

PULLMAN'S HAPPY REPUBLIC: A REVOLUTION  
OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN PHILIP PULLMAN'S  
*HIS DARK MATERIALS TRILOGY*

THESIS

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## **DEDICATION**

In loving memory  
of my grandfather, Raymond Lewis Kaercher,  
the toughest Italian I'll ever know,  
and for my grandma, Betty Jo John,  
whose eyes never stopped shining.

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## INTRODUCTION

### PULLMAN AND THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL LEGACY

We need a story, a myth that does what the traditional religious stories did: it must explain. It must satisfy our hunger for a why. Why does the world exist? Why are we here?"

Philip Pullman in "The Republic of Heaven"  
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Persons in the twenty-first century are exposed, on a daily basis, to the debates raging around our dominant power structures and their imposition on the freedom of man, but are given no guidelines or insights to affect real changes in the inequality and almost pandemic unhappiness perpetuated by the oppressive forces. Although by no means a new or hip topic, there is a sense of desperation on the side of those that see and recognize the wrongs being performed in the name of higher powers, whether governmental or religious. One such participant in the recent debate over the conditions in which humanity exists is British author Philip Pullman whose fantasy trilogy, collectively titled *His Dark Materials*, has won worldwide acclaim and notoriety. Pullman's attempt to awaken the masses to the devastating ideologies of the powers that be harkens back to the minds from the Frankfurt School, such as Herbert Marcuse, and more contemporary political-psychoanalytical writers, like Walter A. Davis. Pullman's critique of contemporary society and his desire to liberate human consciousness from the inculcating structures of authority, structures embodied in his novels as "The Kingdom of

Heaven,” are remedied at the close of his trilogy with the establishment of the “Republic of Heaven,” where all authority is destroyed and humanity is given the chance to start again. But the groundwork of such revolutionary ideas must be laid in order to concretely ascertain the direction in which Pullman is attempting to detour his readership’s consciousness. Concerned with society’s general state of happiness, Pullman’s work mirrors the anxieties of such philosophers as Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, from the Frankfurt School of Social Research. Writing during the pre-WWII era, and continuing into the 1960s, they argued for an environment that supported collective happiness as opposed to the misery imposed by labor, technology, and economic machinations. Marcuse wrote in his essay *One-Dimensional Man*,

Now the ever-more-complete mechanization of labor in advanced capitalism, while sustaining exploitation, modifies the attitude and the status of the exploited. Within the technological ensemble, mechanized work in which automatic and semi-automatic reactions fill the larger part (if not the whole) of labor time remains, as a life-long occupation, exhausting, stupefying, inhuman slavery—even more exhausting because of increased speed-up, control of the machine operators (rather than of the product), and isolation of the workers from each other. (25)

This alienation, or isolation, of the workers from each other and their surroundings, results from society’s economic reliance on its system of labor and production. This form of administration reinforces the mentality that each man is able to work his way into whatever position that he desires. Marcuse, like Pullman, points out that this is a façade, misleading the masses and driving them toward a life of servitude, preventing the individual from attaining true happiness because his or her main focus is money, wealth, and the accruing of tangible merits. The catch? All of these things can only be achieved within the dominant system, securing the obedience of the masses for the dominant power structures.

Relaying this onto the religious facet of civilization, Pullman sees people and organizations dedicated to the myth of an afterlife operating in the same illusory world of subservience and oppression. There must be a revolution, a protest, against the entire system of values and its objectives that, in our past and present, have led humanity, unwittingly, toward an individually damaging societal system. Marcuse writes about this revolution in *An Essay on Liberation*, saying,

This qualitative change must occur in the needs, in the infrastructure of man (itself a dimension of the infrastructure of society): the new direction, the new institutions and relationships of production, must express the ascent of needs and satisfactions very different from and even antagonistic to those prevalent in the exploitative societies. Such a change would constitute the instinctual basis for freedom, which the long history of class society has blocked. (4)

In referring to the infrastructure of man Marcuse is speaking biologically, implying that man, at his most fundamental, physiological core, can be changed or directed to exist in a healthy, unsuppressed way. This new formula will cater to the needs of pleasure and liberty, leaving the chains of oppression and labor on the floor. But changing the basic “nature” of man is a heady proposition indeed, requiring an incessant and methodical refusal to participate in the established powers and ideologies. Each sense must be tuned to the new “nonaggressive, nonexploitative world” (6). The root of the rebellion lies in the firmness of the individual’s refusal to participate in the games of the existing society. For the Frankfurt School there is a two-fronted attack against existing society and man’s existing consciousness. Both, the processes of production (including the technological and cultural) and the attainment of the needs and desires of man, must work to “eliminate the oppressive and exploitative forces (material and religious) which made [traditional modes of life and labor] incapable of assuring the development of a human existence” (*One-Dimensional Man* 47).



Marcuse argues for the development of a new “Reality Principle: under which a new sensibility and a desublimated scientific intelligence would combine in the creation of an *aesthetic ethos*” (*An Essay on Liberation* 24). Theoretically, if we are to live by this ethos, with the senses and the arts incorporated into everything that we produce or create, an objective freedom could surface from under the guilt-driven culture that humanity finds itself mired in. But in order to develop this “new sensibility” man must be able to exist outside the context of capitalist society, with its cultural, religious, and economic “institutions and relations that make up the social body of the reality principle” (*Eros and Civilization* 44). These structures are constantly shaping and changing the “reality principle,” giving the illusion of change throughout history. Individuals raised in this social system may find it difficult or even impossible to imagine a world without the constructs that they have been taught to trust and depend on: thus, Pullman’s insistence on the need for myth.

Pullman asserts that the old systems of belief—specifically the religious systems—are bankrupt, and that a new myth is needed. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer provide their own evaluation and analysis of myth. “The scientific calculation of events annuls the account of them which thought had once given in myth. Myth sought to report, to name, to tell of origins—but therefore also to narrate, record, explain” (5). The importance of mythology for humanity is its reflection of enlightened thinking and the production of systems of standardizations. Individuals are, in the system of traditional myths, encouraged to act, think, and live in conventional fashion, defining themselves by and as objects. But these myths, although intended to supplant the factual, are untruths, vacillating from the appealing to the repulsive,

dependent on the powers in charge of labor, but never presenting anything truly new, just illusory novelty. Eventually the illusion begins to supplant, and thus constitute, reality itself, resulting in the Marx-Engel's notion of "false consciousness." This "false consciousness" is similar to Antonio Gramsci's definition of hegemony, which, as Raymond Williams notes,

Sees the relations of domination and subordination, in their forms of practical consciousness, as in effect a saturation of the whole process of living—not only in political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seems to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense. Hegemony [...] is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting—which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society to move, in most areas of their lives. (*Marxism and Literature* 110)

The hegemonic system, when related to the Marxist critique of consciousness, is the way people accept, even embrace, the conditions that are oppressing them. Thus, one cannot simply decide not to be a part of society any more, or simply become conscious of it. One never really escapes it, but one must work within the system to catalyze change in cultural consciousness.

In "The Republic of Heaven," Pullman writes, "We must find a way of believing that we are not subservient creatures dependent on the whim of some celestial monarch, but free citizens of the republic of Heaven" (657). So following the line of thought espoused by some members of the Frankfurt School, Pullman asserts that a revolution of such "false consciousness" is imperative to changing how our lives are led on a daily, microcosmic basis. It isn't as easy as shopping at a different store or nodding in agreement when the wrongs are pointed out: there must be a fundamental change in how

man views and approaches the world and what social enlightenment must represent. How to achieve this change in humanity's internal and cultural clockwork is the most subtle and most important aspect of both the Frankfurt School thinkers' and Pullman's works.

Another writer pursuing this vein of political-psychoanalytical thinking, one who argues a "how" to changing humanity's collective consciousness, is Walter Davis. In *Death's Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche Since 9-11*, Davis uses the Frankfurt School's previous insights as the initial jumping off point in his political-psychoanalytical dissection of the modern state of American mental un-health. Seeing a state of psychic disintegration resulting from our inability to live and internalize the tragic, Davis wants to portray "the movement from a collective psychosis to the deep psychological changes we must make in ourselves in order to attain in the tragic the only adequate stance toward our historical situation" (xix). Although his book focuses on the state of the American psyche, his message is easily translated onto modern, industrialized, societies. In order for an individual or a community to move towards a place of psychological change one must explore their tragic inwardness. Exploring the tragic in one's psyche or in a community's collective consciousness is fundamental to Davis:

For in opening ourselves to the possibility of despair we also open ourselves to the possibility of self-overcoming and through it the discovery of a *praxis* that lies on the other side of the conceptual and existential paralyses created by the guarantees. We can't know "what is to be done?" as long as we continue to respond to our situation by invoking ahistorical values and guarantees that are grounded in an essentialistic and ahistorical theory of human nature. (63)

To ignore the tragic is to give allowance for those traumatic events to occur again and again, keeping our eyes closed and our heads bowed to the repercussive effects of such happenings. Conversely rooting out and acknowledging the things that are tragic within us, e.g. corrupt things that we have done to other people, other nations, other communities, will either force us to distinguish and deal with the burden or bear the guilt of our cruelty.

