There are Two Worlds:

An Investigation of Childhood, Adulthood, and Influence in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy.

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Abstract for Masters

There are Two Worlds:
An Investigation of Childhood, Adulthood, and Influence in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

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Despite its polemical anti-authoritarian stance on religion, Philip Pullman's children's fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials,* edifies the ideological separation of adult and child. The primacy of so-called adult characteristics reflects the influence of authoritarian ideologies on Pullman's writing. In the study below, with a special focus on the essentializing developmental framework Pullman deploys to structure Lyra's growth from childhood to young adulthood, I show how the *HDM* trilogy replicates many of the frameworks it disavows. Building on existing scholarship, I present the broader influence of Christian values on Pullman's trilogy despite his antagonism towards Christianity's impact on children's literature. Additionally, while acknowledging Pullman's rebellion against the frequently religious generic conventions of children's literature established by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, I expand on this connection to argue that Pullman's disdain for fantasy is connected more broadly to the history of children's literature and colonialism, and that this interplay highlights the ongoing connection between empire and the English canon which complicates Pullman's anti-authoritarian and anti-theistic quest for a republic of heaven in the *His Dark Materials Trilogy.* By connecting Lyra's developmental trajectory to the influence of Christianity and imperialism within the institutional norms of education, children's literature, and psycho-medical discourses, I ultimately argue that we should be skeptical of the developmental model *HDM* proposes, and the values it upholds.

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Dedication

In loving memory of two tough old birds: Mamie Germaine, and my dæmon, Cleo.

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1. Introduction

The image of the child, the Other, holds in place what has been constructed as its binary opposite, the image of the adult. And as constructions of the adult change over time and place, the jettisoned qualities that had formerly belonged to adulthood, are "always being moved outwards…but also backwards into the past".[1] Imagination, fantasy, intuition, and aimless pleasure are parts of the self who once was, the child or the barbarian; a self necessarily excised from the civilized adult consciousness.

In a talk given to the Royal Literary Society in 2001, Phillip Pullman reflects on the Victorian tendency of aligning the image of children with gardens. A garden, he says,

> suggests ideas of growing and cultivation and training, of bringing things up, of nurturing them in the greenhouse to the point where they're hardy enough to stay outside; and also of keeping them in order, of making sure they look tidy, and so on.
> ("Children's literature without Borders," 127-128).

This description suggests that childhood is a wilderness and that without a 'gardener' it remains stunted, uncultivated, and unruly. In this study below, I will unpack how the colonial processes of educating children and 'civilizing' non-European peoples both constitute attempts to order nature's chaos, in whatever form, and therefore assert dominance over nature. I begin with Pullman's comments because the quest to order the wilderness of childhood shapes the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Through his heroine's developmental trajectory, the trilogy reconfigures the meaning of Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden of Eden. Instead of this eviction being a loss, Lyra exchanges nature's grace for knowledge to grow up and fulfill her destiny. However, I

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[1] Nodelman, Perry. "The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1992, pp.33.

argue that Pullman's version of the journey between innocence and experience forcibly molds Lyra into an imperially inflected version of adulthood.

Despite its polemical anti-authoritarian stance on religion, Philip Pullman's children's fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials,* edifies the ideological separation of adult and child, and the primacy of so-called adult characteristics. Pullman insists that there "is no use moping about for… lost childhood, and becoming intoxicated by the sickly potency of… nostalgia; we have to grow up" …" leav[e] fantasy behind, and becom[e]…realist[s]" ("The Writing of Stories," 31, 32). Accordingly, the alignment of Lyra's maturation with her emergent rationalist pragmatism suggests that the *His Dark Materials* series reflects Pullman's investment in a strictly empiricist, rationalist, colonial epistemology despite his fantastical writing and anti-authoritarian stance.

Pullman writes that to build a better world "we need a story…a myth," and that "books children read" provide "evidence" of "what a Republic of Heaven might look like" ("The Republic of Heaven" 428, 431). [2] This juxtaposition, the success of his writing, and the authoritarian frameworks his writing inevitably reproduces, create an interesting tension in *His Dark Materials* because it reflects Pullman's belief in the utopian potential of children's literature, and how it might be harnessed. The utopian potential of fantastical writing never exists in a vacuum.[3] Each literary impulse to imagine a better world contributes to and is constrained by the world it is produced within. Subsequently, the utopian impulse to banish the oppressive

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[2] Pullman writes that "The Republic of Heaven is a metaphor for a state of being that's already partly present wherever human beings are treating each other with kindness and approaching the universe with curiosity and wonder…" and the Republic "is a place where you can change things," ("God and Dust" 407, 424).

[3] For more on the utopian potential of children's literature, fairy tales and fantastical writing see Zipes, Jack. *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion.* Routledge Classics*,* 2012.

and corrupt "Authority" and its church in Pullman's trilogy is accompanied by the replication of other authoritarian frameworks.[4] While Pullman's trilogy is critical of hierarchical family and gender constructs, *His Dark Materials* valorizes rationalist adult characterizations and hierarchical developmental stages, and thus, ultimately reinforces these non-religious authoritarian structures.

My argument has three parts. First, I will briefly survey how Pullman's trilogy is thematically in dialogue with Genesis and with John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. To demonstrate this, after a brief summary of Pullman's trilogy, I will outline the thematic connections between the Bible, *Paradise Lost,* and *His Dark Materials* trilogy, before turning to the broader influence of Christian values on Pullman's trilogy, and his antagonism towards Christianity's impact on children's literature. This context clarifies how Pullman's anti-fantastical pragmatism aligns him with certain features of English literary prestige, while rebelling against others.

Next, I will demonstrate how Pullman's disdain for fantasy is connected to the history of children's literature and colonialism, and how this interplay highlights the ongoing connection between empire and the English canon, thus complicating Pullman's anti-authoritarian and anti-theistic quest for a republic of heaven in the *His Dark Materials Trilogy.* I will rely on the arguments of scholars like Nodelman (1992), Hunt (2005), Rudd (2019, 2005) and others who argue that children's literature and fantasy writing are "inherently imperialist" projects designed to reinforce English language, culture, and its patriarchal, colonial, and capitalistic values (Nodelman 34). Understanding how the values of Christianity and imperialism have shaped

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[4] God is usually referred to as "the Authority" in the trilogy

children's literature, children's education, and developmental psychology illuminates the legacy of these values in Pullman's trilogy.

Finally, I will demonstrate how the *HDM* trilogy replicates many of the frameworks it disavows, with a special focus on the essentializing developmental framework Pullman deploys to structure Lyra's growth from childhood to young adulthood. Pullman's depiction of Lyra severing her rational self from her soul-self to become an adult replicates authoritarian, colonial, ideologies. By forming Lyra into the ideal modern subject and naturalizing that process, Pullman reifies the imperial, white, patriarchal vision of modern subjectivity. Pullman's series takes up the legacy of Victorian education, children's literature, and psycho-medical discourses, by having Lyra, a "coarse and greedy little savage" rewritten throughout the trilogy, to finally emerge as a rational and realistic young adult ready to participate and propagate the framework and values she was formed within (*TGC,* 33). [5]

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[5] The trilogy concludes in a garden, with Lyra and Pan discussing their plan to go to school and eventually become scholars: Lyra says that if they had followed their happiness, with Will and his daemon, "then we wouldn't have been able to build it. No one could [build the Republic] if they put themselves first. We have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and patient, and we've got to study and think and work hard" (*TAS* 518).

2. I: “Another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell”[6]

The His Dark Materials Trilogy

The *His Dark Materials* trilogy is made up of *The Golden Compass* (1996)*, The Subtle Knife* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000).[7] When the trilogy begins, Lyra Belacqua is eleven years old. Lyra and her dæmon Pantalaimon have lived among the scholars of Jordan college in Oxford since they were orphaned as infants and given sanctuary there. The Oxford of Pullman’s novel is heavily inspired by the real place and Pullman’s time there as a student, but it is a version from a different world than our own. In this world, every person has an animal-shaped dæmon from the moment they are born until they die. A dæmon’s final form externalizes certain elements of a person’s character, but prior to puberty, a child’s dæmon shifts between many forms depending on their emotions and environment. Dæmons are one of many magical beings in Pullman’s trilogy. In the north there is a kingdom of speaking, metal-working polar bears, in the skies there are witches who fly on pinewood branches, and many other fantastical beings in a multitude of other worlds that are like each other in some regards, and strikingly different in others. These magical beings and multiverses generate an affective dialogue between familiarity and strangeness that emphasize how precarious Lyra’s understanding of her own world is at the beginning of the trilogy. The constantly shifting realities of the text are foregrounded several chapters into *The Golden Compass* when Lyra learns that she is not an orphan as she has been

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[6] *The Golden Compass* pg. 28

[7] The first book, called *Northern Lights* in the UK, was published in 1995. A year later the book was released in the US, and name was changed to *The Golden Compass* for North American audiences.

told, but the result of an affair between a nobleman-adventurer, Lord Asriel Belacqua and a politician's wife, Marisa Coulter.

