148-51). The fact that both poems end with the traumatic death of the Child makes less tenable generalizations about the idyllic nature of Romantic childhood innocence. In fact, the very concept of ‘innocence’ is much less appealing to Wordsworth than to Wordsworthians. As Lane Copper claims in *A Concordance to the Poems of William Wordsworth* (Plotz 2001: 56), the word appears rather infrequently in his poetry: of the thirty-seven instances of ‘innocence’ and the ninety-two of its near variant ‘innocent’, the majority – seventy-three of one

hundred and twenty-nine – refer to adult legal and moral innocence rather than to childhood innocence.

While the Quintessential Child is idealized as the emanation of nature and the embodiment of autonomous, unitary consciousness, its position outside the limitations of culture and the social sphere of dialectical exchange is, paradoxically, *decontextualizing* (Plotz 2001: 24), rather than honorific. The opening lines of ‘The Solitary Reaper’ (1805) first published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), is indicative of an ‘aesthetically embalmed apartheid [...that] erases social context, intersubjective communion, and sequesters an iconically framed child in emptiness from which superfluous companions, social landmarks, and psychological [...] faculties have been whittled away’ (Plotz 2001: 63). In fact, the poem structurally embodies this fact with the Child’s singleness inhabiting every possible foot of iambic tetrameter:

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain (2000: 319).

This decontextualization also differentiates the Quintessential Child from 'real' children. The Child's lack of corporeality in 'The Danish Boy' – as well as in 'Lady Gray' and 'Ruth' – where its presence is but 'shadow' and 'Spirit' (2007: 124-25), suggests not so much a 'blank mystification where childhood might be' (Plotz 2001: 85), or that there are 'no children in Wordsworth's poetry' (Liu 1989: 605), but rather that the Child is an agent of adult pedagogy and self-improvement: devoid of its own agency and hypotized as different in kind, the Child signifies what the adult is not.

The fact that the Child is not only a symbol of the creative power of the mind but also a repository of that very same power objectifies it and strips it of subjectivity. While its identification with nature can be figured in dynamic terms, this process of idealization, where the Child is identified as the source of adult creativity, is a form of nostalgia that upholds perpetual childlikeness as the height of human consciousness. The perceived superiority of childhood to adulthood embedded in the construct of the Child is evident in Coleridge's hope that the 'wisdom & graciousness of God in the infancy of the human species' might providentially shape 'its beauty, its long continuance' (1973: 330).

This Child, forever arrested in childhood, is the product not just of the vocational interest that Romantic writers developed in invoking childhood as a permanent ontological state but also of what Jerome J McGann calls the Romantic Ideology:

It should be plain from the association of childhood with spirit and mind, that childhood operates along with *imagination* and *nature* within romantic discourse as the third autonomous power immune to the pressures of history. If ideology may be thought of as an orphan idea that does not know its own mother, that fails to acknowledge the material conditions from which it springs, then it is no surprise that the Romantic discourse managed to produce a glorified solitary essential child at the same time that it relegated most historical children to obscurity (Plotz 2001: 24).

The defining characteristic of the Quintessential Child is neither its unity with nature nor its embodiment of autonomous consciousness nor its innocence but its exclusion in a realm of difference that produces childhood as a fixed ontological state distinct from adulthood. Under the broad cultural influence of Romantic writers like Wordsworth, childhood, though once a time barely distinguishable from adolescence and even adulthood, had by the beginning of the nineteenth century generally come to be perceived as a unique and distinctive phase in human existence.

Running contrary to the development the Quintessential Child, however, was a countermovement, evident in the works of Blake – and those of female writers, such as Wollstonecraft, Barbauld and Edgeworth – that presented the child within a continuous process of development toward adulthood. While the importance of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to later Victorian and Edwardian cultists of childhood cannot be overstated, its language of innocence and experience, and its

nostalgic idyllic imagery, are elected, principally, by those who ignore its critique of innocence.

The children of *Songs of Innocence* share a number of similarities with the Quintessential Child, most significantly identification with nature and visionary innocence. In 'Nurse's Song', nature envelops the children both visually and verbally: they are connected to the natural world both illustratively, as they play beneath the tree in the illumination, and figuratively, as their 'voices [...] are heard on the green', their 'laughing is heard on the hill' (1-2). However, while they are children of nature, they are not emanations of it, as is the Quintessential Child. In *Songs of Experience*, there is less direct reference made to nature, through vocabulary, imagery or allusion.

Blakean experience is characterized by a fall into disharmony with the natural world. In one of Blake's early Prophetic Books, *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* (1793), the fall into experience constitutes a movement away from dependence on the objective material world of nature and natural law toward Eden, where there is only pure energy manifesting itself in form. The fall into experience in the poetry of Blake is not, therefore, accompanied by the same sense of nostalgia for childhood that marks the Wordsworthian loss of innocence.

The visionary innocence of Blake's chimney sweep is also reminiscent of the Child of 'We are Seven'. He sees no contradiction between the physical shearing of little

Tom Dacre, 'who cried when his head | That curl'd like a lamb's back was shav'd', and the continued existence of his curls in his mind's eyes: 'Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare | You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair' (4-8). Therefore, while *Songs of Innocence* summons visions of bucolic, idyllic settings, it is more a condition of mind. Again, however, although *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* presents childhood as a time of visionary consciousness, it also challenges adults through 'ironic counterpoint' (Thacker 2002: 20) to question the desirability of innocence. While the parents in *Experience's* 'Chimney Sweep' go to 'praise God & his Priest & King' (11), they send their child to work in a degraded trade. They justify their actions by claiming that, because the child seems 'happy [...to] dance & sing' (9), they have done him 'no injury' (10). The poems of *Songs of Experience* have a greater satirical edge because the 'wisdom' of adulthood is frequently equated with oppression: parents, nurses and priests regularly and ruthlessly attempt to control children.

Similar to the poetry of Wordsworth, Blake's poems do not suggest that childhood is an ontological state cosseted in idyllic innocence. The fact that *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* frequently depicts challenges to and distortions of childhood emphasises that children are not sealed from the world of adult experience. In fact, *Songs of Innocence* contains images of children not only at play but also threatened with danger: brute beasts alarm innocent lambs ('The Tyger') and slavery imprisons the negro ('The Little Black Boy'). While 'HOLY THURSDAY' celebrates a mass of charity-children singing praises to God under 'the high dome of Pauls', it also

denounces the regimentation and exploitation of these children by ‘aged men, wise guardians of the poor’ (4, 11).

Where the children of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* differ from the Quintessential Child is in terms of their individuality and agency. Blake’s child is not abbreviated. While *Songs of Experience* may be bleaker than *Songs of Innocence*, there is no real sense of nostalgia in the poems for the lost innocence of childhood: the unavoidable passage from innocence to experience sees the blissful naïveté of childhood give way to the harsh realities of adult responsibility. The critique of childhood innocence in *Songs of Experience* centres on its incompleteness: the fact that it is a partial and imperfect state, defined more by what it is not than what it is. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* presents childhood as continuous rather than distinct from adulthood; its developmental and integrated view of childhood focuses on multiple states of personal and social becoming rather than a unitary state of being, such as that identifiable in the Quintessential Child. This is the principal point of difference between Blakean and Wordsworthian constructions of childhood. In the works of Blake, from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* through to the long prophetic books, identity is always subject to alteration and redefinition – to what Saree Makdisi describes as an ‘unequivocal challenge to the very concept of the sovereign individual’ (2003: 41).

In Blake’s poetry sex is one of the principal arenas of struggle and revolt against oppression and fixed identity. It not only challenges respectable society and cynical

experience but also those who would attempt to fix childhood as a disempowered ontological state. In fact, Blake is 'as serious about sex, as he is serious about the child; and for the same reason. [...] He knows that as sex is the buried part of our [...nature], so the child is the buried part of the man' (Kazin 2010). In Blake's poetry, sex is frequently framed in enjoyment and wonder, as it is in 'The Question Answered':

What is it men in women do require?

The lineaments of Gratified Desire.

What is it women in men do require?

The lineaments of Gratified Desire (1998: 114).

In *Visions of the Daughter of Albion*, sexual love is posited as a possible revolutionary impulse against the tyranny of the material world. In the poem, Oothoon, who is in love with the chaste and righteous Theotormon, is violently raped by the lustful Bromion. After she is raped neither man wants anything to do with her. What the poem suggests, however, is that if Theotormon was not chained by the expectations of society, he may have had a healthy relationship with Oothoon. The poem presents sexual love as a means to transgress not only inhibitive moral laws but also barriers to self-emancipation. It implies that rationalist epistemologies that desire power, including the sexual ethics promulgated by churches, give rise to cycles of oppression, where true desire is enslaved under hierarchal and patriarchal dominion:

'Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent.

If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me;

How can I be defild when I reflect thy image pure? [...]

O Urizen! Creator of men! mistaken Demon of heaven!

Thy joys are tears! thy labour vain, to form men to thine image.

How can one joy absorb another? are not different joys

Holy, eternal, infinite! And each joy is a Love. [...]

Father of Jealousy, be thou accursed from the earth!

Why hast thou taught my Theotormon this accursed thing,

Till beauty fades from off my shoulders darken'd and cast out,

A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-entity.'

'I cry: Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!

(2008: 47. 2. 14-16, 5. 3-6, 7. 12-16).

Songs of Innocence and of Experience extends the condemnation of the defilement of sexual love to include the fetishization of sexual innocence. In 'The GARDEN of LOVE', the speaker claims that where he used 'to play' is barred and shut, with "'Thou shalt not" writ over the door' (6). His sexual awakening is repressed by 'priests in black gowns [...] walking their rounds, 'binding with briars' his 'joys & desires' (4, 11-12). Unlike the Quintessential Child, the children of *Songs of*

Innocence and of Experience have agency: their sexual awakening symbolizes their transition to adulthood and their rejection of oppressive morality.

That sexual consciousness is a marker for the movement from childhood to adulthood is evident in the contrasting imagery of 'Nurse's Song' from *Songs of Innocence* and 'NURSE'S Song' from *Songs of Experience*. The dialectic between the two poems offers a series of shifting perceptions between innocence and experience. The poems represent pivotal times in human growth: the socially formative early years of play and the burgeoning sexual awareness of adolescence. It is the children's changing perceptions of the nurse that signifies their transition into adulthood. The fact that the illumination that adorns 'Nurse's Song' depicts the nurse as a continuation of the circle that the children make while playing emblematically suggests the strength of the bond between them. However, although they recognize her nurturing nature and are happy to include her in their childhood games, after they reach adolescence she becomes a renunciatory figure, a debaser of their newfound sexuality and the pleasures that life can afford. The children's altered ontological states are symbolically mirrored in the natural world: the roots of the tree near which the children play in the *Songs of Innocence* serve to contrast with the more delicate and winding vine that climb up the archway in the illumination that adorns 'NURSE'S Song'. The grapevine, which forms an archway over the children, suggests that the doorway to the world of adulthood is sexuality.

Within *Songs of Experience* there are poems that read as visions of sexual innocence though they mark a transition to experience. In 'The Little Girl Lost', Lyca's innocence is evident in her wanderings, which allow her to hear 'wild birds' song' (16). However, after she becomes lost in 'the southern clime' (9), she falls asleep and is carried to safety in a cave by 'beasts of prey' (34). This journey takes the little girl to a place of delight, symbolic of the end of innocence and the beginning of sexual knowledge; by embracing the possibilities and freedoms of the imagination, she goes beyond the constraints of adult reasoning:

Leopards, tygers, play
Round her as she lay,
While the lion old
Bow'd his mane of gold

And her bosom lick,
And upon her neck
From his eyes of flame
Ruby tears there came;

While the lioness
Loos'd her slender dress,
And naked they convey'd
To caves the sleeping maid (51-62).