Davis argues that our capitalist society perpetuates a “fantasmatic consciousness” (12) that mutates the whole of history to fit within the constraints of the capitalist system, effectively ending any challenges to the beliefs held by that system. These beliefs, or ideologies, are “psychotic defense mechanisms” (12) that, although not based on false ideas, perpetuate and give approval to ignoring or extricating ourselves from traumatic experiences. Man, if he is to truly understand his place in history, must separate his psyche from the fantasmatic problems that were constructed to conceal the real psychological issues. Thus, instead of projecting the insecurities one has onto an “external object” that he/she may destroy, persons or institutions must confront the tragic inwardness head on (13). Capitalistic ideology, or any other political, religious, or economic ideology for that matter, can only experience a “perfect” existence in the absence of all other competitive and oppositional ideologies. So, concomitant with the projective identification is the destruction of all otherness. This is apparent in *His Dark Materials* through Pullman’s depiction of the Church and its attempt to destroy the characters Lyra and Lord Asriel in order to keep their imperfect system intact. Davis is a vocal critic of the capitalist system and he elucidates how capitalism utilizes the

phenomenon of ideology, and its psychological quality, to contain all “sources of resistance” (18).

Ideology guarantees the continued projection of the founding psychosis as the blank check on which the entire edifice draws for its sustenance; for in its work ideology forms a circle that cannot be broken into, one which resolves experience and history into the ceaseless repetition of the same. (20)

Davis’s position is not that of a simple mistrust of an economic system, but a deeper animosity toward an entire mode of existence in the twenty-first century. Davis’s fears are mirrored by Pullman’s words, “In here is permeated by evil conspiracies whose influence reaches the very centers of worldly authority, corrupting politics, the law, the military-industrial complex, and every other center of power in the world” (“The Republic of Heaven” 656). The “in here” Pullman refers to is the world as we know it, not some specific sect or country or idea, but the entire system of politically dominated economics and culture.

In Davis, Marcuse, and Pullman the ideological roles of Eros and Thanatos are highlighted for their socially permeating characteristics. Eros represents the need, or instinctual impulse, toward pleasure, self-preservation, and procreation. Thanatos is diametrically opposed to Eros, and in Freudian terms, represents the universal death drive. Eros is the fight for life, untainted by the economic influence of capitalism, which, like a pseudo pod, has innumerable Thanatotic extensions into all arenas of society. The twenty-first century’s obsession with armament, national security, and the perpetuation of fundamentalist ideologies represent Thanatos in the public space. In the private sphere of the psyche, the rampant phenomenon of depression, anxiety, and disillusionment are the calling cards of Thanatotic inculcation. Marcuse, as he wrote in *Eros and Civilization*, described Thanatos, or the death instinct, as, “Destructiveness not for its own sake, but

for the relief of tension. The descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is an expression of the eternal struggle against suffering and repression” (29). It is important to point out that the Church of Pullman’s trilogy, largely the same as the church of his readership’s literal reality, views death in these Thanatotic terms. Mrs. Coulter, while describing to what ends the Church will go to stop Lyra from succeeding states,

No, they’re bound to kill her. If they could, they’d go back in the Garden of Eden and kill Eve before she was tempted. Killing is not difficult for them; Calvin himself ordered the deaths of children; they’d kill her with pomp and ceremony and prayers and lamentations and psalms and hymns, but they would kill her. If she falls into their hands, she’s dead already. (*The Amber Spyglass* 184)

The importance of the act of death for the Church is equally as important as the results that will manifest from the death.

So, if Thanatos is an escape from the pains of one’s life, then the importance of Eros is to entice man towards a civilization based in freedom and happiness. In Freudian terms, when the Thanatotic mentality is dominant the “pleasure principle” is thwarted by the “reality principle,” resulting in a mutated state of pleasure. Instead of immediate gratification, man delays his pleasures until certain that nothing damaging can result before satisfying the desires. Sex and the process of sexual maturation are imperative to understanding Eros as a life force. Although this point will be discussed more fully in a following chapter, the importance of self-knowledge, the liberation of one’s sex drive, and physical interactions with others are vital to maintaining a defense against the nihilistic impulse of the death instinct.

The death instinct is evident in Pullman’s depictions of the religious authorities throughout *His Dark Materials*, and their obsession with the eradication of sin and Dust.

In seeking out a way to destroy “evil,” the Church of Pullman’s novels perpetuates the moral and ethical tragedies that have resulted in a state of unhappiness and misery. The “Republic of Heaven” is Pullman’s remedy to the oppressive totalitarian Church/state of the “Kingdom of Heaven.” The trilogy does not discuss the building of the “Republic,” but ends with the moment where the main characters realize building the “Republic” is their destiny. Simultaneously, the reader is forced to develop his or her own concept of the “Republic,” including what its purpose, intentions, and manifestations will be. The reader must investigate individual and collective roles in building and maintaining this potentially realizable utopian ideal for mankind, and must ask questions about the paradigms and patterns of Pullman’s “Republic of Heaven.”

## CHAPTER I

### REALITY THROUGH THE LENS OF FANTASY

If Pullman is attempting to comment on the state of human and environmental affairs in the twenty-first century it may strike some as strange that he employs the genre of fantasy to make such observations. The traditional stance over fantasy and science fiction is that they are tools to describe utopian or dystopian lands, out of place and time, that function in an escapist manner, providing an alternate social structure that, theoretically, supplants the ones known in reality. Although the idea can be traced back at least to Plato, the word *utopia* came from Thomas More in 1516 to name his ideal society. The utopian ideal has been used philosophically and sociologically and has been understood to be an imaginary and indefinitely remote place with unrealizable and impractical social structures. The Oxford English Dictionary defines fantasy as “Imagination; the process or the faculty of forming mental representations of things not actually present.” *His Dark Materials*, although full of creatures, worlds, languages, and cultures that are not present in the twenty-first century concept of life on Earth, utilizes this disconnection from reality as a mirror for the reader to view his or her life in.

Pullman’s employment of fantasy and his view of what can be done with the genre is akin to Frederic Jameson’s redefined idea of utopia, discussed in *Archaeologies*



of the Future: *The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, that attempts to correct the past criticisms and derisions:

Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet. (xii)

So, when Jameson argues that works depicting utopias are works inciting or instigating revolutionary changes in reality, he does so because the utopian worlds were meant to show a better system of some sort. Thus, Jameson views utopian literature as definitely not escapist (although he usually does see fantasy as negatively escapist). People were writing and publishing escapist literature because they wanted something better or more satisfying than where they were situated in reality. Pullman adds to this argument through his insinuation that utopian ideals, or his own “Republic of Heaven,” which unfolds between the pages of a fantasy novel, do not have to remain unattainable mental realms of whimsy. Instead, through active participation and involvement, a more ideal world can be brought to fruition. Thus, Pullman’s own clarification of his choice of genre:

If the Republic of Heaven exists at all, it exists nowhere but on this earth, in the physical universe we know, not in some gaseous realm far away. Nor can it be truly depicted in most fantasy of the Tolkien sort: closed fantasy, as John Goldthwaite calls it in his brilliant and invaluable study, *The Natural History of Make Believe*...The difference lies in the connection, or lack of it, with the everyday. Am I saying that there is no fantasy in the republic of Heaven? That everything must be sober and drab, with a sort of earnest sociological realism? Not at all. If the republic doesn’t include fantasy, it won’t be worth living in. It won’t be Heaven of any sort. But inclusiveness is the whole point: the fantasy and the realism must connect. (“The Republic of Heaven” 658)

Throughout the trilogy characters arrive and disappear to varying worlds through magic windows in the air. One such realm is the world of the twenty-first century, the world that Will and Mary Malone reside in, with scientific, religious, and cultural terms

and phenomena that readers recognize as their own. Lyra's world is close to our own, with similar geography, religious orders, and scientific advancements, but with drastic differences from our own, such as daemons, *panserbjørn* (armored polar bears), and a distinctly less modern, although certainly not less technologically advanced, milieu.

There are worlds that Pullman gives us hints about, such as the world that the Gallivespian spies come from, where it seems there are great battles between the tiny Gallivespians and the more humanoid creatures that cohabitate with them. There is the world of Cittagazze, an Italian-esque world, where children have free reign over the cities because the adults have been driven away by ghastly creatures known as Spectres. Pullman's worlds are, in the theory of the novels, innumerable and infinite, but all are connected through the "Dust" of consciousness. This is a point of inclusiveness, where the disparate elements of each fantastic world are connected, resulting in the reader's questioning of what is known or what is "true" in their own reality.