Lyra's parents are significant to the trilogy. Beyond exemplifying the childish precarity of Lyra's knowledge, they represent the two ideological positions that are in conflict throughout *HDM*. The opposing view on Dust in the trilogy demonstrates this ideological binary. Dust is a microscopic particle that accumulates on people once their dæmons settle. According to Asriel and the witches, Dust is the source of knowledge, free-will and self-aware consciousness. To the Church and Mrs. Coulter, it is the source of all evil, sin, and corruption, and the result of Eve's original sin.

Where Mrs. Coulter seeks to destroy Dust, Lord Asriel wants to protect it. Asriel, a Jordan scholar, seeks to kill God, overthrow the oppressive Magisterium and replace it with "the Republic of Heaven". These fierce opponents unite when they discover that their daughter is prophesied to be "Eve, again" who after being tempted by a new "serpent," will free the world from the Magisterium's oppression and bring "the end of destiny" (*TSK* 313, 248. *TGC* 271). Their formerly self-serving and ruthless characters shift to protect Lyra, and Marisa collaborates with Asriel to defeat the Authority. On the surface, Marisa and Asriel's choices underscore Pullman's position that good and evil are "adjectives" that describe human actions, not an inherent human quality or supernatural force ("God and Dust" 400). Lyra's parents defeat the Magisterium, who "seeks to restrict understanding and put knowledge in chains" and Lyra frees the souls trapped in purgatory by giving their keepers, the harpies, a new job ("The Republic of Heaven" 430). The harpies now judge the stories of the dead; souls with "true" stories are guided out of the land of the dead and permitted to transcend consciousness by rejoining the material

world in an abstract molecular way, while the souls without rich experiences to tell are trapped in a static, grey purgatory for eternity. These triumphs reflect Pullman's belief that anything that stands in the way of knowledge, sensuous experience, and free-will is wrong. In the following section I will clarify how *His Dark Materials* is engaging a tradition of English writers who dramatize this battle between knowledge and ignorance, and the responsibility of individual choices. Because these dramatizations in turn are based on imagery from the Hebrew scriptures and the Christian Bible, I will begin my own survey with the book of Genesis, and specifically the figure of Eve.

Expanding Genesis, Eve, and Original Sin.

Although expressly forbidden, Eve eats from the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" (King James 2:9). She shares the fruit with Adam, they both become conscious, and God exiles them from the garden of Eden. Where God describes this transition as dying, the serpent likens their newly conscious state to a divine awakening; telling Eve her "eyes shall be opened" "as gods" (3:5). Eve, while less than Adam's equalin the biblical story, is held responsible for their fall from grace and God lowers her further into subjection and misery for the sin of seeking knowledge. Yet, because God created the garden and everything it in, including the tree of knowledge and the first couple, Eve appears predestined to eat from the tree, and as the doctrine of original sin suggests, that humans are created to be incapable of goodness, or self-restraint. Comparing the summary of Pullman's trilogy with the biblical fall of man demonstrates how Eve's role in Genesis, and the meaning of their fall from grace, is positively reconfigured in the *His Dark Materials* series.

In 1667, the English poet John Milton publishes an epic poem in ten books called *Paradise Lost* where he expands the bible's account of Genesis.[8] The title of Pullman's trilogy "His dark materials," is a quote from book II of *Paradise Lost,* and refers to the chaotic matter that "th'Almighty Maker" used to create the world and could "them ordain….to create more Worlds" (II. 915-16).[9] For Milton, like most of his countrymen in the 17th century, the Bible's account of Genesis was a record of historical fact.[10] Yet, Milton takes issue with the claim that the first parents were predestined, arguing instead that God had made Adam and Eve "sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" (III.99). Milton sought to "justify the ways of God to men" by expanding Genesis to demonstrate that because Adam and Eve could have chosen otherwise, God's doctrine is harmonious with Milton's belief in informed choice, freedom, and righteous authority (I.26).[11] Milton's Eve surprised his readers; in his account, Eve is Adam's physical and intellectual equal. While Eve is still held responsible for the fall, her choice to eat from the tree is nuanced and relatable, more driven by curiosity and logic than pride and vanity. Milton argues

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[8] In 1674 Milton republishes his epic with two additional books.

[9] Book II of *Paradise Lost* describes Satan and his council of fallen angels after they revolt against God, and are cast out of heaven. The council decides on attacking God through his new favorite creation, Man, and Satan volunteers to spy on Adam and Eve. This book is marked by moving arguments for freedom from unjust authority, righteous rebellion, and the value of personal autonomy. The passage Pullman's title come from describes Satan's contemplation of the Abyss of Chaos and the daunting journey he must undertake to strike against what he views as the unjust authority of God. Pullman's choice of title suggests that he imagines a thematic symmetry between himself and Satan, as he "sets out across the wastes of hell to find his way to the new world" (*Paradise Lost*, 55).

[10] See Anne Ferry (1988) for more on Milton's faith, women in *Paradise Lost,* and the Geneva Bible. For an exhaustive comparison of Milton's version of Genesis in *Paradise Lost* with the Bible's, see Philip J. Gallagher (1984).

[11] As well as seeking to justify God's choices in Genesis, Milton's poem is in dialogue with the politics of his period, particularly the English revolution and Restoration.

elsewhere that faith and loyalty must be tested to be proven worthwhile.[12] Accordingly, his expansion of Genesis is controversial because it is sympathetic to characters like Eve, who question and explore the limits of their world. Pullman builds on Milton's idea that "Will and Reason [are] …choice[s]" and that individual choices have great importance. However, Pullman bristles against Milton's ultimate emphasis on obedience and seeks to positively recode defiance. While Milton's Eve is tested and fails, Pullman's trilogy reinterprets Eve's decision to sacrifice grace for knowledge as a triumph for humanity. The thematic connections I have drawn above, between the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, help contextualize the ideological stakes of Lyra's journey toward adulthood. As the next section will demonstrate, these stakes reflect Pullman's desire to align himself with the ideological battle for personal autonomy, knowledge, and reason as he sees it playing out amidst writers of English literature.

A great deal of the scholarly work on Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series celebrates its "remarkable ingenuity and power," (Scott 95) his "artistic mastery," (Lenz 13) and the way his "secular humanist fantasy" diverges from the conservative history of children's literature (Hatlen 76). Yet, as much as Pullman's fiction diverges from the conservative and religious history of English children's literature, as I introduce in the previous section, the *His Dark Materials* trilogy invests in and is influenced by the English literary canon and the ideological forces that shaped it.

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[12] His celebrated anti-censorship treatise: Milton, John. (1644). *Areopagitica: A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England*. URL: www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/areopagitica/index.shtml

In addition to borrowing the title of his trilogy from Milton, nine of the epigraphs in the series' third book, *The Amber Spyglass,* are taken from various works of William Blake (Pullman 354).[13] Pullman writes that his view of "Milton had been influenced by Blake's" and during the time of writing *TAS* he was "interested in anything that spoke of the two of them" (354). Milton and Blake are clearly significant and explicit intertextual interlocutors in *His Dark Materials*, but the work J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis also provide contrast for Pullman's departure from the generic conventions of fantasy writing for children.