In the subsequent poem in the collection, 'The Little Girl Found', Lyca's parents, who are initially described as 'tired and woe-begone' (5) from fear of their daughter's sexual awakening, are shown to come to an acceptance of the naturalness of her maturation, after looking into the eyes of the lion who carried their naked daughter to the caves:

They look upon his eyes
Fill'd with deep surprise;
And wondering behold
A Spirit arm'd in gold.

On his head a crown;
On his shoulders down
Flow'd his golden hair.
Gone was all their care.

'Follow me', he said;
'Weep not for the maid;
In my palace deep
Lyca lies asleep' (33-44).

The juxtaposition of these paired poems with another from *Songs of Experience*, 'A Little GIRL Lost', also enables the collection to comment on the deformative

influences of morality. The poem, which is clearly analogous to the biblical myth of the Fall, tells of a little girl who enjoys love without shame or 'fear' (15) until she is suddenly confronted with her father, whose 'loving look, | like the holy book' (23-24) drives her to 'terror' (25). Blake's savage parody of 'The Lord's Prayer' – in 'Doctor Thornton's Tory Translation, Translated out of its disguise in the Classical and Scotch Languages into the vulgar English' – supports such a biblical reading of *Songs of Experience*, as it provides further evidence of his aversion to theocratic morality:

'Our Father Augustus Caesar, who art in these thy Substantial Astronomical
Telescopic Heavens, Holiness to Thy Name or Title, & reverence to thy
Shadow [...] Give us day by day our Real Taxed Substantial Money bought
bread; deliver from the Holy Ghost whatever cannot be taxed' (Glen 1983:
63).

Blake's poetry refuses to impose limitations upon human freedom. It offers a challenge to adults who would wish to prevent children from gaining worldly knowledge, as well as repressive religious reasoning that would protect the material wealth and interests of tyrannous institutions. However, although it suggests that moral codes are apparatuses of oppression, and that human beings are not innately moral, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* cautiously avoids creating a moral system of its own beyond acknowledging that the human condition is a state of dialectical contraries. While the 'fearful symmetry' (4) of the Tyger in *Songs of*

Experience inspires terror, no moral judgement is made on the creature itself; it just exists – a fact that includes all its ambiguity, as well as all the wonder and dread the child experiences before it. The rhetorical questions in the last stanza of the poem, which compare the Tyger to the ‘tender’ (7), ‘meek’ (15) and ‘mild’ (15) Lamb of *Songs of Innocence*, emphasise the importance not of moral orders but of contraries to an understanding of life:

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee? (17-20).

While the central theme of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is that of the child who is lost and found, the predominant archetypal pattern is the dialectic between innocence and experience. The songs present experience as the natural replacement for innocence, rather than as the agent of its inevitable corruption. They conceive of experience not so much as the extinction of innocence but rather as the complication, even enrichment, of it. Although innocence co-exists with a more empowered experience, it is depicted as a crucial ontological state in facilitating the possibility of higher innocence: the integration of contraries. Only when innocence is revisited in the context of adult experience can it become an ideal to be fought for in a Fallen world. Consequently, the songs offer not only a series of shifting perceptions between the two contrary states of the human soul but also an ontological synthesis

of childhood and adulthood that suggests the importance of both Edenic innocence and worldly experience if we are to realize our full potential as human beings.

Paul Youngquist contends that, while Blake describes innocence and experience as two contrary states of the human soul, he ‘resists the inclination [...] to resolve them into ‘a third and higher state’; he claims that ‘organized innocence’ or ‘higher innocence’ is primarily the product of ‘sentimental’ readings of Blake’s poetry (1986: 57). Although it is true that Blake never uses the term ‘higher innocence’, he not only comes close to it in writing ‘unorganized innocence: an impossibility!’ (2007: 404) in the margins of the manuscript of *The Four Zoas* but also turns to such a solution in his creation of Beulah, the earthly paradise of *Jerusalem*. In fact, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is, in its totality, the symbol of Blakean ‘higher innocence’: a unified work of two contraries, offering shifting perceptions between the imagined worlds of its author’s desires. While the speaker of the ‘Introduction’ of *Songs of Innocence* is an adult, his viewpoint is informed by visionary innocence rather than fallen empiricism – he embodies the integration of contraries the collection strains toward:

Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me: [...]
‘Piper, sit thee down and write

In a book, that all may read'.
So he vanis'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed,
And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear (1-4, 13-20).

In *Songs of Experience*, the longing for visionary or imaginative innocence does not represent nostalgia for childhood; it suggests, for want of better words, a third or higher state of integrated contraries. The 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience* transforms the passivity and perfect harmony of the 'Introduction' to *Songs of Innocence* into a poem of agency, vitality and power: the calming, childlike iambs and the simple, rhymed couplets of *Innocence* are replaced with the irregular, accented meter and complicated, interlocking schema of *Experience*.

Such a formal contrast is also evident between 'The Lamb' in *Songs of Innocence* and 'The Tyger' in *Songs of Experience*; however, while the gentle rhythms and simple meter of the former are mirrored in the latter, its comforting question-answer dynamic is not. 'The Tyger' problematizes inquiry by resisting resolution or answer – a fact evident in the poem's powerful rhetorical question: 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' (25). Although *Songs of Experience* is more fragmented and less perfectly unified than *Songs of Innocence*, it challenges readers to recapture the

imaginative freedom of childhood in adult experience and, in so doing, transform both ontological states. To see possibilities in a fallen world is the unspoken hope, the higher innocence, of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees,

Calling the lapsed Soul,
And weeping in the evening dew;
That might control
The starry pole,
And fallen, fallen light renew! (1-10).

In light of this examination of Romantic and Blakean constructions of childhood, the following three sections of this chapter analyse childhood innocence and adult experience, as well as the dialectic between both of these ontological states, in *His Dark Materials*.

The Absence of Nostalgia for Childhood Innocence in *His Dark Materials*

You can't go back to a sort of innocence and this is part of my quarrel with the children's literature of the Golden Age; the sort of nostalgia for childhood that you find so powerfully in Barrie and Milne and people. I don't care for that. I don't like it. I'd rather say something positive about growing up. It's a fascinating [...] powerfully disturbing phase in the lives of all of us (Pullman 2003, March).

Like imaginative works of the Romantic period, *His Dark Materials* reinterprets traditional Judeo-Christian patterns of thought, Fall, redemption, and the restoration of paradise, in a secular context. According to Michael Chabon, Pullman has examined this 'broken universe of ours, in its naturalistic tatters, and has indicated, like Satan pointing to the place on which Pandemonium would rise, the site of our truest contemporary narrative of the Fall: [...] children' (2005: 3). In his introduction to the Oxford University Press edition of *Paradise Lost*, Pullman stated,

as I played with it, my story resolved itself into an account of the necessity of growing up, and a refusal to lament the loss of innocence. The true end of human life, I found myself saying, was not redemption by a nonexistent Son of God, but the gaining and transmission of wisdom. Innocence is not wise, and wisdom cannot be innocent, and if we are going to do any good in the world, we have to leave childhood behind (2005a: 10).

This conviction that adulthood, and the possible wisdom it may bring, is a natural replacement for childhood innocence is also at the centre of his quarrel with children's literature of the 'Golden Age'. He claims that in the works of writers like 'Barrie and Milne' there is a powerful and unhealthy 'nostalgia for childhood' that 'refuses to say anything positive about growing-up' (2003, March). While texts of nostalgia are often highly ambivalent forms of social criticism, they can present the past as utopian, thereby laying the foundations for a radical critique of the present as a departure from a more authentic past. It seems that the works of Barrie and Milne vex Pullman because he believes they present the world of childhood as preferable to the 'fallen' world of adulthood.

Similar to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *His Dark Materials* promotes the necessity of losing childhood innocence and gaining adult experience. The dialectic between these two states in the text is not that of a dichotomous ontology. As in 'Infant Sorrow', malign aspects of the adult world are shown to adversely affect the lives of the children in *His Dark Materials*: the young lives of the text's two child protagonists, Lyra and Will, are not cosseted from the harsher complexities of adulthood. Throughout the text, both children are exposed to physical, emotional and intellectual deprivation – in fact, in the initial chapters of *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* both Lyra and Will are shown to suffer from adult neglect, cynicism or self-interest (Chabon 2005: 13).

Lyra is initially depicted in the guise of an orphan entrusted to the care of a group of well-meaning male Scholars, who are unsuitable foster-parents. She suffers physical deprivation even in the most ordinary aspects of her childhood: the text states she washed ‘with hard yellow soap in a chipped basin, where the water that struggled out of the taps was warm at best, and often flecked with rust’ (NL: 76). While it would be fallacious to claim that the world of childhood in *His Dark Materials* is completely devoid of depictions of physical comfort and security, these depictions are generally associated with the world of adulthood:

The only light in the [Retiring Room] came from the fireplace, where a bright blaze of logs settled slightly [...] sending a fountain of sparks up the chimney. [...] It was a large room, with an oval table of polished rosewood on which stood various decanters and glasses, and a silver smoking-mill with a rack of pipes. On a sideboard nearby there was a little chafing-dish and a basket of poppy-heads (NL: 4).

Despite living most of her life in the College, the text states that Lyra had never seen the Retiring Room until the day she decided to ignore the restrictions placed upon a person’s access to it: ‘only Scholars and their guests were allowed in’ (NL: 4). By chapter three of *Northern Lights*, it is clear that her childhood ‘home’ (NL: 70) is unsuitably equipped to deal with not only her physical but also her emotional needs as a growing child. Her own lack of a sense of familial belonging is evident in her awareness of her artificial upbringing:

She knew the Scholars well: the Librarian, the Sub-Rector, the Enquirer and the rest; they were men who had been around her all her life, taught her, chastised her, consoled her, given her little presents, chased her away from the fruit trees in the Garden; they were all she had for a family. They might even have felt like a family if she knew what a family was, though if she did, she'd have been more likely to feel that about the College servants. The Scholars had more important things to do than attend to the affections of a half-wild, half-civilised girl, left among them by chance (*NL*: 18-19).

While the text states that 'she knew the Scholars well' (*NL*: 18), Lyra's childhood is characterised, markedly, by emotional retardation caused by an absence of familial security and authentic parental support. The fact that the Scholars remain unnamed in the extract and are addressed only in relation to their position within the College emphasises not just the lack of familial integration between Lyra and the Scholars but also her lower status as a child. In warning Lyra how she should act around the Master, Mrs Lonsdale, the Houskeeper, tells her, 'speak when you're spoken to, be quite and polite, smile nicely and don't ever say *Dunno* when someone asks you a question' (*NL*: 65). Although the expectation is that they act in *loco parentis*, the Scholars fail to provide a real sense of kinship or family for Lyra – that they represent a male-dominated, academic community is not lost on the Scholars themselves:

‘You have been safe here in Jordan, my dear. I think you’ve been happy. You haven’t found it easy to obey us, but we are very fond of you, and you’ve never been a bad child. There’s a lot of goodness and sweetness in your nature, and a lot of determination [...] We have taught you some things here, but not well or systematically. Our knowledge is of a different kind. You need to know things that elderly men are not able to teach you, especially at the age you are now. You must have been aware of that’ (NL: 70).

There are times during her life at Jordan College, nonetheless, when Lyra does experience moments of belonging that come close to genuine familial integration, particularly when she is removed from the world of the Scholars and in the company of the College servants. Mrs Lonsdale, for example, fusses over her in true parental fashion, providing her with a sense of motherly concern:

‘The number of times you’ve been told about going out there ... Look at you! Just look at your skirt - it’s filthy! Take it off at once and wash yourself while I look for something decent that en’t torn. Why can’t you keep yourself clean and tidy...Look at the state of this wardrobe! You en’t hung nothing up for weeks! Look at the creases in this [...] God bless me, girl, your knees - look at the state of them [...] God knows, [why] I even care about you, you give me little enough reason and no thanks’ (NL: 64-64).