Nicholas Tucker further elucidates this point in his work *Darkness Visible*, writing,

In the course of [Lyra and Will's] travels, they enter other worlds as well. This may seem a strange direction to take for a writer so intent on the idea of making the best of the here and now in his fiction. Yet there are good reasons for this plot device. Pullman takes his cue here from modern quantum theory, which replaces former truths once held to be standard with the idea of uncertainty as a built-in factor to all science. (131)

This emphasis on uncertainty and its repercussive effects on quantum theory are also seen in the instruments employed by the characters of *His Dark Materials*. In the third and final book of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, the Gallivespian Spy, Chevalier Tialys, is asked to explain how their communication tool, the lodestone resonator, works.

Your scientists, what do you call them, experimental theologians, would know of something called quantum entanglement. It means that two particles can exist that

only have properties in common, so that whatever happens to one happens to the other at the same moment, no matter how far apart they are. (156)

So, what seems to be a magical instrument, straight from the imaginative mind of Pullman, is actually the product of modern advances in scientific theory. Pullman takes those advances and transforms them into tangible objects with practical uses, blending the fantastic with the real. It's important to note that the object not only seems fantastic to the reader, but to Lyra as well, who—even having lived in this world—is equally astonished and confused by the lodestone resonator. Lyra is experiencing the fantastic just as the reader is. This helps illuminate the importance of comparative differences when dealing with matters of fantasy and reality while highlighting the importance of an unknown interconnectivity between all the worlds of *His Dark Materials* with its readers' reality. Also, the Gallivespian mentions “experimental theologians” as those people in Lyra's world who would understand quantum entanglement, but in Will's world, or the reader's world, we know them as physicists. The difference between the two is that physicists' work is distanced from the leaders of the Church, influenced by ideas pertaining to the separation of church and state, whereas in Lyra's world everything is connected to the Ministry of Theology, including the “sciences.” The pervasive use of science in *His Dark Materials* highlights Pullman's fixation on interconnectivity and functions to successfully blend the fantastic and the real in the trilogy. This blending is imperative to understanding Pullman's trilogy as a work of fantasy that nevertheless avoids the mere escapism that accompanies much of the fantasy canon. Indeed, one of the more fantastic elements of *His Dark Materials* actually serves as another way in which Pullman debunks the notion of the *fantastic* as an escapist genre. Earlier, I mentioned windows through which the characters could travel from world to world,

moving between the universes. This theory of multiple universes, the basis for Pullman's windows into other worlds, is elegantly explained in Mary and John Gribbin's *The*

*Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*:

One way of thinking about the Many Worlds described in Chapter Five is to imagine millions and millions of balloons, one inside the other like those nested Russian dolls, each one made of its own stretchy space. When Will cuts a window in space in one world, it opens into one of the other worlds. There is another Earth "underneath" our Earth, and another one "under" that, and so on forever [...] They stay next door to each other even though the "balloons" are expanding because they are all expanding at the same rate. So once Will cuts a window, it stays in the same place in both worlds. (109)

As the Gribbins explain, Pullman depicts a fantastic phenomenon, but it is borne by the generally accepted theories of modern physics, and thus informs the readers about their own world while also imaginatively constructing an unknown world.

It is easy for the unknown to appear as magical or fantastic, and Pullman uses this to his advantage. And, as Jameson points out, the use of magic in fantastic literature is more than just a simple plot device.

The most consequent fantasy never simply deploys magic in the service of other narrative ends, but proposes a meditation on magic as such – on its capacities and its existential properties, on a kind of figural mapping of the active and productive subjectivity in its non-alienated state. (66)

Unfortunately for characters in Pullman's trilogy, the creation of each window has an exponentially negative effect on the whole universe of universes. When each world is cut into, and a window is opened, a Spectre is released, having been caught between the two worlds. These Spectres feed off "Dust" and daemons, or the elements of consciousness in Pullman's trilogy, turning all adults (and they only feed on adults) into living zombies, void of all emotion, attention, or interest in anything. Why would Pullman have something so malicious and damaging result from man's exploration into other worlds and universes? If Pullman is anti-escapist then it makes sense that man, trying

desperately to experience something different from his own world by cutting through the fabric of the universe, should be affected by the misuse of technology resulting from a lack of understanding about the intricacies of such experimentation. The previous bearer of the knife, Giacomo Paradisi, illustrates the corrupted use of the knife to Lyra and Will, explaining,

If we had days and weeks I could begin to tell you the story of the subtle knife, and the Guild of the Torre degli Angeli, and the whole sorry history of this corrupt and careless world. The 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 held the smallest particles of matter together.

[...] We thought we knew about bonds. We thought a bond was something negotiable, something that could be bought and sold and exchanged and converted....But about these bonds, we were wrong. (*The Subtle Knife* 165)

The Spectres are the resultant creation of Pullman's awareness of a growing apathy, amongst adults especially, toward life and environment. Much like the invention of nuclear technology, the subtle knife was created with a specific intent. But, because the scientists, like Oppenheimer, could not foresee every possible outcome of their new instrument, some of the most horrific acts in history came to be. Inventing and manipulating technology is important for the growth and stabilization of society, but carelessly employed or manipulated by ignorant or corrupt entities, the power of our technology can haunt us or, as Pullman may be warning, even destroy us.

Pullman's stance on the abuses of technology and its repercussive effects are seen in the writings of Marcuse as well. Technology, created for and used by systems of authority, can be a weapon of subjugation. But Marcuse asks, "Is it still necessary to repeat that science and technology are the great vehicles of liberation, and that it is only their use and restriction in the repressive society which makes them into vehicles of

domination?” (*An Essay on Liberation* 12). The technology that man invented to split the worlds apart, the subtle knife, develops negative side effects when used carelessly. The technology that is invented by those in positions of power, the subtle knife, the alethiometer, and the bomb used to track and find Lyra, exhibit capabilities beyond what the inventors have intended. We see a warning against this in Theodor Adorno’s and Max Horkheimer’s analysis of the “culture industry,”

The total effect of the culture industry is one of anti-enlightenment, in which enlightenment, that is the progressive technical domination of nature, becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves. (106)

But, placed in the hands of a responsible character, these weapons can become “vehicles” of liberation, allowing the disenfranchised or powerless to gain control over their destinies. Lyra uses the alethiometer to guide her actions, but is not totally dependent upon the tool to make her decisions, just as Mary Malone must create her own tools to study “Dust” with, but must rely on herself to determine exactly what the tools are showing her. Pullman uses technology in a very real sense. He sets up tools, machines, and other products that can be used for potentially good or bad ends, reflecting the reality that modern technological advances have left us with. As opposed to using these tools to help his characters escape their circumstances, they are meant to use them as supports to their own fight for independence and autonomy.

The only adult characters that are unaffected by the Spectres are Mary Malone, Father Gomez, and Stanislaus Grumman/John Parry. All three of these adults lead lives that are non-traditional, or at least removed from the rat race of the televised, globalized, capitalistic economy. Mary Malone, a former nun who became a scientist after realizing her belief in the Church was no longer strong enough to invest her faith with it, is

concerned with dark matter and, after slipping through worlds, becomes a key character in understanding and explaining “Dust.” Father Gomez is on a mission from the Church to kill Lyra before she experiences the temptation and “falls,” while Grumman, a mystical shaman, is avoided by the Spectres as well. All three of these characters lead spiritual lives, driven by a belief in a higher, mystical, and mysterious presence in the universe. On the other hand, Mrs. Coulter eventually manipulates the Spectres into letting her live while she supplies them with adults to feed upon. It is under her torturous hand that one of Pullman’s most vivid descriptions of a Spectre attack occurs:

She felt a nausea of the soul, a hideous and sickening despair, a melancholy weariness so profound that she was going to die of it. Her last conscious thought was disgust at life; her senses had lied to her. The world was not made of energy and delight but of foulness, betrayal, and lassitude. Living was hateful, and death was no better, and from end to end of the universe this was the first and last and only truth. (*The Amber Spyglass* 278)

The adults that are luckily impervious to such terror have a mental orientation that is different, perhaps due to their religious mindset, from most adults. These characters are, like the children Lyra and Will, able to mentally slip into the Keatsian concept of “negative capability” that Pullman references as the mental space where Lyra goes when reading her instrument the alethiometer. Millicent Lenz comments on this aspect of Pullman’s work as well, writing,

Repeatedly, readers are made aware of the receptive mode of consciousness (a “negative capability” in the poet John Keats’s term), which seems more like a dream state than a fully awakened one. This mode of negative capability is the state of mind that Dr. Malone has to maintain to see “shadow particles” – particles of “consciousness”—whether on the computer screen, through the Spyglass, or in the semi-mystical state induced by the I Ching. (*His Dark Materials Illuminated* 6)

We will return to the varying states of consciousness and their importance in the next chapter, but for now it is important to note that while only certain adults in the trilogy

have the ability to slip into and out of different levels of consciousness, while all children have this capability.