As an Oxford English alumni, in attendance while Tolkien and Lewis were Oxford dons, Pullman's work reflects a desire to reproduce the scope and quality of great English writers like Milton and Blake, but upon finding his writing strengths closer to those of Lewis and Tolkien, he attempts to write fantasy for children without the patriarchal and religious ideologies of these antecedents. Burton Hatlen writes that Pullman is "inevitably writing in the long shadow of his two redoubtable predecessors," but that Pullman has "on several occasions assertively, even aggressively positioned himself in opposition to Tolkien and Lewis" ("Pullman's *His Dark Materials,* a challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis…," 76). Hatlen goes on to argue that Pullman's *HDM* series challenges Tolkien and Lewis' "life-denying" "Christian worldviews;" their reification of class and gender hierarchies; and their commitment to "metaphysical dualism" (76, 79). Pullman writes *His Dark Materials* in reaction to the authoritarian, religious and imperialistic features of the fantasy and children's writing.

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[13] Mostly from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* and *The Book of Urizen.*

Religious Influence

Specifically, Pullman is critical of religion's impact on children's literature, and skeptical of the "supernatural forces" Christianity uses to justify human "goodness and modesty, or… self-righteousness and pride" ("God and Dust" 396). In his essay "God and Dust," Pullman summarizes his thoughts on religion after reading *God Outside the Box* by Richard Harries, the former Bishop of Oxford. Pullman writes that he "agree[s] with every word of [the Bishop's arguments,] except the words [he doesn't] understand; …*spirit*, *spiritual* and *God*" (395). Pullman argues that these words are incomprehensible because they require justifications that defy logic, are "entirely unsupported by anything verifiable," and are predicated on "hierarchical" "subordinat[ion]," rather than "mutual…responsibility" (397, 408). This statement is one of many instances where Pullman writes that he does not understand good and evil as forces that animate human life, nor does he "believe in…God" (397).

Pullman is most skeptical of the church and other religious institutions (397). This skepticism is a major point of continuity between himself and his major influences. Scholars have noted that "Pullman, Blake, and Milton all share great cynicism regarding the church's part in the battle [of good versus evil]" and that like "the biblical story, Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and most of Blake's work…the key theme of" Pullman's trilogy is "the battle of good and evil for the soul of humankind" (Scott 97).

Pullman acknowledges his trilogy's similarities with the "Ophite serpent-wisdom idea as it manifest[s] itself in Milton and Blake," and to "Blake's Gnosticism" in depicting "the

opposition…between an aged father-tyrant and the revolutionary, life-bringing son" (355, 369).[14] Despite setting out to write literature that departs from religious and imperialistic frameworks, these similarities go beyond plot and character dynamics. Pullman "boldly reshapes the biblical story" but despite this reformulation, *His Dark Materials* continues to "employ Christianity's humanistic ethics, traditions…its biblical themes and narratives, its symbolism…and often its diction" (Scott, "Revamping Old Traditions in *His Dark Materials*," 96). One of the major points of continuity is how Pullman organizes the climax of his trilogy around the sexual maturation of his two main characters, Will and Lyra. While the stakes of the battle between knowledge and grace are different in Pullman's text than they are in the bible, or even in Milton's epic, the battle is still initiated by Will and Lyra feeding each other fruit that introduces them to love and desire.

Furthermore, despite his claim that he does not understand or see the need for spirituality, Pullman's *HDM* series is marked by a nearly "puritanical" moralizing of "every person's ultimate responsibility to mankind, even at the expense of their own happiness" (Scott 96). This puritanical tendency creates an opportunity to question how Pullman imagines a balance between the conflicting imperatives to fully savour "the joys of life" on one hand, and to sacrifice your happiness for the benefit of mankind, on the other (*AS* 320). The tension between these two drives reaches a breaking point when in *The Amber Spyglass,* the third book in Pullman's *HDM*

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[14] This acknowledgement is retrospective, stated in a talk given in 2005 to the Blake Society, titled "*I must create a system"*. Furthermore, Pullman comes to realize the extent of his trilogy's similarities to Gnostic thought, and gnostic religious frameworks used by Milton and Blake after reading A.D. Nuttall's *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton and Blake* while writing the final book of the trilogy. Pullman describes that he was initially "immobilized" by his inadvertent religious filiations, and I argue that Pullman's series is marked by these kinds of inherited institutional links.

trilogy, Lyra is forced to abandon her dæmon Pan on the shores of Hell to fulfill her destiny of rescuing the ghosts trapped there. [15]

Despite the agony this separation causes Lyra, which she describes as "hurt[ing] more than anything" and akin to being a "murderer," Lyra tells Roger's ghost that she "had to! or [she] couldn't have come" (*AS* 8:47:27). In this scene, it is imperative that Lyra symbolically slay the deep connection between herself and Pan, who stands for her emotional, imaginative, "soul-self" (Scott, 100). When the boatman tells Lyra that she must leave Pan behind, Will intercedes only to be told that "[i]t's not a rule you can break. It's a law like [gravity]". To demonstrate, the boatman reaches into the river, cups, and pours out the water from his hand, continuing "I can't tilt my hand and make the water fly upward. No more can I take her dæmon to the land of the dead. Whether or not *she* comes, he must stay" (*AS* 283). This moment reconnects the *His Dark Materials* series to the epic poem from which the series gets its name. This link muddles Pullman's rejection of the Christian demand for "obedience, humility, and submission" because while the boatman and narrator frame this junction as a choice, Pullman ends up replicating the mechanics of Milton's argument in defense of God's law and man's freedom of choice; Adam and Eve were "[s]ufficient to have stood, though free to fall,"(Scott 103) (*PL* IV:99).[16] The narrator notes that "[Lyra] *could* turn back…She could be true to the heart-deep, life-deep bond

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[15] People and their daemons can only move a "few yards away from" each other without extreme pain (*TGC* 170).

[16] Scott uses this quote to suggest that Pullman departs from a Miltonic structure, because Milton defends God by asserting that Adam and Eve had freedom to choose. While Pullman may depart from Milton's piety, I read the no-choice Lyra is offered as participating in the Christian demand for obedience with death as the only other choice (Genesis 3:3). Notably, Lyra literally chooses to die to save the souls trapped in the land of the dead.

linking her to Pantalaimon, she could put that [relationship] first. But she couldn't," because Pullman's ontology of self-sacrifice for collective benefit only offers one option to move forward: obedience (*AS* 283-284). The boatman uses the "law" of gravity, a law that describes an unyielding feature of the natural, material world to describe his inability to choose to allow Pan into the land of the dead. Structured this way, the boatman is not accountable or responsible for the choice to not let come with them. Pullman's invocation of such a law gestures towards Pullman's preferred alternative to religious authority; a scientific authority that describes and explains the material world, "our true home" (*TAS* 320).[17] Pullman contrasts the ability to break religious "rules," which his trilogy suggests are made up of "[l]ies and fantasies," with the unbreakable laws of science (*TAS* 320).

Amidst the 'natural laws' of science, Pullman also suggests that there are relational human qualities that void the need for religious laws. To return to the scene where Lyra must abandon Pan, a different set of natural and self-evident 'laws' become apparent:

> And Pantalaimon didn't ask why, because he knew; and he didn't ask whether Lyra loved Roger more than him, because he knew the true answer to that, too. And he knew that if he spoke, she wouldn't be able to resist; so the dæmon held himself quiet so as not to distress the human who was abandoning him, and now they were both pretending that it wouldn't hurt, it wouldn't be long before they were together again, it was all for the best. But Will knew that the little girl was tearing her heart out of her breast (my emphasis, 284).

In the passage above, Lyra and Pan silently "preten[d]" and "keep [themselves] quiet" so as "not to distress" each other (*AS* 284). Pretending, in Pullman's series is positively charged with

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[17] Laws of physics are distinct from theories because they describe a phenomenon and are unbreakable. A theory attempts to explain a phenomena and must be disprovable. Likewise, any law of physics is by definition unbreakable, and if ever 'broken' the law is revised to include the new property, so that it was never broken *is this common enough knowledge that I don't need to cite a source?

imagination and discovery for children, and negatively charged with dishonesty and ignorance for adults, but this journey to Hell marks the inclusion of a new kind of pretend; Pullman treats placations as a largely neutral, or even positive form of pretend that is linked to adulthood. When Will states that, despite Lyra and Pan's display of composure, he "knew that *the little girl* was tearing her heart out of her breast," this separation between girl and dæmon is explicitly linked to Lyra's transition from childhood to adulthood (my emphasis, 284). Leaving Pan behind severs Lyra's connection to her soul-self by removing her "heart;" thus killing or at least excising her "little girl" child-self to become an adult.[18] Will too experiences a version of this transition as they journey towards the land of the dead., and the contrast between Will and Lyra's experiences suggests that Pullman's puritanical impulse carries gendered connotations.