The degree to which Lyra is aware of her need for adult role models or confidantes to support her in her movement from childhood into adulthood is unclear and only becomes apparent after her initial meeting with ‘the beautiful and young’ (*NL*: 66) Mrs Coulter – whom, at this stage, she knows not as her mother but as an interesting and exciting woman at odds with the male-dominated world of Jordan College. In fact, when, in a conversation with Father Heyst, the College Intercessor, Lyra is asked if she is lonely at Jordan College, living as she does among ‘a company of elderly Scholars’ (*NL*: 53), she claims that she is not. However, there is a strong sense that her answer is tempered by her desire to free herself from an awkward situation with the adult Scholar, whom she knows not well, and, as such, the sincerity of her answer is questionable.

Intellectually, too, Lyra’s life at Jordan College fails to develop her obvious aptitude for complexity of thought; for while she did know about ‘atoms and elementary particles, and anbaromagnetic charges and the four forces and other bits and pieces of experimental theology’, her ‘knowledge was patchy’ (*NL*: 83). Lyra’s intellectual development is also not accorded the attention it so rightly deserves. The reason for this is because she is a child and female. Instead of a systematic and intensive approach to her education, the Scholars at Jordan are more concerned with ‘chasing her away from the fruit trees in the Garden’ (*NL*: 19) – a thinly veiled analogy to the biblical myth of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The result is that

Lyra's knowledge had great gaps in it, like a map of the world largely eaten by mice, for at Jordan they had taught her in a piecemeal and disconnected way: a Junior Scholar would be detailed to catch her and instruct her in such-and-such, and the lessons would continue for a sullen week or so until she 'forgot' to turn up, to the scholars relief. Or else a Scholar would forget what he was supposed to teach her, and drill her at great length about the subject of his current research, whatever that happened to be (*NL*: 83).

In a very Blakean sense, Lyra's eagerness to leave Jordan College is inherently linked to her desire not only to escape the deprivations of her childhood but also to grow-up and embrace adulthood. She knows that her childhood has been devoid of a female role model to counteract the acutely patriarchal nature of the College, and she recognizes that, because 'it won't be long [...] before [...]she] will be a young woman, and not a child anymore' (*NL*: 70), she would benefit from adult 'female company and guidance' (*NL*: 70) at this crucial stage of her development. While she receives half-hearted lessons, which she constantly attempts to avoid, from the Junior Scholars at Jordan College, and while she learns the lessons of street-life, the text states that she fails to receive the other kinds of lessons that are 'so gently and subtly given' through the keeping of female company: 'how to wash one's own hair; how to judge when colours suited one; how to say no in such a charming way that no offence was given; how to put on lipstick, powder, scent' (*NL*: 84).

In the opening chapters of *Northern Lights*, Lyra, the ‘coarse and greedy little savage’, who is ‘half-wild, half-civilized’, passing her childhood playing on the streets because she feels she is ‘at home there’ (NL: 19-54), becomes increasingly drawn to adulthood. She readily agrees to the Master’s request that she consider the possibility of leaving the College to live under the tutelage of Mrs Coulter – in fact, on hearing Mrs Coulter’s offer of support, the text states that Lyra ‘could hardly sit still [...] and [...] felt a current of warmth flow into her’ (NL: 72). While Lyra ‘wondered how much she’d miss’ (NL: 72) her life at Oxford, it is not a serious concern, as she departs Jordan College in the company of Mrs Coulter with little regret for the life she is leaving – in effect, she has no sense of nostalgia for the childhood she leaves behind.

Whereas the opening seventy-five or so pages of *Northern Lights* detail Lyra’s childhood experiences, *The Subtle Knife* sketches Will’s in a brief thirteen-odd. This is unsurprising, as Will does not really have a childhood in *His Dark Materials*: his young life is characterized by adult responsibilities. His father vanished on an expedition to the Arctic, long before Will was able to remember him, and, because he has no siblings to share responsibilities with, he has been left to care for his invalid mother. Despite the extreme difficulties that Will faces, in having to forego being a child, in acting the parent, his relationship with his mother is characterized by love and not resentment. However, while the bond that exists between Will and his mother is the most important aspect of his life, the degree to which he is only partially successful in his attempt to assume adult responsibilities and take care of

his mother is evident in the appearance of Mrs Parry. Her physical dishevelment bears witness to the seriousness of their predicament: her 'clothes smelt slightly musty, as if they'd been too long in the washing machine before drying', and her 'untidy hair' complemented make-up that was 'on one eye but not the other' (SK: 2).

Will's is an unhealthy and dysfunctional home-life. The fact that adult responsibilities have encroached upon Will's childhood is apparent in everyday domestic realities. The brief description of the exterior of the house that Will shares with his mother, at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife*, is telling in this regard: the house, which is situated on a loop of a road in a modern estate of a dozen identical dwellings, is described as the 'shabbiest' by far (SK: 4); the front garden 'was just a patch of weedy grass' because the shrubs that had been planted earlier in the year had 'shrivelled and died for lack of watering' (SK: 4). Inside the home, the deprivation that Will experiences is evident in the fact that he must fend for himself in all manner of ways and at all times: 'it was dark, and [...he] was hungry. He made himself baked beans on toast and sat at the kitchen table wondering' (SK: 5). The absence of any familial dimension to the preparation or sharing of food – considering the ritualistic significance of meals – poignantly symbolizes the degree to which Will's childhood does not offer him sustenance.

Similar to Lyra, Will has no adult confidant to turn to for support; however, unlike Lyra, he is also in need of a different kind of support: the kind that would alleviate the burden of his adult responsibilities. Unfortunately for Will, the modern housing

estate on which he lives lacks a sense of community, and there is evidence that his and his mother's isolation is the norm. This middle-class and suburban 'loop of road' is a neighbourhood in name only: 'in the last of the evening light the man across the road was washing his car, but he took no notice of Will, and Will didn't look at him. The less notice people took [of each other] the better' (SK: 4). The fact that the man remains unnamed, that he does not give even a cursory glance or an acknowledging grunt to Will, suggests that, as a child, at least biologically, Will lacks both status and significance.

It is the mystery surrounding his father's disappearance, while exploring the Arctic, which propels the plot of *The Subtle Knife* and acts as the catalyst for Will's departure from home. When he and his mother begin to receive frequent and threatening enquiries from unnamed officials of a sinister and mysterious authority, eager to obtain a batch of letters they know his father had written to his mother detailing important information relating to his northern expeditions, Will realises that he must set out to find 'the answer to some of his questions' (SK: 13). However, there is dissimilarity between Will and Lyra's preparations for their departures from their childhood homes. Unlike Lyra, who is caught up and swept along by the intoxicating 'grown-upness' and 'glamour' (NL: 75) of the endless possibilities and status her new adult life might afford her, Will's mind is preoccupied with finding 'somewhere safe for his mother to stay' (SK: 13) during his absence. Will's difficulty in securing a safe refuge for his mother is due, in no small part, to the suspicions their way of life has raised among the neighbours, and the

fact that 'he had no friends to ask' (*SK*: 13). In the end, he has no choice but to leave his mother with his elderly piano teacher, whom it seems is only too glad of the company and the chance to make use of her absent daughter's room. In effect, Will has no nostalgia for the childhood he leaves behind because he departs as an adult in all but age.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of both Lyra and Will's childhood is the pervasiveness of violence in their young lives. In fact, Cynthia Grenier argues that 'given their high quotient of [...] violence' the volumes should be considered 'strictly adult fiction' (2001: 40-44). From the very first chapter of *Northern Lights* there emerges a vocabulary that relies heavily on verbs, adverbs and adjectives of violence and conflict: 'wild', 'grimacing', 'clenched', 'fury', 'bloody', 'scalping', 'fiercely', 'growled' and 'savage' (*NL*: 3-17). Like Blake, Pullman, for the most part, domesticises violence in the ordinary rhythms and settings of life and work. This is clearly evident in Mrs Lonsdale's treatment of Lyra: for, while the Housekeeper undoubtedly cares for Lyra, there is, nonetheless, a degree of unnecessary violence in her physical handling of the child:

'God bless me, girl, your *knees* - look at the state of them'. 'Don't want to look at nothing', Lyra muttered. Mrs Lonsdale smacked her leg. 'Wash', she said ferociously. 'You get all that dirt off'. 'Why?' Lyra said at last [...] Another smack on the leg [...] She seized the flannel and rubbed Lyra's knees so hard she left the skin bright pink and sore, but clean (*NL*: 65).

While this kind of socially sanctioned violence against children is relatively restrained in nature in the text, more severe forms of violence are also depicted. In *Northern Lights*, Lord Asriel's reaction to finding Lyra in the Scholars' Retiring Room is characterized by abusive physicality:

He seized her wrist and twisted hard [...] The girl twisted in pain, but [...grimaced] to prevent herself from crying out louder, the man bent over her frowning like thunder [...] She sank to the floor [...] Her uncle looked down with a restrained fury, and she didn't dare meet his eyes [...] Lyra relaxed a little, and allowed herself to feel the pain in her shoulder and wrist. It might have been enough to make her cry, if she was the sort of girl who cried. Instead she gritted her teeth and moved the arm gently until it felt looser (14-15).

This is an act of violence perpetrated by a adult against a child, a father against his daughter – for although Lyra believes Lord Asriel to be her uncle, he is fully aware at this point in the text that she is his child, conceived out of an illicit affair with a married woman, whom Lyra later discovers to be Mrs Coulter. Lyra's exposure to violence is not confined to the physical abuse she is subjected to at Jordan College, however. Her experiences of the world outside the gates of the College are often depicted through scenes of violence. Most of these experiences take place in and around the 'wharves along the waterfront' of the canal basin and centre on the lives

of the gyptian families who live there (NL: 54). The extent to which violence is portrayed as an everyday occurrence is evident in the hostility that exists between Lyra and the gyptians on account of her unfailing exploitation of the 'endless opportunities for provoking warfare' between them, and, in particular, her 'capture of [one of their] narrow boat[s] the year before' (NL: 54). It is presumable that this was one of the two occasions on which Ma Costa, a relative 'queen among the gyptians', had 'clouted Lyra dizzy' so much so that Lyra was convinced she 'could snap your backbone like a twig' (NL: 54-56).

His Dark Materials gives expression to the cultural truism that a significant amount of violence against children is actually tolerated and even approved of (Greenblat 1983) due to the perception that children are subordinate and subservient to adult authority. However, in portraying violence against children, the text not only mediates the uncomfortable reality of domestic and societal violence against children but also destabilises nostalgic idealizations of childhood: it suggests that while childhood can be a sanctuary from the harsh realities of adulthood it is not necessarily preserved from them. The opening chapter of *The Subtle Knife* emphasises this dramatically in its depiction of the gruesome death of an intruder who breaks an entry into Will's house in search of information regarding his missing father. The intruder dies at the hands of Will:

Then the door began to move. Will waited till the [intruder] was framed in the open doorway, and then exploded up out of the dark and crashed into the

[man's] belly [...] The man could have dealt with Will, because he was trained and fit and hard, but the cat was in the way, and as he tried to move back he tripped over her. With a sharp gasp he fell backwards down the stairs, crashing his head brutally against the hall table [...] Will heard a hideous crack, and didn't stop to wonder about it: as he swung himself down the banisters, leaping over the man's body that lay twitching and crumpled at the foot of the flight [...] He couldn't get out of his mind the crack as the man's head had struck the table, and the way his neck was bent so far and in such a wrong way, and the dreadful twitching of his limbs. The man was dead. He'd killed him (*SK*: 7-8).

The explicit nature of this passage, expressed in phrases such as 'sharp gasp', 'crashing his head brutally', 'hideous crack', 'twisted and crumpled' and 'dreadful twitching', suggests that violence can destroy forever associations between childhood and feelings of security: as Will flees his home, turning away from it with a 'shudder', he is convinced not only of the need to embark on a quest to find his father but also that his life will never be full of 'childish' games again, and whatever the world is to hold in store for him, it has 'to be better than what he'[s] just left' (*SK*: 12-16).