Having looked at fantasy versus reality and escapism versus living in the here-and-now, we see how Pullman firmly entrenches the reader in reality while distorting reality to look fantastic. Using the tools of the fantastic there seem to be a lot of magical creatures, tools, and occurrences throughout the trilogy, but each manifests itself out of the magic of reality. As Claire Squires wrote in her reader's guide to *His Dark Materials*, "The claim of 'stark realism' for his work is Pullman's way of promoting his own skill in developing character motivation: although the worlds of *His Dark Materials* may be unknown to us, the psychological manner in which characters traverse them is instantly recognizable" (17).



## CHAPTER II

### WAKING UP IN REALITY

What is it to be alert, cognizant, or fully aware of one's surroundings? What does it mean to live or be alive? If a patient's vitals are strong or within acceptable limits, does that make her or him a healthy living specimen of the human race? Today questions about health can be answered through traditional, medicinal, or methodological means, but what about the facets of life that cannot be quantified using the scientific method? Earlier I mentioned the importance of consciousness to Pullman's personal ideology, and how there are various levels and states of consciousness, or wakefulness, that are portrayed through the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Pullman's concern for, and potential solution to the problem of, society's general state of happiness is manifested in *His Dark Materials* through the "Republic of Heaven." This "Republic" would help to ground people in a state of freedom and of fully developed consciousness, hopefully resulting from a marked decrease of misery in society coupled with a dramatic increase in the overall happiness and alertness of all citizens. As Pullman has openly derided those who would pursue or condone escapist ideologies, his call to arms involves overthrowing the mental shackles placed upon the individual by the political and bureaucratic structures that control and manipulate our environment.

This revolution must manifest itself through an increased interaction with the social systems and forms of administration that govern our daily lives. An individual wishing to revolutionize his or her consciousness must be aware of the psychological and physical environment that humanity has been subjected to. Once an individual has evaluated all structures of authority, correctly identifying the powers that abuse, alienate, and subjugate, her or his protest will exhibit moral choices intent on changing our impoverished condition. So, more simply put, we must develop a cultural awareness, participate in the system, and instigate a revolution of consciousness.

Pullman has written, “In the republic, we’re connected in a moral way to one another, to other human beings. We have responsibilities to them, and they to us. We’re not isolated units of self-interest in a world where there is no such thing as society; we cannot live so” (“The Republic of Heaven” 660). Our modern culture has established conditions miserable enough that humans have developed avenues of escapism (virtual relationships, on-line gaming, and the phenomenon of “work from home” businesses, to name a few), resulting in large communities of individuals accustomed to alienation. This pattern of escape, resulting from an unsatisfactory environment, is reinforced by the social structure’s advancement of technology that facilitates a life defined by estrangement. In *His Dark Materials* the main character, Lyra Belacqua, is a young girl being boarded at Jordan College in Oxford. In *The Golden Compass* we are given insight to Lyra’s adolescent consciousness:

Just as she was unaware of the hidden currents of politics running below the surface of College affairs, so the Scholars, for their part, would have been unable to see the rich seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties which was a child’s life in Oxford. Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?

In fact of course, Lyra and her peers were engaged in deadly warfare. (31-32)

Just like most young children, Lyra and her companions had forms of play that were anything but pretend to the participants. The adults in and around Jordan College led lives they considered to be real and conscious but viewed the children's lives as mere games. Thus, the reader is initially introduced to varying states of consciousness when Lyra's is contrasted with those of the adults around her. The descriptions of Lyra's life before her adventures are the springboard for all the changes that Lyra will go through on her way to understanding and developing the "Republic of Heaven."

As I mentioned above, Lyra had other mental states that, when slipped into, helped her manipulate and clarify the world around her. Much like Pullman himself, his character is gifted at telling stories, some true, others false. Tony Watkins, in his book *Dark Matter: Shedding Light on Philip Pullman's Trilogy HDM*, mentions "a paradox with which Lyra has been living for some time":

On the one hand she prides herself in being an accomplished liar; on the other she has access to—and passes on—truth through her reading of the golden compass. The word alethiometer means "truth meter," and almost from the very beginning Lyra has been convinced that it is entirely truthful. (148)

For an author to rail against escapism but to endow his main character with an uncanny ability to lie seems paradoxical as well. But, with the encounter between Lyra and the harpies, Pullman is able to mend the discrepancy. Lyra was not blessed with a magical ability to lie, but to tell stories. These stories must revolve around what is, what reality and life have taught and exhibited to her; as Nicholas Tucker puts it, "Such stories must draw on her knowledge of what it is really like to be alive, aiming to get everything exactly right as she sees and feels it" (*Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman* 109). And just as Mary Malone must slip into a receptive mode of

consciousness to read the dark matter that she studies or the I Ching, Lyra must slip into a focused state of consciousness to tell her stories or read the alethiometer.

Pullman's character Mary Malone epitomizes this transformation of consciousness. The first transformation is her falling away from her role as a nun in the Catholic Church; as she explains her epiphany to Lyra and Will, "But it gradually seemed to me that I'd made myself believe something that wasn't true" (*The Amber Spyglass* 395). Pullman then uses Malone, and her interactions with creatures known as *mulefa*, to express the transformation of consciousness that the "Republic of Heaven" embodies.

As the mulefa had shown her, Dust came into being when living things became conscious of themselves; but it needed some feedback system to reinforce it and make it safe, as the mulefa had its wheels and the oils from its trees. Without something like that it would all vanish. Thought, imagination, feeling would all wither and blow away, leaving nothing but a brutish automatism; and that brief period when life was conscious of itself would flicker out like a candle in every one of the billions of worlds where it had burned brightly. (*The Amber Spyglass* 403)

The "Dust" that is mentioned here is not the traditional dust of the Earth, but a cosmological particle, invisible to the naked eye, but viewable through three different instruments found throughout the trilogy. The first is the photogram projector that Lord Asriel uses to explain "Dust" and its settlement patterns on adults versus children. The second is the computer program that Mary Malone writes to help her communicate with the dark matter, or Shadow-particles, that she is studying in her research lab. The third is the amber spyglass that Malone, with the help of her mulefa companions, invents to track the patterns of "Dust" in the sky.

Initially, "Dust" is an almost taboo topic amongst adults; because it is not talked about, "Dust" acquires a sense of mystery and suspicion. Although it is obviously important, no one seems sure of the utility or purpose of "Dust." And from the outset of

the trilogy, Lyra, having secretly watched Lord Asriel's presentation, is fascinated by the effect on the Jordan scholars that a simple photogram had. Her fascination is to be met with questioning glances from Mrs Coulter, who wonders where the child might have heard of such heretical ideas, and contempt from Lord Asriel, who decides she has no need or right to know about such things. It is only Malone who, although she is somewhat incredulous at first, takes Lyra's inquiry and knowledge seriously enough to engage her in conversation about the "Dust"/"Shadow-particles." In a conversation with Lyra, Malone explains,

Dark matter is what my research team is looking for. No one knows what it is. There's more stuff out there in the universe than we can see, that's the point. We can see the stars and the galaxies and the things that shine, but for it all to hang together and not fly apart, there needs to be a lot more of it—to make gravity work, you see. But no one can detect it. So there are lots of different research projects trying to find out what it is, and this is one of them. (*The Subtle Knife* 76)

Malone's willingness to interact with Lyra is due in part to the scientist's not being under the constraints of the theocratic Consistorial Court of Discipline, (since Malone is from a different world), and partially because Lyra has knowledge of things that no others—and especially not children—in Malone's world do.

Pullman's own comments on "Dust" illuminate how the fictional matter functions in the world:

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. ("Philip Pullman in *Readerville*")

The reader, at the end of the trilogy, learns that the particles of "Dust" are material bits of consciousness, and that it is seeping out through the many windows created by the subtle

knife. This leaking results in a tragic reduction in each world's quantity of "Dust," throwing off the relationship that Pullman references above. Throughout the trilogy Pullman uses "Dust" to represent not only consciousness, but also the essence of human existence. This opposes the escapist theology doctrines, such as belief in an afterlife, of the "Kingdom of Heaven" that has reigned strong over the many worlds for millennia. "Dust," rather than the "Authority" of Heaven, is the foundation of all matter and thought. Pullman created the angel Balthamos as a character close enough to God to know and reveal this insight to Lyra and her companion Will: "The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was the first of all. He told those that came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie" (*The Amber Spyglass* 28). So "Dust" is the only original matter of the cosmos, and with it all forms of life sprang into existence. For Pullman, what matters is how individuals, like the angels, choose to employ the "Dust," because the "Dust" is affected by our use, or misuse, of it.