While he describes the physical pain of his heart being torn out as well, he also describes that:

> [I]t was mental, too: something secret and private was being dragged into the open, where it had no wish to be, and Will was nearly overcome by a mixture of pain and shame and fear and self-reproach, because *he himself had caused it*. And it was worse than that. It was as if he'd said, "No, don't kill me, I'm frightened; kill my mother instead' she doesn't matter, I don't love her." And as if she'd heard him say it, and *pretended she hadn't* so as to spare his feelings, and offered herself in his place anyway because of her love for him. He felt as bad as that. There was nothing worse to feel. So Will knew that all of those things were part of having a dæmon… (285).

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[18] For more on how reading fantasy might reconnect adult-readers with their child-selves see Zipes, Jack. "The Liberating Potential of The Fantastic in Contemporary Fairy Tales for Children." *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 168-190.

Here, Pullman explicitly links the mature composure and self-sacrifice shown between Lyra and Pan with maternal qualities.[19] Where Lyra and Pan make themselves "not look away, not avoid the guilt," Will's experience suggests that the transition into adulthood if not faced with "honesty and…courage," it can breed a selfish escapism that denies an adult's responsibility to their communities. Lyra and Pan's behavior shows a mutual self-sacrifice; like Will's mother, Lyra and Pan face the reality of death as an act of service to each other, borne out of love and duty. On the other hand, Will's inability to face the reality of death results in sacrificing his mother out of cowardice. These contrasting modes of emergent adulthood reinforce Pullman's insistence that successful adulthood is inherently oriented towards a community serving, "puritanical" self-denial which requires the sacrifice of the emotional and imaginative child self.

I argue that this imperative, that Lyra must sever the connection between her reason and her imagination to continue, complicates Pullman's attempt to "redefin[e] good and evil so that freedom, wisdom and strength are humankind's goal, replacing the obedience, humility, and submission" by participating in and blindly replicating the colonial, patriarchal values that naturalize this epistemological perspective as an ontological reality (Scott, 103). To say this another way, Pullman's series does not critically intervene in the inherently imperial discourse

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[19] The conventional and gendered qualities of motherhood and fatherhood are variously but consistently troubled in Pullman's *HDM,* but ultimately the second half of *The Amber Spyglass* is marked by a version of motherhood that is coherent with gendered parenting norms of women as comforting, nurturing, and selfless caregivers as exemplified by Lyra's reflections that she would like "to have a child of her own, to lull and soothe and sing to, one day" and Mrs. Coulter's out of character choice to sacrifice her own life to protect Lyra's (*TAS* 278)

that replicates itself through the institutional and ideological valorization of modern, rational, empiricist ways of learning and being.

Another instance where Pullman utilises Christian morality is the positive associations Pullman makes with ordered natural settings in the trilogy; the final pages of *The Amber Spyglass* describe Lyra and Pan after the world has been saved, sitting in Oxford's botanic garden, planning their future (515). The *HDM* trilogy uncritically reinforces this positive linkage between progress and order, without acknowledging its biblical origins. Genesis, of course, describes God creating the earth and heaven over 6 days. This process of development is extremely orderly, each day neatly encapsulates one of God's acts. In *Paradise Lost,* Milton describes how "The heav'ns and earth / Rose out of Chaos" (I. 9 -10,) and that after God's creative act, the "wild uproar/ Stood rul'd…and order from disorder sprung" (III.710-13). Much like his tidy garden metaphor cited in my introduction, Lyra's evolution in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy reifies these values by depicting their cultivation as a requirement to become a societally valuable adult. With this context of institutionalized religion in mind, it is clear that even as Christianity lost traction and credibility, many of its values remain foundational for the ideological frameworks that replaced it, including Pullman's belief in order, self-sacrifice and realism.

3. II: "The world of everything we can see and hear and touch" (28)

At times, Pullman's series conflates Christian myth with the fantastical models proposed by Lewis, Tolkien, and the tradition of Christian fantasy they continue, but his disdain for fantasy is not unique. Pullman's disapproval of magical, fantastical, or otherwise unreal elements

in literature is echoed by various sources, from literary studies to religious fundamentalists.[20] The treatment of fantasy can range from ambivalence to hostility, but the loose consensus is that "the fantastic is to be regarded primarily as children's literature, and children's literature is to be regarded as innately inferior and less complex" (3). In the following section, I will highlight how this skepticism of fantasy shares an intricate relationship with the changing views on Christianity, English identity, and empire, before highlighting how these features came to shape the study and concepts of childhood and adulthood.

Fantastical Skeptics

To begin, I will outline how the denigration of fantasy and children's literature has a complicated relationship with Christian morality and the category of the child. In their study of how fantasy and children's literature are interconnected genres, Michael Levy and Farah Mendlesohn trace the literary disdain for fantasy that informs Pullman's comments to the impact of Christianity's dismissal of unreal elements in classical myth and their depiction of the "immoral," and often sexual, "adventures" of "the Greek gods" (Children's Fantasy Literature, 2016. I). Christianity's dismissal of the fantastical features of Greek myths contributes to the still widely held "belief in mimesis:" that a writer's primary responsibility is to "accurately describe reality," and that they can do so (Levy and Mendlesohn, I). Yet, the denigration of fantasy predates Christian power; Plato and Aristotle, the forefathers of western critical theory, contend that "mimetic representation" is the "essential relationship between text and [reality]" (I). This

[20] It is worth noting that despite his early and oft-mentioned disapproval of fantasy, Pullman has now been a writer in the genre for over twenty years. Furthermore, Pullman has published a collection of fairy tale retellings, *Grimm Tales: For Young and Old* (2012,) several graphic novels, picture books, short stories, and countless novels in a variety of fantastical settings.

historical elevation of realism and deprecation of fantasy instantiates a "division between high and low in our literary culture" (I). Fantasy and other 'lower' literary forms were not originally linked to children, but to the lower classes. Prior to the eighteenth-century fantasy, fairy, and folktales were "intended for the [entertainment of the adult] peasantry," not for children, and when "children were taught (if they were taught) [it was from] from hornbooks, the Bible and…from primers grounded in mimesis" (Levy and Mendlesohn 2). However, the emergence of the western European middle class, and changing ideas about childhood at the end of the seventeenth century creates new opportunities for fantasy.[21]

One of the most significant shifts in how children as a category are understood, is that now, "the supervised rearing of children is [meant] to lead to the *homme civilisé;"* proper, pragmatic, and pious (17).[22] Fairy tales and other fantastical forms resurge in the allegorical, often religious, literature of the eighteenth century and become one of the period's default tools in the moral education of children. Christianity's successful use of fantasy storytelling elements for children's moral instruction shifts the intended audience of fantasy writing and contributes to the emergence of what is now called children's literature. But, as Tolkien himself argues, "the

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[21] This shift is monumental in two ways: for the first time at such a scale, children as a category are being written for, and at an unprecedented scale, women are writing. This cultural and ideological shift creates "an entry point for women into literature"; women, now increasingly responsible for "the moral education of children," begin writing "fairy tales…to prepare [young people] for roles they…believe[e] they should play in society" (17). This historical moment forges cultural associations that link women writers, fantastical or fairy elements, and writing for children together, and is partly responsible for the effeminacy and childishness associated with the unreal.

[22] In the medieval period, children "were not granted a special or distinctive social status…once weaned they participated in society according to their abilities, just as adults did" (James and James 26). It was not until the late fifteenth century that children began to be seen as "different or particular," and once they were, "images of the child" and their development, fluctuated over time; "evil or innocent" already "immanent or…developing naturally" (James and James 32). Levy and Mendlesohn add that "by the end of the seventeenth century, childhood was conceived as a state of natural innocence, and therefore potentially corruptible" (17).

association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history" which "in the modern lettered world," has "relegated [fantasy] to the nursery" ("On Fairy-Stories" 130). One effect of fantasy being relegated to the realm of childhood, is that fantasy and children's literatures are treated as "suspect, if not illegitimate," and that imagination has come to be seen as a childish characteristic (Tolkien 145).