Inseparable from Pullman's aversion to nostalgic depictions of childhood is his cynical attitude toward those who would argue for the 'natural' innocence of children: he claims that 'children have a fairly bleak view of each other and

themselves' and 'it's only sentimental adults who think kids are sweet and angelic' (Parsons and Nicolson 1999: 130). In *His Dark Materials*, children do not have a natural inclination towards virtuousness. From the very beginning of *Northern Lights* the fact that children do not come 'trailing clouds of glory' (Wordsworth 2000: 299) is evident even in the subtlest details of characterisation: Lyra's friendship with the young children of the servants of Jordan College, but in particular with the kitchen boy, Roger, sees them frequently acting as willing accomplices to mischievous behaviour – 'clambering[s] over the College roofs [...] to spit plum-stones on the heads of passing Scholars or to hoot like owls outside a window where a tutorial was going on', or simply enjoying the freedom of 'racing through the narrow streets, or stealing apples from the market, or waging war' (NL: 35-36).

While literatures of nostalgia, the kind that Pullman associates with writers like Barrie and Milne, often present children as innocents, *Northern Lights* situates Lyra within a 'rich seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties', as leaders of gangs of children that delight in the physical combat and tactical victories of 'deadly warfare' (NL: 36). Although the consequences of these child 'wars' reverberate less on the wider world than those of their adult counterparts, because they occur within the context of the children's 'play', they are just as political.

In the third chapter of *The Subtle Knife*, entitled 'A Children's World' (57-73), a darker side to children's culture is evident in the hedonistic, mob-mentality of the

denizens of Cittàgazze – a republic of children. In the chapter, negative aspects of child social relations emerge as the children firstly attempt to kill a cat and, later, turn on Lyra and Will. In the first instance, the image of a group of children screaming in hate as they attempt to club a cat with sticks is as disturbing as it is animalistic:

Somewhere in the little streets beyond the café, something was screaming. [...]

Twenty or so children were facing inwards in a semicircle at the base of [...a] tower, and some of them had sticks in their hands, and some were throwing stones at whatever they had trapped against the wall. At first Lyra thought it was another child, but coming from inside the semicircle was a horrible high wailing that wasn't human at all. And the children were screaming too, in fear as well as hatred. [...]

Then both Will and Lyra saw what it was: a tabby cat, cowering against the wall of the tower, its ear torn and its tail bent (SK: 113).

In fact, this chapter subverts Wordsworthian Romanticized concepts of childhood innocence by depicting children not as innocents but as 'uncouth, even feral – as the absence of knowledge and of culture rather than the presence of purity, love or virtue' (Wood 2005: 17). Lyra, too, is initially described in *His Dark Materials* not only as a 'coarse and greedy savage' but also as a 'barbarian' and a 'half-wild cat' (NL: 35-37). Her unsentimental attitude towards an injured rook that she wants to

‘kill’ and ‘roast’ (39), after she finds it on the roof of the library at Jordan College, early in *Northern Lights*, undercuts any sense that she has a natural affinity for nature, life or virtue because she is a child. However, what her thoughts also suggest is her amorality.

Pullman’s description of Lyra’s reaction to the rook shares similarities with his account – in a review of Blake Morrison’s book *As If* – of a gibbon he witnessed at a zoo catching and tearing apart a screaming starling: ‘I can’t forget the crackings and snappings, the tough white sinews, the lolling shrieking head, and most of all the curious innocent concentration of the ape’ (1997: 6). Pullman’s portrayal of the gibbon as ‘innocent’ presents the ape as clinical, unemotional but, above all, amoral. It is precisely this amorality that separates Lyra from the world of adulthood: childhood innocence insulates her both from the moral or immoral decision-making that often comes with adult knowledge and experience and from assuming authority for herself and her actions. In its focus on amorality, an ‘aspect of innocence that few adults consider’, *His Dark Materials* questions not only ‘understandings of what innocence is but also [...] assumptions about what it means, whether it is, in fact, a quality to be valued’ (Wood 2005: 15).

The series of experiences that the protagonists of *His Dark Materials* go through encourages them to re-imagine the things that are closest to them: to see growing-up as something natural; moral decision-making as a consequence of the acquisition of knowledge; and, adulthood as a more empowered ontological state than childhood.

Lyra and Will's ever-increasing self-awareness is characterized by a desire for the experiences and knowledge that will give some recognition to the endowments and potentials that have had no opportunity for realisation in their childhoods. In the absence of genuine and sustained adult support or concern, the child protagonists of *His Dark Materials* suffer from physical, emotional and intellectual deprivations. As with *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, these deprivations, along with the pervasiveness of violence in their young lives, differentiate the text from literature that presents childhood as an idealised period of sanctuary, when children are immune to the uncertainties, starkness and manipulation of the fallen adult world.

Lyra and Will's journeys away from their initial homes are, fundamentally, journeys away from lost or absent childhoods. They have no sense of nostalgia for the lives they leave behind, for this would, literally, entail a 'severe homesickness' or 'a painful yearning to return home to [...a] Golden Age' (*OED*: 930) of childhood that *His Dark Materials* refuses to acknowledge – for them, childhood has certainly not been 'the most beautiful [...thing] in all the world' (Alcott 2008: 553). In these respects, it is difficult to agree wholeheartedly with Michael Chabon's assertion that *His Dark Materials* ends with 'an invocation of the glory, and a lamentation for the loss, which [...] is irrevocable, of the idea of childhood as an adventure, a strange zone of liberty, walled perhaps, but with plenty of holes for snakes to get in' (2005: 14).

Dæmonizing Childhood Sexuality in *His Dark Materials*

Something happened in the world when innocence changed into experience
(NL: 373)

The value Pullman places on wisdom owes a great deal to his reading of von Kleist's essay, 'On The Marionette Theatre'. Like von Kleist, he reads the biblical and Miltonic myths of the Fall not as stories of some 'unfortunate rebellion which has to be regretted and lamented [...] but of a very important and brave step forward towards achieving what it is that we're capable of [as human beings], which is wisdom' (2003, March). As Pullman argued in his *South Bank Show* interview, 'we have to go through [...] a stage of discovery, rebellion, estrangement, self-consciousness in order to become wise. Unless we do that we can't become wise; we're stuck in a sort of childhood' (2003, March). For Pullman, therefore, it seems that the undesirability of childhood centres on children's relative lack of wisdom: their inability to make judicious decisions based on personal knowledge and experience.

The *modus operandus* used by Pullman to reify the transition from childhood to adulthood in *His Dark Materials* is the dæmon. According to him, it is the 'richest idea' he has ever had, as it enables him not only to solve the narratological problem that 'when you have two characters in a scene it's easier to write the scene [...] when they can talk to each other' but also to say 'something about the business of being human' (Watkins 2002). *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* show that

dæmons are the opposite sex to their humans (*SK*: 223), that they die with their humans' deaths (*AS*: 175), that they cannot be separated from their human counterparts but in death (*AS*: 298), and that their changing forms in childhood represent the personalities and moods of their human partners (*AS*: 483). Nevertheless, while dæmons can shape-shift, as children enter puberty and move into adulthood, they are also shown to settle into one shape, a shape that defines their humans' personalities and identities thereafter.

The fact that *His Dark Materials* describes children's dæmons as having the ability to change shape is an acknowledgement of the myriad of possibilities present in childhood: that there are positive attributes and attractive qualities to childhood as an ontological state. The powerful potential for change represented by children's daemons is clearly depicted in *Northern Lights* in the description of Pantalaimon's attempts to escape forcible separation from Lyra through the process of intercision at Bolvangar – in fact, Pantalaimon's changes are also reminiscent of Blake's Orc in the Preludium to *America: A Prophecy* (2008: 51. 2. 13-17):

Pantalaimon [...] twisted free of those hateful hands – he was a lion, an eagle; he tore at them with vicious talons, great wings beat wildly, and then he was a wolf, a bear, a polecat – darting, snarling, slashing, a succession of transformations too quick to register, and all the time leaping, flying, dodging from one spot to another as their clumsy hands failed and snatched at the empty air (278).

If the motility of children's dæmons in *His Dark Materials* suggests potentiality, however, it suggests effectively only one kind: that of realising adulthood. As the Able-Seaman Jerry explains to Lyra, dæmons 'have always settled, and they always will. That's part of growing up. There'll come a time when you'll be tired of this changing about, and you'll want a settled kind of form' (NL: 167). In fact, it is also suggested in the text that the constant flux of identity in children, symbolised by the ever-changing nature of their dæmons, is indicative of their lack of certainty about who they are as individuals and their place in the world. In the same conversation he has with Lyra, as they sail towards Trollesund, the main port of Lapland, the Able-Seaman claims that

there's compensation for a settled form [...]

Take old Belisaria [he tells her]. She's a seagull, and that means I'm a kind of seagull too. I'm not grand and splendid nor beautiful, but I'm a tough old thing and I can survive anywhere and always find a bit of food and company. That's worth knowing, that is. And when your daemon settles, you'll know the sort of person you are (NL: 167).

According to Pullman, it is not until dæmons 'finally settle into one form' that individuals really know 'something about [...] being human', especially with regard to 'what they want out of life' (Watkins 2002). The fact that he sees 'fixed' adulthood as preferable to the instability of childhood is evident in his claim that *His Dark Materials* provides 'a very good picture of the difference between children and

their infinite potentiality and plasticity and swift changingness of moods, and the greater certainty, the greater strength and authority and power that adults have' (2003, March).

By associating the settling of dæmons with the acquisition of knowledge about being human, *His Dark Materials* also makes a case for moral consciousness as a distinguishing feature of adulthood. However, in light of the secular humanism of the text, as well as the influence of Blake on Pullman, morality in *His Dark Materials* has no connection to religious codes; rather, it is relative, coming, in Blakean terms, 'from within; from the Imagination and not from without' (Farrell 2009). Nonetheless, to utilize the Imagination is to be preoccupied with morality, as the Imagination not only enables individuals to shape the realities they perceive but also provides them with a common human bond, a means of sympathy, of identification with an 'other' (Whitney 2009).

As stated in previous chapters, dæmons are initially presented in *Northern Lights* as animal creatures that represent the inner voice of their human counterparts. However, while often described as the physical manifestations of human souls (Chabon 2005: 6; Matthews 2005: 129; Traviss 2005: 85), dæmons might be better thought in terms of human consciences – the concept of 'souls' runs antithetical to the secular humanism of the text. As early as the third chapter of *Northern Lights*, there is evidence of the link between dæmons and morality. In the following extract, which centres on Lyra's exploration of the College crypts with Roger and her

disturbing of dead scholars' graves, the liminality of adolescence between childhood and adulthood manifests itself in the amorality of Lyra's actions and the latency of her moral conscience represented by her Pantalaimon:

She and Roger made their way into the crypt below the Oratory. This was where generations of Masters had been buried, each in his lead-lined oak coffin in niches along the stone walls. A stone tablet below each space gave their names. [...]

She reached up and lifted the nearest skull gently out of its resting place.

'What are you doing?' said Roger. 'You en't supposed to touch 'em!'

She turned it over and over, *taking no notice* [my italics]. Something suddenly fell out of the hole at the base of the skull. [...]

'It's a coin!' said Roger, feeling for it. [...]

He held it up to the candle and they both gazed wide-eyed. It was not a coin, but a little disc of bronze with a crudely engraved inscription showing a cat.

'It's like the ones on the coffins', said Lyra. 'It's his dæmon'. [...]

She tried to play a trick on some of the dead Scholars, by switching around the coins in their skulls so they were with the wrong dæmons. Pantalaimon became so agitated at this that he changed into a bat and flew up

and down uttering shrill cries and flapping his wings in her face, but she *took no notice* [my italics] (NL: 49-51).