Just as Pullman's windows into other worlds derive from scientific findings, his imaginative "Dust" of consciousness has a foundation in quantum physics. As Mary and John Gribbin explain in *The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, there is not enough baryonic material (the particles that make up the cold gas and dust between the stars) to hold everything in the universe together while it is constantly in motion. Thus,

There must be at least five times as much extra material, not made of atoms at all, out there. It cannot be made of atoms, so it must be made of some sort of particles not yet detected on Earth. And it cannot shine, or we would see it. It is dark material. Between 80 percent and 95 percent of the material of the Universe really is made of this stuff, which astronomers call non-baryonic Cold Dark Matter—or CDM, for short. This is the real science behind the Dark Materials in the trilogy. (27)

And although there have been advances in knowledge surrounding Cold Dark Matter since Pullman began publishing *His Dark Materials* in the 1990s, Pullman obviously holds science—the human attempt to understand the mysteries that the universe holds—in highest esteem. Pullman is equally aware that there is a more complex change that must occur, not only in how we lead our lives daily on this Earth, but in the internal structure, the core, or biology of man. Herbert Marcuse believed that this change in human nature was the root, or genesis, of the rebellion against the harmful authoritarian structures of civilization. He concluded, “on these new grounds, the rebels would redefine the objectives and the strategy of the political struggle, in which alone the concrete goals of liberation can be determined” (*An Essay On Liberation* 5). Like Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, Pullman engages the dialogue over what constitutes the liberation of man, dealing foremost with this issue of internalized change. Walter Davis further elucidates this need for change, writing, “Ethically, to know one’s psyche is of necessity to engage in an effort to transform it, since inner change is the only way to halt the projection of what otherwise does harm to others. Psychological change is the primary task; ethics the result” (184). This internal change, a divulgence of the self to the self, can only result in a greater understanding of how one’s consciousness is manipulated by the systems of power. Once an individual’s internal problems have been identified and addressed, he or she can begin to transform his or her moral and ethical actions toward others.

Each of Pullman’s central characters experience psychological transformations resulting from the plot’s progression toward the destruction of the “Authority” and the demolition of the “Kingdom of Heaven.” Without instructions or blueprints they must

rely on the lessons they learned from their adventures and comrades to guide them in their effort to change the common human approach to consciousness one individual at a time.

Pullman is not embracing a form of individualism so much as admitting that a collective change must start with each individual opening his or her mind. One of Pullman's great strokes of genius is the coupling of each human in Lyra's world with a daemon; an animal counterpart that is a visible representation of the person's soul or spirit. The daemon is an essential part of the individual's consciousness and gives its human companion love, encouragement and guidance. The daemon's form can change while its human counterpart has yet to cross the threshold of maturity, but once puberty begins the daemon, not the person, chooses its final form. This daemon form encourages the person to accept and to embrace his or her identity and what his or her role in the world and in society is to be. Pullman's daemons "derive from the Greek, with Socrates at one stage talking about his own *daimon*, which in his terms was a cross between a conscience and a guardian angel" (Tucker 141); the daemons also have roots in the idea of *anima* or *animus*, "Carl Jung's idea that all humans have a craving for an other half, also of the opposite sex which, if we could reunite with it, would then mean that we could at last become truly whole individuals" (Tucker 142).

In the case of Lyra's daemon, Pantalaimon, which in Greek means "all merciful," their relationship reveals moments of haunting pain and tenderness. One of the most tragic scenes in the trilogy is also the most revealing with respect to the importance of the daemon to the individual. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will must travel to the world of the dead in order to destroy death forever, but Lyra cannot cross into the world of the



dead with her daemon and is forced to leave Pan on the banks of the land of the living. Will, a member of Mary Malone's world where beings exist without visible daemons, discovers that he too must leave his "daemon," which he did not really know he had, behind. Although we know from previous parts of the trilogy that it physically hurts Lyra to be separated from Pan, we are not aware of Will's own inner daemon until his unseen "anima" makes itself known, through Pullman's narration of Will's internal dialogue, as they cross the river toward the land of the dead.

Part of it was physical. It felt as if an iron hand had gripped his heart and was pulling it out between his ribs, so that he pressed his hands to the place and vainly tried to hold it in. It was far deeper and far worse than the pain of losing his fingers. But it was mental, too; something secret and private was being dragged into the open, where it had no wish to be and Will was nearly overcome by a mixture of pain and shame and fear and self-reproach, because he himself has caused it. (*The Amber Spyglass* 254)

Using the daemon figure, Pullman illustrates the importance of self-knowledge and consciousness to an individual's mental and physical health. And it is not as if being apart from one's daemon gets easier with time; the longer an individual is separated from his or her counterpart, the more dejected and pessimistic the person becomes. The ghosts in the land of the dead try to touch and grasp onto Lyra and Will as they walk through the dead as they are drawn to their living essences, essences that cannot be possible without a daemon. So, because the dead are still drawn to Lyra and Will, their daemons are still connected, albeit tenuously.

Throughout the trilogy daemons play an important role. They are involved in important emotional actions, like settling disputes between persons through a battle for dominance or like the "love-play" between two individuals as witnessed in the scene between Lyra and Will when they realize their matured emotions toward one another.

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

Lyra gasped. But her surprise was mixed with a pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn't protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will's daemon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew that Will was feeling exactly what she was. (*The Amber Spyglass* 447)

There are other instances, less emotionally fraught, but where the human-and-daemon duo must work together to complete specific tasks. For instance, when Lord Asriel has captured Mrs. Coulter and is showing her the "intention craft," she is curious about how such a flying mobile can work with no visible motor or engine. Lord Asriel explains,

Your daemon has to hold this handle—whether in teeth, or hands, it doesn't matter. And you have to wear that helmet. There's a current flowing between them, and a capacitor amplifies it—oh, it's more complicated than that, but the thing's simple to fly. We put in controls like a gyroscope for the sake of familiarity, but eventually we won't need controls at all. Of course, only a human with a daemon can fly it. (*The Amber Spyglass* 195)

In Pullman's universe only a fully conscious person—that is, one who is "in tune" with his or her daemon—can participate in great acts of dominance and love, or even perform quotidian tasks such as operating certain machinery. His multi-faceted representations of consciousness in the universe, "Dust," consciousness in varying states, and the physical manifestation of consciousness in an individual, daemons, all function to delineate the changes necessary for the building of the "Republic of Heaven." But we have yet to discuss what the evil is that Pullman wants to destroy and replace with his "Republic." What is the "Kingdom of Heaven" in *His Dark Materials* and what is its authoritarian parallel in our twenty-first century world that Pullman advocates changing?

## CHAPTER III

### OPPOSITION TO THE REVOLUTION

As Pullman presents it in *His Dark Materials*, the greatest evil infecting the lives and minds of individuals in Lyra's world is the all-powerful Holy Church and its belief in a corrupted, dying, and archaic mythology of the "Authority." As the prime source of funding for the universities (Jordan College), for scientific research (speculative theology), and for the military (soldiers and sergeants in service of the Consistorial Court of Discipline), the Church controls almost every aspect of life. The Church both stands in the way of, and is the principal reason for, the revolution that Lord Asriel, Lyra, Will, and the Gyptians (to name a few) are striving to bring about.

Our first introduction to the omnipresent power of the Church is when Lord Asriel appears at Jordan College to seek funding for his exploration of the other worlds that were seen through the aurora. After Asriel's presentation, the Master of the College and the librarian debate the reasons for and against providing monetary support, while the librarian wonders about the "Bernard-Stokes" heresy referred to in the presentation. The Master explains,

As I understand it, the Holy Church teaches that there are two worlds: the world of everything that we can see and hear and touch, and another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell. Bernard and Stokes were two—how shall I put it—renegade theologians who postulated the existence of numerous other worlds like this one, neither heaven nor hell, but material and sinful. They are there, close by, but invisible and unreachable. The Holy Church naturally disapproved of this

abominable heresy, and Bernard and Stokes were silenced. (*The Golden Compass* 28)

That was how the Church's authorities handled dissenting ideas that challenged their dogma or power. They simply claimed the threat to be heretical and made it disappear.

Although there are some similarities, we should not confuse the Church of Lyra's world with the Catholic Church of Will and Mary Malone's world. The Church of Lyra's is an overwhelmingly unified body of bureaucratic order. This bureaucracy that I mention is referred to as the Magisterium. The existence of this specific body of the Church is explained by Pullman's narrator at the beginning of *The Golden Compass* in the same conversation between the Master of the College and the Librarian:

Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church's power over every aspect of life had been absolute. The Papacy itself had been abolished after Calvin's death, and a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, collectively known as the Magisterium, had grown up in its place. These agencies were not always united; sometimes a bitter rivalry grew up between them. For a large part of the previous century, the most powerful had been the College of Bishops, but in recent years the Consistorial Court of Discipline had taken its place as the most active and the most feared of all the Church's bodies. (*The Golden Compass* 27)

The Magisterium is the political, judicial, and legislative machinery of the Church, and is also the bureaucracy in charge of teaching Church doctrine in the Catholic Church of Pullman's reader's world. Also, by including the historical figure of John Calvin, who was one of the most influential Protestants of all time, Pullman ties together our Catholic and Protestant churches in his critique of religion. It is under the Magisterium that the General Oblation Board (known to the children as the ominous "Gobblers") and the Office of Inquisition are set up. The latter is mentioned infrequently in the trilogy, but the Gobblers, "followers or employees of the General Oblation Board who kidnap children off the streets [,] acquired urban legend status" (Frost 452). The Gobblers

kidnap Lyra's best friend Roger, and Lyra's search for him is what leads her on her adventure.