Consequently, critical work on the history of children's literature and fantasy writing is characterized by a defense of these genres against claims that the depiction of fantastical or otherwise unreal events is fluff entertainment at best, or morally damaging at worst. The aimless, non-productive, and aesthetic pleasures produced by fantasy threaten the ideological cohesion of adult categorization with "regressive yearnings" (Knoepflmacher 497). Despite being fantasy writing for children, Pullman's *HDM* trilogy reflects the author's ambivalence toward the value of fantastical literature. The author himself describes fantasy as a genre he "neither enjoyed nor approved of," but was "inexorably—helplessly – bound into…writing" (*"I Must Create A System"* 357). One moment where we see this thematized in the novels themselves is in *TAS*; In the land of the dead, the harpies attack Lyra for telling them "[l]ies and fantasies," and the Harpies parrot a widely held belief that only "true" stories are "nourishing" (*TAS,* 317*).*

Pullman claims that the primary theme of his trilogy is the "end of innocence;" "leav[ing] the…grace of childhood behind [to] go in search of…wisdom" ("The Writing of Stories" 30-31). His trilogy is preoccupied with how young people can be encouraged to grow up properly, with the benefit of their fellow humans in mind. Pullman sets out to write a myth to replace "the story of Adam and Eve…[as]…the fundamental myth of why we are as we are" (31). Unlike Lewis and Tolkien, Pullman rejects religion as an appropriate or necessary epistemological framework

for the education of children and goes as far as saying that Lewis's Narnia series "is an invaluable guide to what is wrong and cruel and selfish" about institutionalized religion (421). This impulse in his work is useful for understanding both his disdain for fantasy and his decision to write in the genre. [23]

To understand how talking polar bears have anything to do with imperialism or English identity, I would like to return to an element of Pullman's biography: his Oxford education. Pullman's time at Oxford is significant beyond linking Pullman to the English literary canon. Oxford University is represented in contradictory though interrelated ways in the cultural imaginary. While on one hand "a great deal of Oxford is imaginary anyway," Oxford is also a site for the reproduction of institutionalized racial, gendered, class inequities; a marker of English identity and superiority; the architectural and thematic prototype for magic schools and other places of arcane learning; the imagined birthplace of the modern fantasy genre (Pullman *DV* 97). Oxford's overlapping valences of magic and oppression are echoed in the fantasy genre because Oxford and fantasy literature are shaped by "the idea of the [English] nation as a seat of institutional and cultural power…. that transcends time and author" (Cecire, *Re-Enchanted,* 10).[24]

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[23] Pullman is not consistent in his disparagement of fantasy. In the opening statements to his talk "Magic Carpets: The Writer's Responsibility" Pullman makes two arguments in defense of non-realism in children's literature: he first argues that these genres offer comparable psycho-social benefits as those attributed (though not well proven) to literary fiction. Next, he links contemporary fantasy and writing for children to Oscar Wilde's defense of "art for art's own sake," and links these genres to a historical fear of aestheticism, decadence, and the link between moral degeneration and aimless, non-productive pleasure.

[24] In *Re-Enchanted,* Maria Sachiko Cecire establishes a genealogy between fantasy and academia that begins with how Lewis and Tolkien not only set up a curriculum that focuses on medieval literature as *the* appropriate mode for moral instruction, national identity edification, and understanding "essential humanistic questions", but also, especially in the case of Tolkien, position their own fantasy works as meaningfully engaging this medieval tradition and therefore "bind the genre [of fantasy] to an authoritative source of cultural capital" (Cecire 125). This genealogy maps out how English identity, Oxford's institutional and imaginative appeal, and the "minority" status

Through the figure of the hero-cum-scholar, exemplified by characters like Gandalf, Digory Kirke, Dumbledore, and Samwell Tarly, fantasy writing reifies the study of arcane language and literature, positioning these ancient texts as holding the key to contemporary problems, and the role of recording and passing on this knowledge as essential to human culture and survival. C.S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien co-created "the Oxford School of children's fantasy literature" through their anti-modernist curriculum design and fantasy writing in their time at Oxford (Cecire 97). The Oxford School of children's fantasy describes a handful of students, Pullman included, who receive their English degree at Oxford while Tolkien and Lewis are Dons there, go on to write children's fantasy literature heavily influenced by the medieval conventions they studied while at Oxford.

Pullman rebels against some of these medievalizing conventions, while still trading on a kind of academic cultural capital through his reinterpretation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the influence of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* on Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series. This consideration of Oxford's various symbolic registers contextualizes the twin poles of educational enchantment in Pullman's texts: on the one hand, the structured and sacred scholars of Oxford, and on the other, the influence of back-alley retellings of "old tales and ancient wisdom" (Cecire 108). We will return to the significance of Pullman's scholar and storyteller in a later section, but first, I will show how the emergence of childhood as an institutional category reified adult-Englishness as the standard for civilized personhood.

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of medieval-inspired fantasy for children and adults, have contributed to the genre's "interrelated expectations and outsized social impact" (9). Oxford University is represented in contradictory though interrelated ways in the cultural imaginary.

Shaping Childhood

Pullman is not alone in depicting childhood as a state of social, sexual, and spiritual 'blankness' that needs to be written. Just as the English garden became *the* archetype for fashionable landscaping, English values became the de-facto benchmark for children to be molded into.[25] By the dawn of the eighteenth century, children are a new category, shaped and qualified by the budding disciplines seeking to "civilize" them: "this process of social indoctrination through anxiety-provoking effects and positive reinforcement – operate[s] on all levels of manners, speech, sex, literature, and play. Instincts [a]re to be trained and harnessed to sociopolitical values" (Levy and Mendelsohn 17). Children are understood as either void and ready to be filled, or chaotic and ready to be tamed, but in either case, it is adults, both individual and institutional, who define those states and decide how to remedy them.[26] Pullman engages with this pattern of institutional prescription in *HDM* when the scholars of Oxford make choices about Lyra's interests and capacities without consulting her.[27] Despite Lyra's centrality to the prophecy the scholars of Oxford are protecting, the scholars are certain that a "healthy, thoughtless child" like Lyra "wouldn't listen," and could not be interested in "distant theological riddle[s]" or "Dust" or her own future (*TGC* 29). While the narrator later informs the reader that the scholars had been "wrong" and Lyra "would have listened eagerly…to anyone who could tell

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[25] Maud Hines highlights how the fluidity of children's daemons, and the shape of adult's daemons demonstrate the influential legacy of "pseudosciences like phrenology and physiognomy [on Pullman's text]. Fantasies of reading the body as a key to the self persist today in a multiplicity of discriminatory practices against people with visible disabilities and racist, sexist, and ageist practices. In *The Golden Compass* these readings are directed at the shape of daemons, familiar and yet unfamiliar to us, natural to Lyra" (Hines 39).

[27] The juxtaposition between HDM's polemical reputation and its authoritarian didacticism has already been noted by several scholars. Naomi Wood agrees that Pullman's first trilogy naturalizes hierarchies for children, and Kristine Moruzi adds that Pullman fails to reimagine child-parent relationships beyond a didactic and duty-bound framework common to children's literature ("Missed Opportunities," 56; "Paradise Lost and Found," 256).

her about Dust," this passage demonstrates the way the Scholar's expectations of Lyra reflect their perception of themselves as keepers of "arcane knowledge" and of children as "thoughtless" and expendable unless they offer some future and communal benefit (*TGC* 35). Pullman's portrayal of individual children as only valuable for their future contribution reflects his view that only adult qualities can generate communal benefit in the HDM series. However, Pullman series upends the expectation that "nobly born children" are more valuable than the children of servants like Roger, or Gyptians like Billy, two children captured by "the Gobblers" (*TGC* 46).[28] While the young people captured by the General Oblation Board are always taken "from the slums," "under the age of twelve," with poor, sick, or otherwise disenfranchised family "histories," Lyra keeps her promise of rescuing Roger because he is her friend, and frees the captured children because it is the right thing do (TGC 38, 40).

Disciplines that study children and childhood codify what constitutes adulthood as much as they qualify childhood. Contemporary understandings and qualifications of mature cognition as rational, logical, and empirical, are a by-product of the late-Victorian modernism, which sought to reinforce the affluent white patriarchal "right to rule" by establishing emotion, fantasy, intuition, and imagination as primitive, childish, effeminate or otherwise non-modern.[29]

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[28] The Gobblers are what children call the agents of the General Oblation Board. The GOB is an experimental organization of the Magisterium, a faction of the Holy Church, that is run by Lyra's mother, Marisa Coulter. This organization runs brutal experiments on the children they abduct. These experiments, called "excisions," sever children from their dæmons to prevent Dust from settling on them. The magisterium believes that if Dust can be stopped, humanity can reclaim the childlike innocence that was lost when man was expelled from the garden of Eden. However, the children subjected to this process usually die, and the few who survive are forever catatonic.