Over the course of *His Dark Materials*, Lyra's gradual acquisition of knowledge and experience is shown to result in the development of moral consciousness. One of the most powerful examples of this is her behaviour towards Tony Makarios, the child severed from his dæmon in *Northern Lights* (209-20). Lyra, who is initially sickened and repelled by the sight of the boy, describing the scene as 'something unnatural and uncanny that belonged to the world of night-ghasts, not the waking world of sense' (216), is finally moved to respond with compassion and love to the child after wrestling with her conscience:

Lyra knew that Pantalaimon's impulse was to reach out and cuddle the little half-child. To lick him [...] and warm him as his own dæmon on would have done; but the great taboo [of touching another person's dæmon] prevented that'. [...]

In Lyra's heart, revulsion struggled with compassion, and compassion won. She put her arms around the skinny little form to hold him safe' (NL: 216-17).

The moral dimension to Lyra's actions is emphasised by Iorek Byrnison, the armoured bear, when he chastises a group of gyptian men that draw back from the child in fear: 'Shame on you! Think what this child has done! You might not have

more courage, but you should be ashamed to show less' (NL: 218). While Shelley King argues that Lyra's moral awakening over the three volumes has significance beyond its 'function in the narrative' – encouraging 'readers [and characters] to reflect on aspects of their own lives that could benefit from similar conduct' – it is narratologically significant (2005: 115).

The fact that *The Amber Spyglass* ends with Lyra and Will choosing to forego a life together for the good of others emphasises not only their movement from the blissful naïveté of childhood love to the harsher realities of adult sacrifice but also the extent to which moral decision-making is a defining characteristic of adulthood. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the movement from the amorality of childhood to the moral consciousness of adulthood is not shown to necessarily result in adults acting morally – even in terms of their own moral codes, the immorality of Lord Asriel's murder of Roger (NL: 392-94) and Mrs Coulter's sanctioning of intercision (NL: 283-85) proves this emphatically.

While moral consciousness differentiates the world of childhood from the world of adulthood in *His Dark Materials*, it is sexual maturation that marks the transition between these ontological states. According to Pullman, 'On the Marionette Theatre' describes how we humans exist on a spectrum that goes from 'the unconscious to the fully conscious' and that once we've left unconscious grace behind 'we can't go back, we can only go on – through life, through education, through suffering, through experience to the thing we come to call wisdom' (2007,

August). In *His Dark Materials*, however, Lyra and Will ‘go on’ not only ‘through life, through education, through suffering, through experience’ but also, in a very Blakean sense, through sex and sexuality.

Lyra’s growing sexual awareness in *Northern Lights*, particularly in terms of ‘gender identification’ (Dolgin 2005: 76), reflects both her emerging adult concerns and moral awakening. When she is given into the care of the beautiful and elegant Mrs Coulter, she is shown to quickly begin acting like the woman she admires: becoming interested in the ‘kinds of lessons [...] that [...] didn’t feel like lessons at all. How to wash one’s own hair; how to judge which colors suited one [...] how to put on lipstick, powder, scent’ (84). In *The Amber Spyglass*, however, Lyra is portrayed as being far more self-conscious about her own femininity: in deciding not to wake Will up to join her for a swim, she thinks to herself that while ‘she happily used to swim naked in the River Cherwell with all the other Oxford children, [...] it would be quite different with Will’ – in fact, she is described as blushing at the thought (458).

As with moral consciousness, sexual maturity is reified in *His Dark Materials* through the construct of the dæmon. From the warning that Mrs Coulter gives Lyra, it is apparent that dæmons are viewed – especially by those who wish to encode a rigid image of femininity, of authority, and of religious conservatism (Matthews 2005: 125) – as being the direct cause of sexual desires: ‘at the age we call puberty, the age you’re coming to very soon, darling, dæmons bring all sorts of troublesome

thoughts and feelings' (NL: 285). At puberty, dæmons become fuelled and energized by a powerful force that galvanizes their human companions toward sexual maturity. Once attained, dæmons lose their ability to shape-shift and settle into one form, which they maintain for life. It is a change that symbolises their human counterparts' movement from the world of childhood innocence to adulthood experience.

While it is suggested in *Northern Lights* that touching another person's dæmon is 'taboo' (217), in *The Amber Spyglass* it is clear that it is taboo because it constitutes a sexual act. After Lyra briefly touches Will's dæmon for the first time she is, again, depicted 'blushing': it is stated in the text that

it was a gross violation of manners to touch something so private as someone else's dæmon. It was forbidden not only by politeness, but by something deeper than that – something like shame. A quick glance at Will's warm cheeks showed that he knew that just as well as she did. She couldn't tell whether he also felt that half-frightened feeling, as she did (482).

The presence of the word 'shame' in this passage helps not only to emphasise the Church's insidious moral dominion over the sexuality of individuals but also to contextualize the unnaturalness and perversity of intercision. Although Mrs Coulter advocates the supposed benefits of intercision as a way to avoid sexual maturation to Lyra, the threatened separation of Lyra from Pantalaimon at Bolvangar is described,

paradoxically, in terms of ‘sexual molestation’ (Hines 2005: 42) – in the sense that Bolvangar is a place where the institutional abuse of children is sanctioned, Pullman’s Church-sponsored science station also has twenty-first-century real-world parallels:

She hooked her legs over the sharp edge of the metal above, and struggled upside down, scratching, biting, punching, spitting in passionate fury. The men were gasping and grunting with pain or exertion, but they pulled and pulled.

And suddenly all strength went out of her.

It was as if an alien hand had reached inside where no hand had a right to be, and wrenched at something deep and precious.

She felt faint, dizzy, sick, disgusted, limp with shock.

One of the men was *holding* Pantalaimon. [...]

He had seized Lyra’s *dæmon* in his human hands, and [...] Pan was shaking, nearly out of his mind with horror and disgust. His wildcat shape, his fur now dull with weakness, now sparking glints of anarbic alarm...He curved towards his Lyra as she reached with both hands for him...

They fell still. They were captured.

She *felt* those hands...It wasn’t *allowed*...Not *supposed* to touch...*Wrong* (NL: 276-77).

In the chapter titled 'The Dunes' (509-28) in *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will consummate their relationship, physically and emotionally, by touching each other's dæmon. However, it is the intimate character of their union, freely entered into by both parties, that not only differentiates it from the transgressive sexual assault that Lyra is subjected to at Bolvangar but also encourages their dæmons to settle into their final forms. While there is ambiguity regarding the exact nature of the sexual act they engage in, their knowledge of what they are doing, as well as the analogy made to the biblical myth of the Fall in the fruit that Lyra puts to Will's lips, suggests that it is sexual intercourse. This is significant, as it is 'carnal' or 'worldly' (*OED*: 198; 753) knowledge that marks their movement from childhood innocence to adult experience:

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

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

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

So wondering whether any lovers before them had made this blissful discovery, they lay together as the earth turned slowly and the moon and the stars blazed above them (527-28)

In *His Dark Materials*, sexuality is not the *raison-d'être* of existence, however; greater than sexuality is self-consciousness: 'when life becomes aware of itself' (Wood 2005: 21). By imbuing his child protagonists with a libido sufficiently potent to attract Dust (*AS*: 480-548), Pullman, like Blake, places sexual energy at the heart of the quest for knowledge, experience and moral freedom:

Mary turned, spyglass in hand, to see Will and Lyra returning. They were some way off; they weren't hurrying. They were holding hands, talking together, heads close, oblivious to everything else; she could see that even from a distance.

She nearly put the spyglass to her eye, but held back, and returned it to her pocket. There was no need for the glass; she knew what she would see; they would seem to be made of living gold. They would seem the true image of what human beings always could be, once that had come into their inheritance.

The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all (497).

The fact that Pullman sees the transition from ‘asexual subject to [...] sexual one’ as a positive one (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers 1998: 196) is evident in his criticism of Lewis’ *The Last Battle*. In Lewis’ text, salvation is denied to Susan, the fourth of the group of siblings who passes into Narnia, because of her sexuality. Pullman maintains that instead of portraying her sexual maturation as natural and inevitable, Lewis turns from it ‘in fear and loathing’ (2002, November). What Pullman finds detestable is not simply the implication in Lewis’ text that that individuals must be innocent, or child-like, to enter the Kingdom of God but rather the reason given for Susan’s damnation (2002, November): she is ‘too interested in lipstick, nylons and invitations’ and, therefore, ‘a jolly sight too keen on being grown up’ (Lewis 2001: 741). While alternative readings of *The Last Battle* contend that it is the twenty-one-year-old Susan who excludes herself from Narnia, by dismissing her experiences as childish fantasy (Watkins 2005), Pullman argues that her exclusion is inseparable from Lewis’ very ‘weird unconscious feelings about sexuality’ (2002, November).

In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Will’s sexuality reflects the culmination of Pullman’s objective for his child protagonists to become adult; however, their sexuality is also the ‘medium for the transcendence of inherited Christian pathology,

and the moral prejudices that accompany it' (Davis 2007: 128). Naomi Wood argues, sexuality is 'a fitting site for the contest between forces of purity and impurity' because of 'its inescapably material, physical aspect, its connections with natural selection and its multifaceted nature' (2005: 20). In contrast with 'a totalitarian mindset that privileges the One, the Pure, the Almighty, the Spiritual', sexuality with 'its anarchic subversion of intention' is the antithesis of Divine order (Wood 2005: 20). The fact that one of the corruptions of the biblical myth of the Fall in *Northern Lights* stresses the sexual immaturity of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve – 'they were naked in the garden, they were like children' (371) – helps to contextualize Lyra and Will's acquisition of sexual knowledge as heralding the republic of heaven. In another sense, they can also be seen to embody the realization of Blake's narrative address to 'the future age of now' (Matthews 2005: 127) in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*:

Children of the future Age

Reading this indignant page,

Know that in a former time

Love! sweet Love! was thought a crime ('A Little GIRL Lost': 1-4).

Given the association of moral and sexual awakening with the settling of dæmons and the realisation of adulthood, it is difficult to concur with Lisa Hopkins' claim that the 'nature of the human-dæmon link is never defined' (2005: 49) in *His Dark Materials*. However, the nature of this link is, as she contends, 'sometimes

expressed in mutually contradictory ways' (2005: 49). While dæmons reify the movement from childhood innocence to adult experience effectively from a narratological perspective, they are philosophically incompatible with the advocacy of self-realisation in *His Dark Materials*. A number of key passages suggest that, rather than potentiality, dæmons represent determinism. It is stated in *Northern Lights* that 'almost all' (5) servants have dogs for dæmons; that 'higher' servants have more impressive dog dæmons than 'lower' servants (168); and, that 'there's plenty of folk as'd like to have a lion as a dæmon and they end up with a poodle. And till they learn to be satisfied with what they are, they're going to be fretful about it' (167). This sense of determinism not only 'belies the infinite possibility' (Hines 2005: 39) dæmons seem to represent in childhood but also implies that some people are naturally bound to servitude. As Lyra tells Will,

As you grow up you start thinking, well, they [your dæmon] might be this or they might be that...And usually they end up something that fits. I mean something like your real nature. Like if your dæmon's a dog, that means you like doing what you're told, and knowing who's boss, and following orders, and pleasing people who are in charge. A lot of servants are people whose dæmons are dogs (*AS*: 457).

In fact, Lyra's understanding of dæmons reflects Pullman's own. In responding to an unidentified American critic who accused him of being 'terribly class-ridden and British and snobbish' because most servants have dogs for dæmons, he claimed that

‘you cannot choose your dæmon [...] If your dæmon turns out to be a dog, that means you're the sort of person [...] who enjoys knowing where they are in a hierarchy, who enjoys following orders and pleasing the person in charge (October 2000). Conversely, however, just as some characters seem naturally predisposed to servitude, Lyra seems born to lead: her noble birth (*NL*: 53) and natural leadership skills (*NL*: 58) are known to her and others even before her dæmon settles into ‘a large and powerful ferret [a pine marten], red-gold in colour, lithe and sinuous and full of grace’ (*AS*: 527).