Pullman's argument for a Republic, rather than Kingdom, of Heaven is a polemic against the very structure of organized religion, figured in *His Dark Materials* as the Church and its Authority. Although Lord Asriel is not really the hero of the trilogy, though he is at times heroic and personifies Pullman's arguments against the Holy Church. At the end of *The Golden Compass*, Lyra finds herself discussing "Dust" with Lord Asriel, and he explains, "Somewhere out there is the origin of all the Dust, all the death, the sin, the misery, the destructiveness in the world. Human beings can't see anything without wanting to destroy it, Lyra. That's original sin. And I'm going to destroy it. Death is going to die" (331). But Lyra, like the reader, still does not understand why Asriel's anger and conviction constitute such a danger to the Church. The shocking truth is revealed in the second chapter of *The Subtle Knife* when Serafina Pekkala finds and questions Asriel's servant Thorold.

"I think he's a-waging a higher war than that. I think he's aiming a rebellion against the highest power of all. He's gone a-searching for the dwelling place of the Authority Himself, and he's a-going to destroy Him. That's what I think. It shakes my heart to voice it, ma'am... 'Course anyone setting out to do a grand thing like that would be the target of the Church's anger. Goes without saying. It'd be the most gigantic blasphemy, that what they'd say. They'd have him before the Consistorial Court and sentenced to death before you could blink." (41)

The character of Lord Asriel is crucial to understanding Pullman's view of modern man. Leading the rebellion against the "Authority" of God, Asriel is the most pronounced anti-authoritarian character of the trilogy. Pullman uses Lord Asriel as metaphor to exemplify the movement towards pure freedom from the archaic structures of dominance. His character develops from a kind of villain to an assiduously secular

martyr who sacrifices himself for the greater good. Lord Asriel initially intends to discredit the politically dominant Church by discovering and publicizing those other worlds that the Ecclesiastical powers have been fighting to conceal. But during the course of his expedition, Asriel discovers where the Church's power really lies. It is not God, the Authority, that is the root of deception and oppression, but the human engineered construct of the Church. Pullman gives the reader a full understanding of what God has become when, in *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra and Will stumble upon him, seemingly abandoned by his caretakers: "Demented and powerless, the aged being could only weep and mumble in fear, and pain, and misery, and he shrank away from what seemed like yet another threat" (366). Fragile and antiquated, Pullman's God is no longer a viable entity to harbor either faith in or animosity toward. Lord Asriel comes to understand there is no real power in the dying entity, and consequently revises his own goals: He must help Lyra form the new "Republic." People must be made to understand that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is obsolete and individuals must strive to live in the here and now. Only then will the individual and the collective find meaning and happiness. As Lord Asriel sums up the new project in *The Amber Spyglass*: "all of us, our Republic, the future of every conscious being—we all depend on my daughter's remaining alive, and on keeping her daemon and the boy's out of the hands of Metatron" (338). Knowing that the destruction of Metatron, the leader of the Angels, would allow Lyra the time and freedom to develop the "Republic of Heaven," Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter, Lyra's parents and avowed enemies, set aside their past differences to sacrifice themselves for their daughter and the future of human consciousness. "Lord Asriel challenges the foundation of traditional Christianity, condemning the 'slave morality' endorsed by

religious establishments in his direct attack on the Church: its political power, suppression of free exercise of reason, and all its theological dogma” (Bird 193).

Is Asriel really the spokesperson for Pullman’s own beliefs? Is Pullman encouraging a revolution on the same scale in the world outside of his books? Apparently, yes. Although he has vacillated on certain statements about encouraging the death of the Judeo-Christian God, in “The Republic of Heaven,” he writes:

The idea that God is dead has been familiar, and has felt true, to many of us for a long time now. Those who believe that he’s still alive will of course disagree with some of what I say, though I hope they’ll stay with me till I come to the end. Anyway, I take it that there really is no God anymore; the old assumptions have all withered away. That’s my starting point: that the idea of God with which I was brought up is now perfectly incredible. (655)

Note that Pullman is in no way stating that we must live in a reality that is without the fantastic, mythic, or supernatural elements. As Max Horkheimer stated in *Eclipse of Reason*, “although the progress of subjective reason destroyed the theoretical basis of mythological, religious, and rationalistic ideas, civilized society has up until now been living on the residue of these ideas” (34). Pullman fully acknowledges that humanity needs myth and spirituality, but that in our modern culture those archaic facets are fading in importance and relevance as compared to the drive to succeed professionally or monetarily. Edward Said comments on the ambivalent nature of the grand ideas of religion that have been used for constructive and destructive ends, noting,

To say of such grand ideas and their discourses that they have something in common with religious discourse is to say that each serves as an agent of closure, shutting off human investigation, criticism, and effort in deference to the authority of the more-than-human, the supernatural, the other-worldly. Like culture, religion therefore furnishes us with systems of authority and with canons of order whose regular effect is either to compel subservience or to gain adherents. This in turn gives rise to organized collective passions whose social and intellectual results are often disastrous. The persistence of these and other religious-cultural artifacts testifies amply to what seem to be necessary features of human life, the

need for certainty, group solidarity, and a sense of communal belonging. Sometimes of course these things are beneficial. Still it is also true that what a secular attitude enables—a sense of history and human production, along with a healthy skepticism about various official idols venerated by culture and by system—is diminished, if not eliminated, by appeals to what cannot be thought and explained, except by consensus and appeals to authority. (*The World, The Text, and The Critic* 290)

These ‘appeals to authority’ in turn cause sorrow and misery in our world, and undoubtedly help to foster the false and escapist religious beliefs that Pullman opposes. For Pullman, human misery can only be meaningfully alleviated through the “Republic of Heaven,” in which mythical and fantastic elements may be combined with a secular and rational consciousness to equip individuals with ways to address their problems.

For all the evils committed in the name of the Holy Church the most contemptible actions depicted in the trilogy are those of the Gobblers, members of the General Oblation Board responsible for kidnapping poor and orphaned children. But the reasons behind the abductions are more horrific than Lyra or those concerned for their missing loved ones could possibly imagine.

Enter Lyra’s mother, Mrs. Coulter. Lyra, surrounded by stuffy, aging scholars and inattentive servants who grudgingly try to keep her in line, has been raised to believe that she is an orphan. Largely unexposed to women of society or standing she immediately becomes enamored with Mrs. Coulter when the latter arrives for a guest visit to the College. After chatting with Mrs. Coulter over dinner, listening to her exploits and adventures in the North, Lyra finds herself wishing to spend as much time with this woman as possible, still unaware that this is her mother. But the Master of Jordan College knows, and although he reluctantly agrees to Mrs. Coulter’s plans to take Lyra with her, away from the college, he does everything in his power to prepare Lyra for what



he knows will be a long and arduous journey. It is the Master who gives Lyra the alethiometer, warning her to never show it or let on to Mrs. Coulter that she has it: “The powers of this world are very strong. Men and women are moved by tides much fiercer than you can imagine, and they sweep us all up into the current. Go well, Lyra; bless you, child, bless you. Keep your own counsel” (*The Golden Compass* 65). This confuses Lyra, but she is still so taken with the glamour of Mrs. Coulter that she suspects nothing and allows herself to be swept up into the world of perfume, cosmetics, and femininity.

But the captivation with the sophistication of Lyra and Pan’s new environment becomes increasingly harder to sustain in the face of Mrs. Coulter’s business with the Church. Pan initially senses that something is amiss; at first Lyra is unwilling to believe she has been deceived, but at a cocktail party she learns the horrible truth. Eavesdropping on a conversation because she has heard mention of Dust, she learns that Mrs. Coulter is the leader of the General Oblation Board and that the G.O.B. and the Gobblers are one and the same. Lyra realizes that her best friend Roger was kidnapped along with the countless other children who are being kept somewhere up North for some sort of experimentation. What sort of experiments they do not know, but Lyra and Pan think it best to run away from Mrs. Coulter rather than find out first hand.

Although it seems hard to believe that Mrs. Coulter, Lyra’s mother, would actually place her daughter within harm’s reach, she clearly had no problem doing so to any number of “ragamuffin” children that she had kidnapped if their suffering would benefit the studies of the G.O.B. and help the Church. What exactly was happening to these children in the Northern station, Bolvangar? One of the most terrible, painful, damaging things for a human in Lyra’s world to undergo: intercision. The mechanics of

the process are explained to Mrs. Coulter during her visit by one of the scientists employed at Bolvangar.