[29] For more on the differences between adult and child cognition see Gopnik, Alison. *The Philosophical Baby.* Picador Press, 2009.

Knoepflmacher demonstrates that the aforementioned characteristics of adult cognition are aligned with the ideal modern literary audience, namely white, adult males.[30] These ideal readers are defined by their opposition to "undesirable readers," namely people of color, women, and children (Knoepflmacher 529). To demonstrate how Pullman uncritically engages this tradition of valuing the readership, and storytelling of some groups more than others, I will now return to the figures of the dutiful scholar and the back-alley storyteller that recur in several of Pullman's nonfiction essays.

In these essays Pullman reiterates that he and his writing are thoroughly "unacademic and highly improper," but his arguments on language and storytelling reflect his Oxfordian education ("The Republic of Heaven" 412). Pullman writes that stories "make themselves at home anywhere" ("Magic Carpet," *DV* 10). He expands on this idea to say:

> Should writers pass on the experience of our own culture? Yes of course. It's one of our prime duties. But should we *only* tell stories that originated elsewhere, on the grounds that we don't have the right to annex the experience of others? Absolutely not. A culture that never encounters any others becomes first inward-looking, and then stagnant, and then rotten. We are responsible—there's that word again—for bring fresh streams of story into our own culture from all over the world, and welcoming experience from every quarter, and offering our own experience in return ("Magic Carpet," *DV 10)*

While Pullman frames this exchange as reciprocal – a multiplicity of storytellers who exchange experiences equally—his free-exchange storyteller fails to acknowledge the politics of profit and privilege in the book-selling market he participates in. Despite his fantasy of a free and undocumented exchange of stories regardless of origin, Pullman is verbose on the writer's

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[30] See Knoepflmacher, "The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children" 1983.

“responsibility towards language” (5). Pullman argues that writers must be weary of “expressions that are *second-hand* or blurred through too much use,” and must not leave language “any poorer, or clumsier, or less precise” (7). The safeguarding of origin, history, and culture are incarnate in the gatekeeping of language.

The same puritanical urgency that drives Lyra’s development in the trilogy seems to animate the ethical imperative Pullman associates with protecting language, and by extension, English culture. Pullman further states that a storyteller must “know [their] story very well,” which strikes me as somewhat of a challenge when retelling a story without it’s embodied, experiential, historical contexts (“Children’s literature without Borders” 122). I am not implying that elements of story should not, or do not, travel. But Pullman’s disavowal for documenting how which and whose stories end up on his page point to a trap door beneath his storyteller’s ‘magic carpet’—stories should, according to Pullman, be funneled towards the most skilled storyteller, and this storyteller is produced by a particularly colonial educational framework. This master of the English language at the level of vocabulary, syntax, and imagery, with a keen eye for clarity and a repugnance of cliché, takes “fresh” story ingredients from all over the world (handily pre-washed of cliché by force of cultural decontextualization,) who decides what is to be conveyed in his acute prose, which is then marketed and sold to the social and financial benefit of himself, and his cultural-colonial context.

Despite testifying that “stories shouldn’t need passports,” Pullman’s oft-noted intertextuality, series title, and quotes included as chapter headers in *The Amber Spyglass*,

explicitly "acknowledge his debts" to a certain genealogy of his "literary forebears" (Scott, 97).[31] Pullman's choice to explicitly document how ideas from these canonical, highly-lauded, fellow-Englishmen, have come to inhabit his series, while not only failing to reference less 'local' ideas, but creating an ideological argument that it shouldn't be necessary to do so, works in two primary ways. Firstly, it aligns his writing with that of these literary colossi and situates Pullman as a continuation of the bloodline of English literary excellence. Secondly, and I would argue, unintentionally it highlights how English literature, the gatekeeping of language, and Pullman himself, are and have always been deeply tied to colonial practices that naturalize the expropriation, erasure, and delegitimization of non-English ways of knowing, storytelling (or teaching,) in the production of white, patriarchal, colonial culture.

Pullman "perceives himself above all as a storyteller…who challenges his young readers to think and to learn" (Scott 104). Yet, Pullman's free-market storyteller seems consistent with his predecessor's "Cauldron of Story" (Tolkien 125). Both approaches agree that the collective unconscious accumulates themes, narratives, characters, and aesthetic elements from across time and space that are mixed, melted down, and are eventually re-disseminated as new stories.[32] Accordingly, the *His Dark Materials* trilogy weaves together complex, multi-mythic cosmologies and "melds religious, classical and folk traditions in a modern idiom consonant with Pullman's vision of the diligent creation of a harmonious universe" (Scott 104). The cosmologies Pullman takes from reach beyond Christianity and the classical tradition. Notable departures

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[31] Pullman, "Children's Literature Without Borders" pg.112.

[32] For more on the Cauldron of Story, see Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories".

from Judeo-Christian, classical mythological frameworks include the witches “with their own lore and philosophy, and “shamanism through…Will’s father” (Scott 101). Yet, the universe Pullman creates is only meaningfully innovative for its secularity (Scott 104). Furthermore, Pullman`s version of Tolkien`s cauldron reduces witchcraft, shamanism, and otherwise alternative belief structures in Pullman’s series to “folk traditions,” “popular legends,” and “folklore,” and thus takes part in Pullman’s disavowal of those practices as ongoing and evolving practices of living people and communities; opting instead to historicize those practices into belonging to a mythic, English “before.”

While Pullman may envision himself diligently creating a “harmonious universe,” he participates in the colonial mythmaking that silences and erases people who practice non-mainstream ways of knowing, living, and community making, and the colonial processes that have pushed them outside of normative culture, to then whitewash, mythologize, and naturalize those practices in the manufacture of multi-cultural ‘harmony’. This pattern is coherent with the aims of children’s literature in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. Levy and Mendlesohn specify that “omnivorous collection of source material is one of the early hallmarks of the British children’s fantasy in a period of intense cultural appropriation” and that this coincided with Britain’s emergent impression “that the cultural as well as material riches of the world [were] somehow British by right of innate superiority” (27). These features of early British writing for children are helpful for understanding how children’s literature propagated and reinforced notions of the English “nation” at home and abroad (29).

Thus far, I have summarized how Pullman’s first trilogy reflects the impact of Christianity on English identity and institutions, and the subsequent influence that impact has

had on ideas about childhood, fantasy, and children's literature. In the following section, I will highlight how these connections are related to the propagation of Imperial values through literature and language, and how this relation is manifest in Pullman's novels.

Civilizing the Other

As mentioned in my introduction, many scholars have argued that the disciplines of children's literature and criticism, education, and developmental psychology are indivisible from each other, and from the colonial project and citizen formation. The way the category of adult is defined, as reasonable rather than impulsive; rational rather than emotional; realistic rather than imaginative—is linguistically charged with the historical medico-scientific, literary, and pop representation, of non-white and non-male adults as child-like subjects that require guidance, discipline, and control, or else threaten the moral-social status-quo.[33] For all that *HDM* seems critical of this legacy, it ultimately reinforces these resonances of developmental categorization.

In the third book of the HDM series, Mary Malone, a nun-turned-physicist, walks into another world to discover a society of creatures called the *mulefa*. Pullman depicts the *mulefa* as sophisticated and knowledgeable beings with agricultural and ecological expertise, meaningful social bonds and hierarchies, a complex language system, and spiritual practices.[34] Yet, their salvation depends on Mary's knowledge of particle physics and her facility with complex

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[33] Fairy tales are linked directly to "concepts of racial and cultural infancy" by Francis Cohen. This theory builds on "the Indo-European thesis" and was "the bedrock of racial thinking in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (Levy and Mendelsohn 30).