While the construct of the dæmon – one of the most popularly lauded aspects of the text – proves problematic at a philosophical level, Lyra and Will’s sexuality also raises difficulties at a psychological one. Their movement from childhood innocence to adult experience is inconsistent with that of ‘typical’ twelve and thirteen-year-olds. Even though they are atypical children in many respects, the identity formation Lyra and Will undergo ‘virtually never occurs until the very late teens or early twenties’ (Dolgin 2005: 79). Their ‘postconventional moral reasoning’, which is evident in their ability to assume responsibility for their actions, as well as their ‘precocious’ sexuality, is ‘most certainly not a hallmark of early adolescence’ (Dolgin 2005: 79). The fact that Pullman hoped to say something positive about growing up’ (2003, March), marks these inconsistencies out as being not only incompatible, at a psychological level, with the developmental patterns of children but also contrary to his aspirations of writing a fantasy that is ‘psychologically [...] real’ (2009, June).

Criticism is also levelled at the correlation in the text between sexuality and adult consciousness. Polly Shulman claims that *His Dark Materials* develops sexuality in characters that are 'too childlike for it to be convincing' (2000, October); while Kristine Moruzi asserts that the narrative not only manoeuvres its child protagonists towards the 'reality' of adult sexuality but also prevents them from 'resisting the imposition of [...] adult values' (2005: 63). In fact, the explicit connection between the settling of Lyra and Will's dæmons and their newfound adult consciousness conflates knowledge and experience with sexuality to such an extent that it seems to be the only way that children can achieve adulthood.

His Dark Materials works toward a stable identity as children mature into adulthood. However, this adulthood, which also forces children into a 'world of compromise and self-discipline and self-sacrifice' (Chabon 2005: 13), entails 'accepting the narrowing of one's potential possible "shapes" [...] and] learning to live with a diminishing of the protean possibilities inherent in the child' (Lenz 2001: 140). As Susan Matthews contends, though the 'wild child is imagined and valued in *His Dark Materials*, there is no doubt 'that innocence ends, the connection between worlds must be lost, dæmons must stop changing, and the adult world must be entered' (2005: 134). The settling of dæmons, just as children are asserting their independence, sees the 'plasticity' of childhood giving way to a more 'fixed' adulthood.

Integrating Childhood and Adulthood in *His Dark Materials*

His Dark Materials is a children's text that narrates the desirability of ending childhood innocence as a culturally idealized and ontological state. As Lyra and Will move from childhood toward adulthood, the consciousness associated with their moral and sexual awakening enables them not only to enact experience as a natural replacement for innocence but also to inaugurate a new world: a republic of heaven. Essentially, the text suggests that adulthood is the only appropriate ontology for conscious human beings, especially if they hope to achieve their full potential for wisdom.

Despite the emphasis in the text on the importance of acquiring knowledge, however, Karen Moruzi claims that *His Dark Materials* not only reflects the reality of the socialization of children and childhood but also creates that reality (2005: 55-68). She argues that while Pullman allows Lyra and Will to become increasingly independent, he does so within 'carefully defined adult parameters – parameters that allow his adult readers to remain secure in their superior positions in the social hierarchy' (2005: 65). In effect, she claims that Lyra and Will progress from a state of innocence to one of experience in *His Dark Materials*, only to for them to end up wiser and more sexually mature but still requiring adult guidance.

The fact that clearly designated adults figures provide Lyra and Will with assistance, as they move from childhood innocence to adult experience, is evident in all three

volumes of *His Dark Materials*. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra's quest to find and save her childhood friend Roger Parslow is aided by Iorek Byrnison, who becomes her protector; the gyptian leaders John Faa and Farder Coram, who give her safe passage North; the aeronaut Lee Scoresby, who rescues her from Bolvangar; and Serafina Pekkala, who teaches her about the evils of the Church. In *The Subtle Knife*, Will's role as bearer of *Æsahættr* – the knife with the ability to cut through the fabric of the Universe – is made clear to him by Stanislaus Grumman, the father whom he searches for but does not know he has found yet; while, the angels Balthamos and Baruch, offer to guide him to Lord Asriel, so that the knife can be used to wage war on the Authority. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will are protected from the Magisterium and accompanied to the Land of the Dead by the Gallivespian spies Chevalier Tialys and Lady Salmakia; they are encouraged to act on their sexual feelings for one another by Mary Malone; and, they are educated by the angel Xaphania as to why they must part, close the opening between worlds; and destroy *Æsahættr*. Lyra and Will's return to their home worlds also sees them securely ensconced in familial environments and under the auspices of mentoring adults: Lyra's return to her Oxford involves the Master of Jordan College providing funding for her to attend a girl's school under the auspices of Dame Hannah Relf (*AS*: 541), a female scholar; while, Will's return to his Oxford entails Mary Malone volunteering to help him with his mother, social services, and housing (*AS*: 533-34).

While *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife* promote Lyra and Will's transition from childhood to adulthood, the ending of *The Amber Spyglass*, according to

Moruzi, subverts this portrayal by not only reinstating them in their roles as dependent children but also imbuing the text with the sort of oppressive nostalgia for childhood that Pullman finds so displeasing in the writings of Barry and Milne. Consequently, the textually constructed childhood of *His Dark Materials*, she would argue, seems to reinforce adult expectations of appropriate child behaviour, reflect tacit adult ideas about children, and suggest children's difference from and inferiority to adults. If this is the case, *His Dark Materials* is no different to other seminal works of children's fantasy literature that 'conceal adult values and norms under a surface ideological layer that seems to be aligned with the subversive culture of children' (Giardina 2005: 141) – the child protagonists of Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), for example, have their adventures in secondary worlds, where they are no longer subject to adult authority, only to realise that the positions of power they enjoy in these secondary worlds do not translate into similar positions on their return to their primary worlds.

Although *His Dark Materials* is prejudiced towards adulthood, what Pullman describes as the greater certainty, strength, authority and power of adulthood is, in the text, shown to be limited and not so changeable. Furthermore, although adult experience is presented as a natural replacement for childhood innocence, value is still ascribed to childhood, children and, even, innocence. Children's social relations, in particular, are described in *Northern Lights* as a 'rich, seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties' (36). This recognition acknowledges

the ‘politics’ (NL: 36) of childhood play: Lyra’s hierarchal position among the children of Oxford, for example, is evident in her ‘indignant’ response to a ‘deplorable lapse on the part of one of her subjects’ not to keep her informed about the disappearance of a young child, Jessie Reynolds, who goes missing from the Market (NL: 59). In presenting play as the medium through which power is negotiated, *His Dark Materials* validates not only children’s culture but also the ontological importance of childhood in preparing children for the hegemonic and hierarchal world of adulthood. In effect, by creating ‘their own rules, hierarchies and values [...children] symbolically subvert the power adults have over their lives’ (Giardina 2005: 141).

His Dark Materials also extols the collective and individual agency of children. This individual agency is evident even in the relative success Will achieves in caring for his invalid mother before he sets out to find his missing father. As stated previously in this chapter, although he is a child, Will bears the responsibilities of an adult – acting as parent, provider and protector – in caring for his fragile and emotionally disturbed mother. However, while he encounters difficulties in attempting to create a secure environment for himself and his mother, his desire for knowledge is noteworthy. *The Subtle Knife* describes how, during the times his mother is lucid, Will is keen to learn ‘how to shop and cook, [...] how to remain unnoticed at school, how not to attract attention’ (11). His understanding of the gravity of the situation he and his mother find themselves in belies the fact that he is a passive subject to adult authority: the text states that ‘what Will himself feared

more than anything was that the authorities would find out about her, and take her away, and put him in a home among strangers. Any difficulty was better than that' (SK: 11).

The collective agency of children is portrayed as early as the third chapter of *Northern Lights* with the disappearance of the gyptian child Billy Costa. Despite the fact that they are aware of the dangers involved in mounting a search for Billy, who is suspected of being abducted by a group of child snatchers, or 'Gobblers', it is Lyra and her 'gang' of college and gyptian children that work together, constructively and symbolically, in an attempt to resolve the situation (NL: 58). The children share their knowledge of Billy's last known whereabouts, before moving like a 'swarm' (NL: 58) to hunt the hunters in an activity that is playful but also serious. While 'half of them didn't know what they were looking for, and thought it was just a lark', the 'real fear and apprehension' felt by Lyra and the other half of the children implies that they are aware of the consequences of their actions. Their refusal to give in to this fear and accept the passive role of potential victims is a powerful depiction of the agency of children.

As they journey away from their initial childhood homes, Lyra and Will's relationships with adults become more complicated. In the few days that she spends with Mrs Coulter in London, before fleeing back to the gyptians in Oxford, Lyra's is not excluded, as she is with the Scholars, from sharing in her adult tutor's life:

Lyra went everywhere with Mrs Coulter [...] In the morning there might be a meeting of geographers at the Royal Arctic Institute, and Lyra would sit by and listen; and then Mrs Coulter might meet a politician or a cleric for lunch in a smart restaurant, and they would be very taken with Lyra and order special dishes for her, and she would learn how to eat asparagus or what sweetbreads tasted like. And then in the afternoon there might be shopping [...] After that they might go for tea and meet some ladies, as well-dressed as Mrs Coulter if not so beautiful and accomplished [...] Lyra would be dressed up prettily for these occasions, and the ladies would pamper her and include her in their graceful delicate talk, which was all about people: this artist, or that politician, or those lovers (*NL*: 82).

While Mrs Coulter's acceptance of Lyra might seem to suggest parity between adult and child, however, there is also evidence to indicate that it reflects, conversely, a process of socialization. The fact that Lyra is not only encouraged to sit and listen to adult conversation but also included in the graceful, delicate talk of older women betrays a desire on Mrs Coulter's part to inculcate upon her daughter the values and norms required to function successfully in adult London society. Although there are also hierarchical elements to Lyra's relationship with the gypsies to whom she flees – Lord Faa and Fardar Coram tend towards being wise patriarchs, while Ma Costa makes a very traditional 'Earth-mother' (Giardina 2005: 146) – they are the product of biological imperatives rather than processes of socialisation. Lyra's status as a

child does not subordinate her position in gyptian society to the extent it does in Mrs Coulter's London:

Helping Mrs Coulter had been all very well, but Pantalaimon was right: she wasn't really doing any work there, she was just a pretty pet. On the gyptian boat, there was real work to do [...] She cleaned and swept, she peeled potatoes and made tea, she greased the propeller-shaft bearings, she kept the weed-trap clear over the propeller, she washed dishes, she opened lock gates, she tied the boat up at the mooring-posts (*NL*: 111).

Unlike Lyra, the relationships that Will has with adults are never hierarchical. He is quick to establish his agency, even in situations where the adult-child power balance seems to be heavily weighed against him. His initial meeting with Iorek Byrnison emphasises the extent to which he refuses to be treated as a passive child: he challenges the armoured-bear-king to combat in order to secure passage into Central Asia in search of Lyra. In doing so, he not only silences the mocking adult crowd that derides his challenge but also out-thinks Iorek Byrnison (*SK*: 110-14).

Despite the contentions of Moruzi, there are times over the course of the three volumes, when Lyra and Will are depicted moving beyond the subordinate socio-cultural positions they initially inhabit as children. In fact, while they are guided and supported by adult figures on their journeys, the key events of *His Dark Materials* are experienced by Lyra and Will alone: the annihilation of the Authority (*AS*: 431-

32) and their fall into sexual knowledge (*AS*: 527-28). Furthermore, the responsibility of bearing the alethiometer and *Æsahættr* is also Lyra and Will's – no adult shares this burden, though several request that the children use these instruments for adult purposes. The fact that Will is physically maimed, losing two of his fingers while using *Æsahættr* (*AS*: 174-98), indicates that the consequences of his actions as a child are not negated by adult intervention.