We're investigating what happens when the intercision is made with the patient in a conscious state, and of course that couldn't be done with the Maystadt process. So we've developed a kind of guillotine, I suppose you could say. The blade is made of manganese and titanium alloy, and the child is placed in the compartment—like a small cabin—of alloy mesh, with the daemon in a similar compartment connecting with it. While there is a connection, of course the link remains. Then the blade is brought down between them, severing the link at once. They are then separate entities. (*The Golden Compass* 239)

The G.O.B., the Church, and Mrs. Coulter are all involved in discovering a process that would effectively separate the children from their daemons, literally tearing apart the body and the soul. Why would the Church condone, indeed encourage, such an inhumane and horrific act?

It all comes back to “Dust.” The mysterious substance that is spoken about in hushed tones, “Dust” embodies consciousness on a microcosmic level. The Church considers it to be proof of original sin. Since “Dust” collects heavily on adults but not children, and “Dust” collects on things that are manipulated or affected by human activity, the Church has concluded that “Dust” is the settling of sin upon an individual. Because Dust does not settle on children the Church estimates that children are still free of sin until they reach puberty, the time in Lyra's world when the daemons take on one stable form. So, if a child can be separated from its daemon before reaching physical maturity then the child will be saved from sin forever. Or, as Mrs. Coulter explains to Lyra,

You see, your daemon's a wonderful friend and companion when you're young, but at the age we call puberty, the age you're coming to very soon, darling, daemons bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings, and that's what lets Dust in. A quick little operation before that, and you're never troubled again.

And your daemon stays with you, only ... just not connected. Like a ...wonderful pet, if you like. (*The Golden Compass* 248)

Lyra remembers seeing all the employees of the Bolvangar station walking around like zombies, glassy eyed. She also recalls that their daemons act in the same automaton-like manner, existing without sin perhaps, but also without life force. Lyra had seen that dazed look before on the face of a child who had just been separated from his daemon, and had escaped Bolvangar afterwards. When she had stumbled upon him, out in the barren landscape of the North,

She lifted the lantern high and took a step into the shed, and then she saw what it was that the Oblation Board was doing, and what was the nature of the sacrifice the children were having to make.

The little boy was huddled against the wood drying rack where hung row upon row of gutted fish, all as stiff as boards. He was clutching a piece of fish to him as Lyra was clutching Pantalaimon, with her left hand, hard, against her heart; but that was all he had, a piece of dried fish; because he had to daemon at all. The Gobblers had cut it away. That was intercision, and this was a severed child. (*The Golden Compass* 187)

After having seen the child, whose name was Tony Makarios, Lyra was infuriated by Mrs. Coulter's assertion that what they were doing was beneficial for the children. Nothing about the process was good or right, and Lyra knew that she must do whatever she could to stop the pursuit and process of intercision.

But for all of the abuses of power that Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are guilty of, the larger structure of the Church must be seen as responsible for creating an environment that, in the case of Lord Asriel, should be destroyed, or in the case of Mrs. Coulter, creates monsters out of its followers. The battle between the Church and individuals is not one-sided. While Lord Asriel is waging war against the "Authority," the Church is waging its own war against sin. This is the point of intersection where the Church and Lyra meet.

Much of *His Dark Materials* is about Lyra's coming of age. She begins the story as a "savage," unaware of the greater threats facing her world. But as she journeys to save her friend Roger, to free the spirits from the land of the dead, and to discover her own history and relationship to her father and mother, she matures into a young woman before the reader's eyes. To ensure a believable and successful developmental journey, Pullman employs Will as a companion to Lyra. Will, accompanying her on part of this journey, was forced into the adult world long before by the burdensome responsibilities he faced as a child taking care of his mentally sick mother, without a father around to help him. And although with Lyra he discovers his mature and realized sexuality, Lyra's transformation has the most important ramifications for the worlds of *His Dark Materials*.

In *The Golden Compass* we find out that Lyra is the subject of a prophecy. As the consul, Dr. Lanselius reveals that the witches "have spoken of a child such as this, who has a great destiny that can only be fulfilled elsewhere—not in this world, but far beyond. Without this child, we shall all die. So the witches say. But she must fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved" (*The Golden Compass* 154). This prophecy is integral to Pullman's retelling of the Fall of man from the Garden of Eden. Lyra is to be the next Eve, who—instead of casting man into an eternity of sin and damnation—will free man from servitude and will end the power of the Church. The Church finds out about this prophecy, and without telling Mrs. Coulter, begins an active hunt for Lyra in order to destroy her. Although this point will be treated more thoroughly in the following chapter, it is important to note that Lyra's journey to maturity is one of the greatest threats to the Holy Church, and that in order to fight a total

war against Lord Asriel and his followers, the Church must destroy Lyra, Will, and Mary Malone (who is to play the role of the serpent) as well.

Pullman draws from a history of religious repression of the sexual instincts, such as the Roman Catholic celibacy requirement for all priests and nuns, or the proscription of certain sexual acts, or sex for procreation only. In his revision of the Fall of Man myth, Pullman also revises this inherently negative view of human sexuality, promoting sex as beneficial, healthy, and natural; indeed, far from causing the Fall and introducing sin, in Pullman's recasting, the sexual union between Lyra and Will obliterates sin. The knowledge—including carnal knowledge—gained by Lyra and Will, heals the wounds caused by the Church's first Fall. In order for the "Republic" to be built its architects must be fully qualified to discuss and change the approach to consciousness. Their maturation not only blesses Lyra and Will with an enlightened understanding of the mysteries of the cosmos, but is coupled with the simultaneous discovery of their sexuality. The newfound love between the two becomes a point of great pain for the pair, but a sturdy base on which Pullman may rest his argument against escapism. The adolescents, no longer children, learn that in order to effect a complete change in consciousness they must part forever to end the disappearance of "Dust" through the windows. Despite their newfound love and their sexual awakening, Lyra and Will will not be able to stay together in each other's worlds after they have permanently sealed every window. If a person's daemon is removed from its natural world for long lapses in time they grow ill, and thus its human counterpart grows ill. (For instance, Will's estranged father, having been adventuring away from his world for ten years, dies because of this chronic detachment from his reality.) Lyra and Will must offer a deeply

personal sacrifice for the good of all worlds, and this sacrifice is vital for the construction of the “Republic.” Pullman separates his young lovers because each has a role to play in his or her own world, and—if they were to stay together—this would be an escape from their reality. This escape would be counterproductive to the entire philosophy of living life as an end in itself. But their brief moments together were not in vain. The importance of life experience and good judgment is imperative for Lyra and Will, for without these influential lessons they will have no basis from which to repair the world.

The Church’s fear of sin, sexuality, and the extinction of death all gave rise to horrible actions committed by or on behalf of the Holy Church. Throughout the trilogy the Church and its officials stand in the way of Lord Asriel’s attempts to cross into other worlds, give Lyra and the Gyptians a reason to head North to find the missing children, send Mrs. Coulter to manipulate the *panserbjørn* into thinking they can be like humans, and eventually build a spectacularly inventive bomb that can travel through the universes to seek out and destroy Lyra. The Church’s abuse of and dependence on the archaic and decrepit Authority leads people to empty, unfulfilled spiritual lives, ordered according to the strict, politicized dogma of a corrupted governing body. This is why Lyra must succeed in bringing about a second, post-lapsarian Fall: To save mankind with the “Republic of Heaven.”

## CHAPTER IV

### PULLMAN'S TOOL CHEST

The sources that Pullman used as inspiration for his great trilogy are as important for understanding his concept of the “Republic” as his depictions of the Church and its abusive power are. While the Church is the vast and oppressive structure to which his “Republic of Heaven” is opposed, Pullman’s references to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, William Blake, and other writers offer a glimpse into just what Pullman envisions his more republican environment to be.

As previously noted, Lyra functions in *His Dark Materials* as a second Eve. The prophecies of the witches depict her as bringing about a second “Fall,” and, as Serafina Pekkala explains to Lee Scoresby,

There is a curious prophecy about this child: she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not her destiny to do it. If she’s told what she must do, it will all fail; death will sweep through all the worlds; it will be the triumph of despair, forever. The universes will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life. (*The Golden Compass* 271-72)

The thoroughgoing intertextuality of *His Dark Materials* connects such prophecies of the “Fall” to the Bible (especially to Genesis) and to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, a poetic re-telling of the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan in the Garden of Eden. In his debate with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, Pullman presented his own analysis of the Fall:

I try to present the idea that the Fall, like any myth, is not something that has happened once in a historical sense but happens again and again in all our lives [...] For me it's all bound up with consciousness, and the coming of understanding of things—and making the beginning of intellectual inquiry. Which happens typically in one's adolescence [...] With consciousness comes self-consciousness, comes shame, comes embarrassment, comes all these things, which are very difficult to deal with. ("The Dark Materials Debate")

So, according to Pullman, all persons will experience a Fall of a sort in their lives. This is when the moment of self-awareness becomes acutely undeniable and our inner-selves begin to develop, resulting in a strong tendency toward self-reflection and a drive to understand one's exterior and interior worlds. In our world this moment of self-consciousness may be acutely felt during the adolescent's transformation into adulthood, whereas in Lyra's world it is at the moment where an individual's daemon settles, ceasing its incessant shape-shifting in favor of settling on its true, permanent form.