[34] In *The Amber Spyglass,* Mary describes how the *mulefa* "had language, and they had fire, and they had society," (123) "everything was linked together and…seemingly, managed by the *mulefa:"* they are "skillful butcher[s]" (127,) "net makers" (128,) who care for the "seedpod trees" that "without the *mulefa's* attention…would die*"* (129).

problem solving and new ideas. While their distinct lack of humanoid features forecloses any reading of the *mulefa* as representative of specific groups, an antiquated anthropological tone marks the *mulefa* passages and recalls the colonial characterization of indigenous peoples as simultaneously admirable and inferior; ‘the noble savage’ trope relegates indigenous lives and cultures to a nostalgia for mankind’s infancy and “the childhood of the world” (*TAS* 472).[35]

To understand these figures and what they reveal about Pullman it will be necessary to briefly explain how settler colonialism has always been paternalistic. The noble savage and childhood innocence are tropes that reflect different faces of the same coin. Both figures embody developmental contexts, whether they be industrial or physiological, that are mythologized and warmly reflected upon for their originary ‘wholeness,’ innocence, and simplicity. Pullman’s depiction of Mary Malone possessing essential cognitive qualities and industrial skills the *Mulefa* depend on for their salvation, and of Lyra becoming “a realist” to save herself and others suggests that the *HDM* series is strongly influenced by the colonial-industrial ideologies of progress (Pullman, “The Writing of Stories” 33). The presence of, and symmetry between, these two development tropes in Pullman’s trilogy connects children, their development, and their literatures, with imperialism.

The ideological connection between educating children and colonialism requires further detangling. In “The Other: Orientalism, Colonialism, and Children's Literature,” Perry Nodelman asserts that child psychology and children’s literature are adult institutions for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over childhood,” in much the same way Said argues that

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[35] Estimations of non-European people as primitive, or barbaric is deeply linked to Christianity, missionary work, and Christian-English-Imperial values.

European institutions construct the Orient, in Orientalism (1992. 29). Furthermore, this construction of childhood is a colonial and imperial project to indoctrinate children to believe that being oppressed, encultured, and managed is for one's benefit, and to grow into adults that believe and enact the same treatment not only onto their children, but onto any 'Other' they encounter. Childhood, like the Orient, is largely constructed, qualified, and studied, from the outside. The adult (or European, in the case of Orientalism) observer represents the child "other" as not only incapable of perceiving and representing themselves, but also not entitled to control over their own representation (29). Discourses about childhood serve to center and reify the position of adulthood and its inherent qualifications as objective observer, and these assumptions are shaped "over a number of centuries…to support the programs of various philosophical and political symptoms" and are "now simply taken for granted as absolute truth," regardless of whether individuals consciously believe the 'truths' about childhood this discourse produces (30).[36] Nodelman notes that the root of the biases that necessitate educating children away from their emotional and imaginative capacities may lay in the threat posed by childish fancies:

> What we chose to understand as childlike irrationality or lawlessness or carelessness is attractively lax, a temptation to be less responsible, less mature, less adult. If adults have a secret desire to act childishly, and if that dangerous desire is engendered by the childish actions of children, then we must protect ourselves and our world by making children less childish. Our domination of children is for our own good as well as theirs (31).

The threat that childishness may breed social inaction, or selfishness, or fragility, is at the heart of Pullman's first trilogy. While none of these qualities afflict the nonhumanoid people

[36] Jean Piaget, a man often cited as the father of developmental psychology reflects how adult expectations bias the research outcomes on studies about children. Piaget is now notorious for interpreting the results of experiments to under value his child-subjects' capacities. Research has since repeated Piaget's experiments but with "different cultural assumptions" and has demonstrated "vastly superior capabilities in children" (30).

Mary encounters in another world, once Mary arrives, the *mulefa* are dependent on her for their survival in their changing world.[37] When their settlement is attacked, and many of their precious and increasingly rare seedpod wheels are pushed into the river and lost, Mary says "*I help…We make again*" to the *mulefa* "crooning with sorrow" (TAS 131). The necessarily fractured language paired with Mary's lack of understanding for what is lost evokes a parent comforting a distraught group of children; well intended but condescending this impression mars Mary's attempt to console. The *mulefa* are not capable of swimming, and after Mary dives into the river and salvages some of the lost seedpods, "the *mulefa* are full of gratitude" and Mary feels "she had done something useful for them at last" (132). Mary's relief at being useful reflects Pullman's imperative that people should be of help to others, but it is complicated by the reader's awareness that Mary has been making nets and helping around the settlement since she arrived.

The narrator's emphasis adds a performativity to Mary's kind helpfulness that troubles our reading of the altruism in this scene and diminishes the sense that the *mulefa* are viewed as capable and independent by the narrator. Just as Mary must help the *mulefa* survive, Lyra must grow out of her "barba[rism]" and her frivolity, and ultimately must sacrifice parts of herself for the greater good of the collective (*TGC* 31). While Pullman condemns England's colonial past and the atrocities committed in the name of empire and religion, his trilogy is only partly successful in critiquing that past. *HDM* is consistent with other writing for children in its insistent pattern of individual sacrifice for the greater collective good, and like much of

[37] Mary is a physicist, though she had previously been a nun. Mary is Pullman's kind of missionary, one that spreads science instead of religion.

children's literature, expresses values that echo the violent and dominating conquests of the English empire that sought to civilize the untamed world, at home and abroad.

Thus far, I have painted a picture of how Christianity and then imperialism shaped the values that became generic conventions in children's literature, children's education, and developmental psychology. In this final section, I will demonstrate how Pullman draws on that vast network of influences in his depiction of Lyra's development.

4. III: "*She* will be the betrayer, and the experience will be terrible".[38]

Eve's Reward

As I have argued, Pullman restages the biblical fall of man in his first trilogy. Lyra fulfills her destiny and falls from the state of unselfconscious grace to become "Eve, again" by abandoning Pan on the shores of hell. Unlike Genesis, or Milton's account, Pullman frames 'earthly pleasures' as a reward for Lyra's betrayal by insinuating that the wholeness she feels with Pan before their final separation is equivalent to the romantic connection she feels with Will, after she has 'fallen' from that state of wholeness.

Despite his insistence that this transition from innocence and intuition, to experience and wisdom, is necessary, Pullman is careful to not undermine the pain of this journey. For Will and Lyra, the experience is described as a horrifying and painful awareness of their own capacity for cruelty, cowardliness, self-interest, but also self-sacrifice, accountability, and kindness. In this

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[38]*The Golden Compass,* pg 29.

self-aware agony, Will and Lyra are each other's only comfort. Pullman frames Will and Lyra's connection as a replacement for the missing symbiosis with their dæmons; their physical "clinging together" reflects their internal interconnection and Will describes how watching Lyra and Pan part produces a physical "shock" that he feels along the "vivid currents of feeling between them" (285). This connection between them substitutes the wordless exchanges between human and dæmon; a "thought came to Will and Lyra at the same moment, and they exchanged a tear-filled glance…and each of them saw their own expression on the other's face" (287). Will and Lyra are consoled through romantic connection, and later, sexual pleasure. This replicates heteronormative standards of the nuclear family, and frames sexual pleasure as the only appropriate form of adult play.[39] Pullman's acceptance and depiction of romance and sexuality as natural and morally neutral parts of young people's lives caused incendiary controversy.[40]

As an author for children, Pullman's inclusion of Lyra's sexual development is noteworthy. Following the scene where their dæmons reveal their settled forms, Lyra and Will engage in "blissful discovery" as "lovers," stroking each other's dæmons (*TAS* 499). Touching another person's dæmon is only permissible between lovers, and usually connotes sexual intimacy. In other instances, touching, holding, or hurting another person's dæmon is an extreme taboo and treated as violent, coercive, and in the case of an adult touching a child's dæmon: an act of

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[39] While this might seem like an oversimplification, Pullman's suggestion echoes the fact that the only adult-specific products that are marketed, and more or less accepted, as "toys" are explicitly sexual products.

[40] At the time of its release, the North American edition of *The Amber Spyglass* censored the scene that depicts Lyra's sexual awakening. Christian groups lobbied to have the book taken out of circulation for their heretical and perverse content, and some groups went as far as finding and burning copies of the book.

sexual molestation.[41] Pullman also suggests that initial sexual encounters fix an essential element of the self. He writes that Lyra knew “that neither dæmon would change now, having felt a lover’s hands on them. These were their shapes for life: they would want no other” (499). If the touch of “a lover’s hand” contributes to their fixity of their forms, then this scene complicates Pullman’s assertion that dæmons are externalizations of the “soul”, “the very self” (*TGC* 172, *DV* 44). It suggests that dæmons are also embodiments of external ideologies and cultural projections. If dust can only settle on a person once their dæmon has settled, and if sexual and romantic encounters fix some part of the dæmon, and if dust is “conscious” and consciousness, then consciousness is attributed jointly to the adult body and to adult culture.