The increasing ability of Lyra and Will to negotiate the shifting currents of power in their relationships with adults develops parallel to their acquisition of knowledge. Over the course of the three volumes, their relationships with adults become, progressively, more egalitarian. However, there is evidence of significant adult-child cooperation even as early as Lyra's involvement with the gyptians in *Northern Lights*: while she needs them to provide her with passage North to search for Roger (110), the gyptians need her skill in reading the alethiometer to improve their chances of finding Billy Costa (150). By the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, the two of most significant adult-child relationships, those between Will and Mary Malone, and Lyra and Iorek Byrnison, are characterised by partnership. Given the significance of dæmons in Lyra's world, the fact that Iorek Byrnison refers to her as his 'little dæmon' (*NL*: 438) after she helps him reclaim his kingdom from the usurper Iofur Raknison, points to the mutually dependent nature of their relationship. Consequently, not only do these genuine and dialogical adult-child relationships replace the tenuous and iniquitous ones experienced by Lyra and Will in early childhoods but they also democratize

the power between adults and children, showing that adults and children are human, and thus equally flawed. Both have the ability to make mistakes and to solve them; therefore, they need each other, and the basis of their relationship should be mutual respect. [...] As Pullman's [...] writing shows, it's not about either group being in charge – it's about being together' (Giardina 2005: 148).

Despite the fact that they demonstrably move beyond childhood, Lyra and Will's decisions as young adults are, according to Moruzi, 'inconsequential', because 'neither of them is given alternatives from which to choose' at the end of *His Dark Materials* (2005: 59). From her perspective, Pullman restricts Lyra and Will's options unnecessarily by nullifying the text's endorsement of independent choice, when he could have portrayed Lyra and Will in any of a number of subject-positions: *The Amber Spyglass*, she contends, firmly re-establishes their subordinate roles by suggesting not only that they 'are, and should be, dependent on [...] adults' but also that 'it is acceptable to venture forth to save the world, but afterwards you must return home to the appropriate position in the social hierarchy' (Moruzi 2005: 67). However, while it would have been more radical, and Miltonic, if Lyra and Will were depicted striking out alone, this does not necessarily imply that they revert back to their status as children. Although it is true that Lyra and Will return home to adult environments, and that they have little choice about what to do once they return, they return, nonetheless, as young adults rather than children.

Their changed subject-positions are evident in the egalitarian nature of Will and Lyra's new or renewed relationships with particular adults before and after returning to their respective worlds. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, the fact that Will not only refers to Mary Malone as 'a friend' (541) but also tells Lyra that, whatever he does in the future, 'he will choose it, no one else' (525) emphasises that he does not consider Mary's support as emblematic of social hierarchy. In fact, Mary Malone tells Serafina Pekkala that she 'need[s] him' as much as he needs her, because he is the 'only person' she 'can talk to' about all that has happened' (AS: 534).

For Lyra, too, her return to Jordan College is marked by a clear change in status: though once barred from the Scholars' Retiring Room and chased away from the fruit trees in the Garden, she is now 'given her own key to the garden door, so she [...can] come and go as she please[s]' (AS: 545). In depicting Lyra's new adult status, it is also significant that there is no reconciliation between Lyra and her parents in *The Amber Spyglass*: the fact that she does not return to a parental fold is consistent with her efforts to realise her agency over the course of the three volumes (Giardina 2005: 148). While she might have little choice about attending Hannah Relf's boarding school for girls in the short-term, *His Dark Materials* ends with its clearest acknowledgement of Lyra's adult agency: her decision to dedicate herself to building the republic of heaven.

In a similar manner to the way in which adult-child interaction offers a model of relations based on interdependence, the dialectic between states of innocence and

experience in *His Dark Materials* is not biased toward experience to the extent that Pullman's public comments on the subject might suggest. The value he attributes to innocence is located in both Lyra's innate ability to read the alethiometer as a child and her subsequent loss of this instinctual skill as she moves toward adulthood. As a child, she reads the alethiometer 'like climbing down a ladder at night' (NL: 152) – she does not have to think about it. In describing her ability as a child to 'move up and down the symbol-meanings and step from one to another and make all the connections', Lyra refers to herself as being 'like a monkey in the trees' (AS: 543). This analogy, which also calls to mind Pullman's story of the gibbon in the zoo, emphasises both the naturalness of Lyra's reading of the alethiometer and the fact that her ability to decipher the symbols is a consequence of her unitary, autonomous consciousness – her innocence. After her fall into sexual knowledge, she is disappointed and confused to realise that she can no longer read the alethiometer without 'having to think about it' (NL: 204). Fallen into experience, she must learn to reread it by cross-referencing the instrument's multivalent symbols with 'the books [...] in Bodley's Library', where 'the scholarship to study them is alive and well' (AS: 543).

More than anything else, Lyra's facility with the alethiometer affirms the similarity between the visions of innocence upheld by *His Dark Materials* and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. In *The Subtle Knife* it is stated that 'without the alethiometer', Lyra was 'just a little girl, lost' (167). The movement from innocence

through experience to higher innocence is evidenced in *The Amber Spyglass* in Xaphania's advice to Lyra after she loses her ability to read the alethiometer:

‘[In the past] you read it by grace [...] and you can regain it by work.
[...]

Your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely and, furthermore, once you've gained it, it will never leave you' (520).

While this 'assertion of grace, with its religious overtones, lends a [...] Romantic aura to the understanding of innocence' (Scott 2005: 104), it is also redolent of the philosophical connotations of grace found in von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre'. The essay suggests that grace is the ability to act naturally, innocent of the knowledge that experience brings. However, it also contends that 'consciousness can disturb natural grace' and that 'grace appears most purely in the human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness (2009). In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra's desire to relearn 'consciously what [...]she] could once do by intuition (AS: 545) involves a reclamation of the 'visionary confidence of the child of innocence' (Matthews 2005: 131) in light of the knowledge of adult experience – in other words, Blakean higher innocence.

In *Northern Lights*, Fra Pavel explains to Lyra that ‘the alethiometer does not forecast; it says, “If certain things come about, *then* the consequences will be –“ and so on’ (NL: 71). Pavel’s explanation of the function of the alethiometer links the instrument to moral decision-making. As Lyra begins to move into adulthood, her innocent reading of the alethiometer becomes clouded by her experience: her greater knowledge of the world means that the symbols on the alethiometer start to connote rather than denote meaning. While she used to think that ‘the serpent was cunning, like a spy ought to be, the crucible could mean knowledge, what you kind of distil, and the beehive was hard work, like bees are always working hard’ (NL: 145), by the end of *The Amber Spyglass* it is stated that ‘she just didn’t know what the symbols meant’ anymore (AS: 518).

It is suggested in *Northern Lights* (127), and explicitly stated in *The Subtle Knife* (92), that learned grace involves ‘being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason’ (Keats 2002: 41-42) – Keats and Negative Capability are both explicitly mentioned in *His Dark Materials*. In fact, it is the state of *Negative Capability* that enables Lyra to read the alethiometer and Will to use *Æsahættr*. It is only by relearning to read the alethiometer ‘without fretting at it or pushing it for an answer’ (NL: 127) that Lyra will come to be ‘in tune with herself’ (Leet 2005: 183) again. However, to be successful, she must also read the alethiometer in light of the multiplicity of meanings that is her new adult perspective on the world. In effect, she must come to an integration of contraries by marrying

the visionary innocence of childhood with the knowledge and experience of adulthood.

That the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience in *His Dark Materials* reflects a series of shifting perceptions is evident in the conversations Lyra has with Dame Hannah Relf and Pantalaimon at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*. The fact that she tells the Dame that the thing she wishes for, ‘almost – *almost* more than anything else’, is that she had not ‘lost the way of reading the alethiometer’ (AS: 542) suggests that, at some level, she misses the innocence of childhood. However, the emphasis she places on the word ‘almost’ implies that she values worldly experience also. While previously inconceivable to her as a child who had relished her dæmon’s shape shifting, her preference for adult knowledge, at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, is apparent in her delight at the final form Pantalaimon assumes:

‘Pan’, Lyra said as he flowed up on to her lap, ‘you’re not going to change a lot any more, are you?’

‘No’, he said.

‘It’s funny’, she said, ‘you remember when we were younger and I didn’t want you to stop changing at all... Well, I wouldn’t mind so much now (527).

Even though the biological imperative of the adult-child relationship still stands at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, *His Dark Materials* portrays children in a positive and empowering manner: it recognizes the complexity of children's social relations, including the significance of play in negotiating power; and, it demonstrates that children's achievements can be just as impressive as those of adults (Giardina 2005: 148). Therefore, while it does not radically reposition adult-child relations, neither does it reinforce traditional 'conceptions of children and their role in society' to the extent Moruzi claims (2005: 56).

Like *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *His Dark Materials* acknowledges that experience is only one of two contrary states of the human soul. It outlines a pattern in which an initial period of innocence is succeeded by a fall into disruption before an integration of contraries is possible in the end. True to its republican agenda, it offers a series of shifting perceptions between innocence and experience that both validates childhood and adulthood and promotes egalitarianism and partnership in social relations. Consequently, while *His Dark Materials* moves towards a more 'fixed' adulthood, the relationship between states of innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood, is dialectical to the very end.

Conclusion

This dissertation argued that *His Dark Materials* is notably influenced by the revolutionary hopes and republican values of Romantic writers and thinkers. The thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with promoting a secular humanist republic of heaven where all people are free and equal citizens, and its philosophical concern, with exploring the dialectic between childhood innocence and adult experience, owe much to Romanticism. In particular, the text's republicanism, evident in its promotion of personal liberty, egalitarianism and partnership, questions the centrality of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism in Western culture, as well as oppressive nostalgias for childhood innocence that refuse to say anything positive about adulthood. In challenging the legitimacy of Christian authority and the nature and place of the individual in society, Pullman harnesses the power of story in the hope of effecting change through the imaginative potential of literature.

Pullman is particularly interested in the possibilities that the liminal space between adult and children's literature affords him in advancing his agenda, because he does not believe in a hierarchy of literary genres. His decision to write for a mixed readership of children and adults is inextricably linked to his perception of the limitations of literature that is written specifically for either group of readers. In *His Dark Materials* he attempts to coalesce story, which he believes is a defining feature of children's literature, and craftsmanship, which he suggests is the reserve of adult literature, into a successful work of crossover fiction. However, the fact that the text

is published as children's literature indicates that he is interested in narrating adult experience as a natural replacement for childhood innocence, in a linguistically accessible manner, to children, as he realises they represent a natural audience for such a concern.

The fact that *His Dark Materials* is a fantasy narrative is another example of Pullman's utilization of the crossover appeal of an established literary genre to forward his agenda and to reach as wide a readership as possible. He is aware that, since the late-twentieth century, the discourse of fantasy has been that of secular humanism; therefore, he employs fantasy as the medium through which to advance his republican agenda with questioning the authority of the Judeo-Christian myth of the Fall in Western culture and the reification of innocence as an idealized ontology. While it has often been set for contrast and comparison amongst the writings of twentieth-century British fantasists, especially those of C S Lewis, the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials* offer not a rewriting of *The Chronicles of Narnia* but of *Paradise Lost*. The thematic concern of Pullman's text with building a secular humanist republic of heaven is informed by iconoclastic Romantic writings and not the theological writings of St Augustine, which inform Lewis' writing.

Pullman works within the pre-existent genre of fantasy, therefore, for very different purposes than simply mastering or reinventing it. In fact, he has gone so far as to explicitly claim that he is uninterested in writing fantasy or developing it as a genre:

the fantasy, he contends, is there to support, not for its own sake. However, while he understands that fantasy has the potential to be the most philosophical, ideological and political of forms of writing, his proclivity for the phrase 'stark realism', when describing *His Dark Materials*, emphasises the realistic dimensions of his fantasy. In effect, he utilizes not only the metaphoric discourse mode of fantasy but also the metonymic discourse mode of realism in his writing: the thematic and philosophical concerns of the text are developed through characterization, events and social practices, as much as they are through allegory.