Lyra and Will are first referred to as “lovers” instead of children when their dæmons reveal their newly settled forms. Their dæmons’ settled forms instantiate the knowledge they now possess about themselves. With “racing hearts,” “knowing exactly what it would mean” they “lay together” in “blissful discovery,” stroking each other’s dæmons (*TAS* 499). In Genesis, knowledge reveals bodily self-consciousness and shame. For Lyra and Will, “knowing” produces sexual discovery, intimacy, and adult consciousness. Prior to puberty and their dæmons’ settling, children are too fluid to know themselves, and therefore exist in a pre-conscious state.

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[41] For more on sexuality and daemons in Pullman’s trilogy see Hines, Maude. “Second nature: daemons and ideology in *The Golden Compass*” in *His Dark Materials Illuminated: Critical Essays on Philip Pullman's Trilogy*, edited by Millicent Lenz and Carole Scott, Wayne State University Press, 2005, pg. 42

Inheritance

Given that Dæmons are how Lyra's universe differs most strikingly from ours, it is worth noting how a Dæmon's settled form reflects Pullman's edification of adulthood. Pan's settled form suggests that genetic heredity play a role in a dæmon's final shape. Lyra's "graceful" and "dangerous" mother had a golden monkey dæmon who was a "deep and lustrous gold" color (*TGC 72,* 37,) and her "large" and "powerful" (*TGC* 12) father is complemented by his "lithe" and "elegant" (*TGC* 15) snow leopard. This connection suggests that part of the essential self is biological and predetermined. However, the importance of genetic inheritance is nuanced through Will and his father, John Parry. Will tells his father that unlike him, he is not a warrior.[42] Will argues that "[he] fought because [he] had to. [He] can't choose [his] nature, but [he] can choose" how he acts (*TAS* 419). Will's statement that "now [that he is] free" he "will choose," suggests that childhood to Pullman is categorized by a lack of control over behavior (*TAS* 419).

When Lyra's dæmon, Pantalaimon settles, all his previous embodiments become inconsequential, assimilated into but unrelated to his final shape. When Will and Lyra first see the settled forms of their dæmons, Will describes that: "Pantalaimon was now…like a large and powerful ferret, red-gold in color, lithe and sinuous and full of grace" (*TAS* 498). Lyra, apprehending her "real nature" externalized in her pine martin dæmon and Will's appreciative reaction to her dæmon's form, reflects that "it's funny…when [they] were younger… [she] didn't want [him] to stop changing at all… [she] wouldn't mind so much now. Not if [he] stay

[42]John has an osprey daemon, and Will's daemon takes the form of a large house cat. Not much is said on their daemons. This could be related to both men hailing from a world where daemon's are not externally visible, and act more like a conscience.

like this" (460, 498). Pan's attractive representation of Lyra's fixed nature replaces the childhood pleasure of experiencing herself as fluid. Pan settled form embodies the distillation of Lyra's character to its essential and eternal qualities. Lyra's attraction to her nature's settled form bleeds into sexual desirability and discovery in the following scene.[43] While probably unintentional, the entanglement of these two themes; the essential self and sexual awakening; insinuate that the essential adult-self is also a fantasy.

The fantasy separation of adult-self and child-self relegates the experience of being a child to a mythical "elsewhere" and mythologizes the freedom of imagination, intuition, and pleasure of childhood as secrets vindictively guarded by youth, when the divide between adulthood and what "we call 'childhood' is always an imaginative construct of the adult mind, and therefore there is no threat of return, because that space was never there in the first place" (Nodelman 33).

Growing Apart

To highlight how Lyra changes throughout the trilogy, and to contrast the scene mentioned in part one where Lyra abandon's Pan on the shores of death, I will turn to a scene in the first book where Pan has an idea and wants to talk to Iorek, but Lyra is too afraid to act, so a brief trial separation is played out. The first time Lyra sees the king of the armored bears, Iorek Byrnison, he is "so massive and so alien…she [feels] a bolt of cold fear strike her" (TGC 170). Her fear and resistance to approaching the polar bear is altogether reasonable; Iorek picks up a slab of metal "as if it were cardboard" and can "lift tractor[s] with one paw" (170). Yet, as Lyra is about to run away, her dæmon, the embodiment of her intuition, imagination, and abstract

[43] Described above.

problem solving, insists on going to speak to the bear. Lyra "knew what he was doing…he was going to pull" her toward Byrnison, and "she felt angry and miserable". As Pan "pull[ed] at the link between [them]" Lyra felt "such a strange tormenting feeling…part physical pain…part intense sadness and love. She knew it was the same for him". Pan pulls relentlessly, despite the pain and sorrow of it, until finally "the pain in Lyra's heart grew more and more unbearable…then she was through the gate, and they were clinging together tightly with little shaky sounds of unhappiness coming from them both" (171). Once they compose themselves, Lyra reflects that "she knew she would rather die than let them be parted and face that sadness again; it would send her mad with grief and terror. If she died, they'd still be together, like the Scholars in the crypt at Jordan" (171). I quote this passage at length to highlight how Pullman changes Lyra's character by the end of the trilogy, and to complicate the virtue proposed by this change. In this scene, Pan's instinct to go against reason, and speak with the bear in spite of very real danger ends up being the right choice. Iorek becomes a close friend, and an extremely powerful ally. Through Pan's determination, Lyra's intuition guides her to the right choice.

In the parallel scene in the third book, Lyra is guided by self-sacrifice and rationality, and she successfully tears herself away from Pan. Within the *HDM*'s cosmology, the contrast between these scenes is so significant because in Pullman's world people cannot separate from their dæmons unless they are witches, which is attributed vaguely to their otherworldly power. While this difference is consistent with Lyra's positioning as a second Eve, the few people without dæmons in the trilogy are uniformly described as "repugnant," inhuman, and "wrong" and this contrast haunts Lyra and Pan's separation (TGC 144).

5.Conclusion

The *His Dark Materials* trilogy unquestionably expands on its frequently Christian predecessors and their condemnation of the body and the material world as sources of delight, wisdom, and transcendence. However, with every read through, even as I am dazzled by the prose, and moved by the relationships, I become more reluctant to agree with claims that the *His Dark Materials* trilogy offers readers:

> "a new map to define our place in the universe and a perspective that might help us survive contemporary crises, through its portrayal of young people who overcome disasters both personal and universal, such as young people who overcome disasters both personal and universal, such as widespread despair and soul loss, chaos in social and political realms, ecological ruin, massive wars, and catastrophes of apocalyptic dimensions" (Lenz 3).

Pullman's series does innovate on the myth of Adam and Eve in meaningful ways, and he is not alone in believing that new myths, and "better stories" are required to build a better world; stories with "potent mythic and metaphorical dimensions" to shape our imagination and strengthen our belief in the possibility that we might "repair the world" (Haraway 57, Lenz 3). Lenz notes how Pullman draws on the biblical fall for its apocalyptic resonances because such cataclysmic ruptures make new futures possible. While I agree that Pullman is drawing on the imaginative and aspirational force of new beginnings to drive his trilogy, I side with thinkers like Donna Haraway when she warns that such apocalyptical thinking risks reifying "too-big players…and too-big stories;" stories that require the worst to happen before new choices and new ways of being can thrive (Haraway 55). Pullman's trilogy digs up the entire garden, to root out a single weed.

When Pan and Lyra separate to fulfill Lyra's destiny, they never regain the state of fusion they had before. Like witches and their dæmons, they maintain the ability to separate from each other, and while this is framed at as "delightful" though taboo at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, by the time Lyra is reintroduced as a young woman in *The Secret Commonwealth* this distance between Lyra and Pan has grown into a strong antagonism, and even a hostility. Whether or not the rift between them will be resolved in the awaited final novel of the new trilogy is unknown, but the growing hatred between Lyra and Pan should give pause about the cost of the developmental trajectory Pullman's "new myth for why we are as we are" sets up.

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