Pullman has spoken regularly about the centrality of stories not only to human cultures but also to the identity of humanity as a species. While he maintains that the purpose of story is not a purely educative one, he is aware that story can be a revolutionary catalyst for change. Consequently, his attempt to shape his children's fantasy *His Dark Materials* into a work of crossover fiction is inextricably linked to his desire to reach as wide a readership as possible in challenging Christian authority and cultural idealizations of childhood innocence.

Similar to the relationship between text and author in the Poet-Prophet or Bardic tradition in Romantic writing, there is a clear association between the crafting of *His Dark Materials* and Pullman's personal hopes for personal and societal transformation. In enlisting story as the medium for revolutionary change, he consequently exalts the role of storyteller. In a manner not altogether dissimilar to the way in which the task of Wordsworth's poet or Blake's bard is to educate, the

task of Pullman's storyteller is not just to entertain but to challenge, resist and liberate. His role as storyteller, therefore, is also that of educator, guiding his readers to evaluate situations that he believes are in need of reform. In fact, he has claimed his aim in writing *His Dark Materials* was not only to say something that he believes to be true about the way which we are but also to tell a story that had resonances, some of them being morally educative. However, while *His Dark Materials* makes an implicit claim for the storyteller as an explicator of possible new realities, the result of the Bardic leanings of its author is that the text itself resonates, sometimes uncomfortably, with the tension between the novelist and the philosopher, the storyteller and the prophet, within Pullman himself.

The thematic concern of *His Dark Materials* with building a secular humanist republic of heaven is developed by Pullman through revising the Miltonic myth of *Paradise Lost* in a tradition of Romantic-Gnostic heresy. Just as it was for many writers of the Romantic period, Milton's poem is *the* reference point for Pullman in his challenge to Christianity. Like many of these writers, too, he celebrates the Fall of Adam and Eve as a *felix culpa*. In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Will's movement from innocence to experience is celebrated as a symbolic re-enactment of the original biblical act of defiance: it enables them not only to discover who they are as individuals, and their place in the world, but also to realise their full potential as sentient human beings.

While *His Dark Materials* seems, at times, to almost inadvertently place limitations on its more general endorsement of human liberty by giving credence to notions of destiny, it argues, for the most part, that the disobedient pursuit of knowledge is the key to personal liberty. However, it also stresses that knowledge calls for responsibility, especially civic responsibility. Consequently, it is Lyra and Will, working in partnership, rather than Lord Asriel and his egotistical concerns, who are entrusted with building a republic of heaven. Shaped by Pullman's Romantic reading of *Paradise Lost*, the characterization of republican insubordination in *His Dark Materials* questions the delineation of human freedom in Christian mythology.

Like Shelley's, many of Pullman's public pronouncements promote the necessity of atheism. However, in many respects, *His Dark Materials* is 'not so much an atheist text [...but] a reworking of a Christian one towards radically different conclusions' (Johnson 2000). It challenges the prevailing Judeo-Christian theology of a benevolent, omnipotent God through both its Gnostic representation of the God of Christianity and by accurately quoting Christian scripture against itself. Similar to Blake's Urizen, Pullman's Authority is a usurper of the material universe: ruling through oppression and pretence. The cataclysmic overthrow of the Authority, therefore, realizes both the Gnostic desire for a universe free from despotism and the Romantic hope of a secular apocalypse. However, Pullman's atheistic revision of Gnostic and Wordsworthian Pantheistic patterns of thought in a secular context is found most strikingly in the passages of *His Dark Materials* that focus on death. In challenging the Christian belief in an eschatological Kingdom of Heaven, Pullman

develops a quasi-Gnostic and quasi-Pantheistic philosophy of death, where all matter returns to nature in death to become a conscious part of the material world.

After supporting Pullman's demythologization of the concept of a Kingdom of Heaven so well, however, Gnostic anti-materialism runs, in the end, contrary to the hope of his protagonists with building a secular humanist republic of heaven in the here-and-now 'real' world. Therefore, while its republican validation of liberty, egalitarianism and partnership is inspiring, the entire series concludes, with the task of building the republic of heaven only beginning – it remains, by the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, as nothing more than an internalized value system in the minds of Lyra and others – the text's replacement for the loss of a Heavenly Kingdom is the very Miltonic 'Paradise within'. Consequently, it appears that *His Dark Materials* is a text more concerned with undermining the basis of Christian belief than working out in detail an alternative secular humanist vision for humanity – like Milton's, Pullman's republicanism entails the articulate rehearsal not of a republican argument but of republican values.

What *His Dark Materials* attacks most forcefully is ecclesiasticism. Sharing a comparable republican agenda with Rousseau, Paine and Godwin, but influenced directly by *Paradise Lost* and the writings of the iconoclasts Blake and Shelley, Pullman seeks to overturn what he sees as tyrannical systems of ecclesiastical oppression. Similar to *Queen Mab*, *His Dark Materials* presents a world in which religions and churches are the adversaries of human freedom: their codified morality

the roots of social evil and political totalitarianism. However, while its challenge to the authority of Christian mythology, theology and ecclesiasticism might have been revolutionary at the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, in the twenty-first, it seems somewhat passé: particularly when Christianity, at least in the Western world, appears to be on the decline, and when another great religion, Islam, is so prominent in world events.

The fact that *His Dark Materials* is unfairly and severely prejudiced against the Christian churches, but particularly its clerics, leaves open the charge of bigotry. Despite his republican aspirations, Pullman has written *His Dark Materials* undemocratically, by consciously misrepresenting that which he wishes to critique: ecclesiastical religion. His stereotypical, caricatured and propagandist depictions of the Christian Churches and its clerics are evidence of what he claims is the hallmark of a theocratic cast of mind. Through his own doctrine of the transformative power of storytelling, Pullman, like many Romantic anti-clericalists, endeavours to forward his own republican agenda through a text that expresses distaste for authoritarian political systems, especially ecclesiasticism. However, his inability to imbue his critique of ecclesiastical religion with any real degree of balance hinders his attempt to write a secular mythology for our time.

Like imaginative writers of the Romantic period, Pullman reinterprets traditional Judeo-Christian patterns of thought in a secular context. He does so to develop the philosophical concern of *His Dark Materials* with the dialectic between childhood

innocence and adult experience. Similar to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *His Dark Materials* promotes the necessity of losing childhood innocence and gaining adult experience. As in the writings of Blake, darker aspects of adulthood are shown to negatively affect the lives of children in Pullman's text: Lyra and Will's young lives are not sheltered from the harsher complexities of adulthood. Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of both their childhoods is the reality of violence in their young lives. In portraying violence against children, the text not only mediates the unpleasant reality of domestic and societal violence against children but also undercuts nostalgic Romantic idealizations of childhood as a time of innocence. In the absence of sustained adult support or concern, the child protagonists of *His Dark Materials* suffer from physical, emotional and intellectual neglect. Like in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, these deprivations, along with the pervasiveness of violence in their young lives, make a distinction between the text and literatures that would depict childhood as an idealised period of sanctuary, when children are impervious to the uncertainties, starkness and manipulation of the fallen adult world.

Inseparable from Pullman's aversion to nostalgic depictions of childhood is his scepticism with regard to the 'natural' innocence of children. In *His Dark Materials*, children do not have a proclivity toward virtuousness. In fact, the text subverts conventional Wordsworthian concepts of childhood innocence by portraying children not as innocents but as coarse, even feral. It is specifically Lyra's amorality that separates her from the world of adulthood: childhood

innocence not only insulates her from the moral or immoral decision-making that is the consequence of adult knowledge and experience but also prevents her from assuming authority for herself and her actions. As a result, the series of experiences that the protagonists of *His Dark Materials* go through encourages them to see growing-up as natural; moral decision-making as a corollary of the acquisition of knowledge; and, adulthood as a more empowered ontological state than childhood.

Von Kleist's essay "On The Marionette Theatre" is the literary bridge that links Pullman's readings of Milton's poetic treatise on the desirability of knowledge and Blake's dialectical songs of innocence and experience. Consequently, the essay also informs his valuation of places on adult wisdom. The *modus operandi* used by Pullman to reify the transition from childhood to adulthood in *His Dark Materials* is the dæmon. By connecting the settling of an individual's dæmon with their acquisition of knowledge about being human, *His Dark Materials* makes a case for moral consciousness as a distinctive feature of adulthood. However, in light of the secular humanism of the text, as well as the influence of Blake on Pullman, it is clear that whatever morality entails in *His Dark Materials* it has no connection to religious codes; rather, it is relative, coming, in Blakean terms, from within; from the Imagination and not from without.

While moral consciousness distinguishes the world of childhood from the world of adulthood in *His Dark Materials*, it is sexual maturation that marks the transition between ontological states. Lyra's developing sexual awareness in *Northern Lights*,

particularly in terms of gender identification, reflects both her emerging adult concerns and moral awakening. However, in *His Dark Materials*, greater than sexuality is self-consciousness: when life becomes aware of itself. By imbuing his child protagonists with a libido compelling enough to attract Dust, Pullman, like Blake, places sexual energy at the centre of the quest for knowledge, experience and moral and sexual freedom.

For all the emphasis *His Dark Materials* places on adulthood, as the only appropriate ontology for conscious human beings, there is a paradox in the fact that the settling of dæmons, which sees the ‘plasticity’ of childhood giving way to a more ‘fixed’ adulthood, occurs just as children are starting to assert their autonomy. The fact that a ‘fixed’ adulthood is presented as preferable to the instability of childhood is apparent in Pullman’s claim that *His Dark Materials* provides a very good picture of the difference between children and their infinite potentiality and plasticity and swift changingness of moods, and the greater certainty, the greater strength and authority and power that adults have. However, while *His Dark Materials* is biased towards adulthood, what Pullman describes as the greater certainty, strength, authority and power of adulthood is, in the text, also shown to be limited and not so changeable. Consequently, although adult experience is presented as a natural replacement for childhood innocence, worth is still credited to childhood, children and, even, innocence.

Like *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *His Dark Materials* recognizes that experience is only one of two contrary states of the human soul. Pullman's text outlines a pattern in which an early period of innocence is followed by a fall into conflict before an integration of contraries is possible in the end. True to its republican agenda, *His Dark Materials* presents its readers with a series of shifting perceptions between innocence and experience that validates both childhood and adulthood, and encourages egalitarianism and partnership in social relations. The ever-increasing capability of Lyra and Will to negotiate the changing currents of power in their relationships with adults develops parallel to their acquisition of knowledge. Over the course of the three volumes, their relationships with adults become more egalitarian. As a result, while *His Dark Materials* moves towards a more 'fixed' adulthood, the relationship between states of innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood, is dialectical rather than dualistic to the very end.

Despite the fact that Pullman's challenge to oppressive nostalgias for childhood innocence that refuse to say anything positive about growing up is well executed, it can also be argued that it is more conventional than it is innovative. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* is evidence that even in the writings of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, where childhood was often evoked as a state of idyllic innocence, dialectical understandings of the relationship between childhood innocence and adult experience existed. Furthermore, Pullman is writing at a time when sexuality is endlessly celebrated by consumer culture, a culture that is aimed as much at children as it is at adults (Matthews 2005: 127); therefore,

considering the extent to which childhood innocence has been attacked in this century, particularly in terms of the sexualisation of children in the media, it would, perhaps, have been more provocative and countercultural for him to argue more for the visionary innocence – the possibilities – inherent in childhood as an ontology.

This dissertation examined those aspects of Romanticism that had the greatest influence on, or shared notable similarities with, the thematic and philosophical concerns of *His Dark Materials*. It proved that Pullman's text could legitimately be set for contrast and comparison amongst writings of the Romantic period. It concluded that, while *His Dark Materials* dialogues with a revolutionary and republican strain in Romantic writings, it does not offer a 'neo-Romantic' critique of contemporary social norms: as a late-twentieth-century text, its challenge to Christian authority and cultural idealizations of childhood innocence are developed through well-established and well-articulated Romantic paradigms. Consequently, *His Dark Materials* heralds a traditional kind of revolution.

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