Whereas Christian theology and philosophy viewed the Fall as a bad thing, depicting mankind as pining for our lost innocence and protected lives in the Garden of Eden, Pullman looks at the Fall through the same revisionist lens through which William Blake read Milton's *Paradise Lost*. As Laurie Frost explains in her guide, *The Elements of His Dark Materials*,

There are those, like Blake, who see the poem as taking on a life of its own, so to speak, arguing against the case Milton set out to defend. The opposing interpretation is that Milton knew exactly what he was up to, and by creating in his audience sympathy for Adam and Eve, he is showing readers they share in the original sin of the first man and woman.

*Paradise Lost* ends with Adam and Eve leaving behind forever the security and predictability of the Garden of Eden. There is no turning back for them; the way is barred. In the Garden of Eden, nothing dies and nothing changed, which may be someone's notion of Paradise, but sounds much like what the ghosts despair of most. Unchanging, predictable, and enclosed spaces—Jordan College's quadrangle, Mary Malone's convent, the world of the dead—are rejected in *His Dark Materials*. It isn't just the movement of the residents of such places that is restricted—their thoughts are, as well. (512-13)



So, instead of the Fall from Eden being seen as a misfortune in the history of mankind, it is the act that enabled us truly to become independent, thoughtful, and creative entities.

This Blakean interpretation seems to be mirrored by Pullman, as he depicts such confined, controlled places as anything but idyllic. Frost writes of Blake's personal fascination with Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake argued that "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet, and of the Devil's party without knowing it." In other words, Milton is at his best writing about Satan and Eve because he was attracted to the disobedient and rebellious. Blake finds Milton's poetry less impressive when Milton writes of the authoritarian God, and Blake's conclusion is that Milton found the Old Testament God an unsympathetic character. (519)

Thus, Pullman's deliberate association of Lyra with Eve, as opposed to a Lyra who could work in cahoots with the Church like her mother Mrs. Coulter, follows the Blakean (and Miltonic) tradition. Only through self-knowledge and self-consciousness can we discover what is good and evil in this world. Lyra and Will must confront and deal with their own personal problems while battling external forces of evil in the forms of the Church, the Gobblers, and other villainous characters. But it is through these psychological and physical challenges that the children will be able to achieve a healthy maturity, in contrast to the lifelong state of child-like dependency upon the Church. Pullman thus revises the myth of the Fall, viewing Adam and Eve not as the negative destruction of mankind, but as the positive step towards a more civilized state. The Fall is the first step towards making a better world, better even than the supposedly paradisiacal Kingdom presented by the Church. With the new Fall, one can continue to strive for better living conditions and improved ideals for the betterment of civilization and humanity.

Pullman includes an epigraph at the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*, a portion of Blake's "America: A Prophecy." Blake wrote this poem at the time of the American Revolution, where hopes for a new form of democracy and the construction of a country around solid republican virtues are glorified. In Blake's view, the new country of America will help to set right the wrongs that were being committed under the archaic monarchical regimes of Europe. As Frost writes, "In the passage providing the epigraph, the victory of the parties committed to freedom and equality is described in terms alluding to the resurrection of Christ, only here it is not a literal death that is being overcome, but the death-in-life of those suffering under oppressive regimes" (*The Elements* 502). Both the new America that Blake envisions and the worlds that Pullman has invented lack the superficiality witnessed in their contemporary communities. In "Rouzing the Faculties to Act: Pullman's Blake for Children," Susan Matthews comments,

In his wholesale rejection of consumer culture, Blake creates an imagined world populated by people, by animals, but not by objects—except where these are the tools and instruments of the laborer, those of the engraver or builder. [...] Yet Pullman's novel is perhaps not so different: it takes the reader out of worlds where there are passing references to a cola and a Swiss Army knife into those of the mulefa, in which technology is intimately linked to the natural world. The imagined worlds of the trilogy make little reference to commerce, consumption, or the media, even if the struggle to awaken the earth takes place through the new physics rather than the work of the laborer. (131)

It is this reference to the tools of the laborer that should bring to mind the instruments that Pullman invents for his characters Lyra, Will, and Mary. These tools are necessary for inciting a revolution of consciousness within each character and, in turn, helping the characters to evoke within each of their respective worlds a desire for change. "Is such a fundamental change in consciousness understandable without assuming a corresponding

change in the ‘societal existence’?” (Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* 29). It is through the use of specific mental and physical tools that Pullman enables his young couple to transform their own emotional and societal needs, making them more qualified to spread the message of the Republic of Heaven to their peers.

Pullman has given the characters of *His Dark Materials* the ability to create a republic that will not exclude ideas because they do not fit neatly into a predetermined mold. The Church and the Authority of Lyra’s world represent the oppressive societal forces that can no longer viably provide people with hope that their worldly existence will be rewarded with an escapist afterlife in the “Kingdom of Heaven.” These forces reinforce class distinctions, gender and racial inequalities, and educational limitations (that is, any education that is not Church sanctioned). Pullman is subtly convincing his reader that, alternatively, life should be treated as an end-in-itself; Pullman reminds them that with this treatment of existence comes a responsibility to make one’s life and environment better. Humans who consciously promote happiness will experience a change in their personal environment, and this environment is made up of other individuals who will be in turn influenced by the initial individual’s transformation.

Pullman is not arrogant enough to assert that he knows how each person can change, for it is something that is idiosyncratic, unique to each individual. In *His Dark Materials* there is a series of tools, named in the titles of each book (in the American editions), which allow the characters to become conscious of themselves and their world. Lyra is given the alethiometer, also known as the golden compass, by the Master of Jordan College. When she asks about its use and workings he retorts, “It tells you the truth. As for how to read it, you’ll have to learn by yourself”; his parting words direct

Lyra to be self-reliant, which leaves her full of self-doubt: “Oh, this *was* confusing. Mrs. Coulter was so kind and wise, whereas Lyra has actually seen the Master trying to poison Uncle Asriel. Which of them did she owe the most obedience to?” (*The Golden Compass* 67). Pullman, through the Master, successfully foreshadows the journey of self-discovery and independence that Lyra will experience. Throughout the trilogy, Pullman intentionally introduces mysterious and cryptic characters so that the reader is equally confused as Lyra about whom she should or should not trust. The reader thus participates in the same cognitive exercises as Lyra does in trying to ascertain what are lies and what are truths. This process forces Lyra, and, by extension, the reader, into a more complicated but also less childish world, not as comfortable as the laid-back life that she had enjoyed at Jordan College, but ultimately more satisfying.

Lyra’s conception of loyalty and her idea of good versus bad are tested with the disappearance of her best friend Roger. His abduction forces her to confront a variety of individuals whom she hopes will help her recover her lost friend, and, like many children in reality and in literature, Lyra’s self-image mutates and evolves; her sense of personal identity changes as her previously unknown past unfolds. She learns who her parents are, what actions they have committed, and how others view her parents, and this affects her self-image and changes her attitude. Knowing that the individuals she should have been able to trust and respect, her parents, have neither earned nor cared to earn her love and admiration (until it is too late, of course) makes Lyra, with only her daemon Pan to rely upon, fiercely independent. Until Will Parry and Mary Malone reintroduce her to a world of family and friendship that has no boundaries or limits, Lyra is self-reliant. It had never been in Lyra’s nature to rely on material objects or consumer pleasures to fulfill her, but

it took a changing of consciousness for her to discard her solitary, self-reliant, and rebellious habits and truly appreciate the important aspects of life, interacting with and improving the lives of the miserable in her world. The alethiometer, which she had the uncanny ability to read without instruction, facilitates much of her and Will's enlightenment throughout most of the trilogy. But Pullman illustrates that by having her daemon's settling into its mature form at the same time as her mind would settle, resulting in her inability to read the Compass by grace alone. As the Angel Xaphania explains to Lyra,

You read it by grace, said Xaphania, looking at her, and you can regain it by work.

How long will that take?

A Lifetime.

But your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you've gained it, it will never leave you. (*The Amber Spyglass* 440)

Pullman, although working in a medium of fantasy, does not allow magic to account for the gifts that Lyra has been given. Lyra's gift of reading the alethiometer eventually falls prey to her raised consciousness in order for her to strive toward a more complete understanding of what the "truth-meter" can reveal.

The second book's title, *The Subtle Knife*, names the next tool to be utilized in Lyra's journey. But Lyra is not the bearer of the knife; her newfound comrade Will Parry is the character that must wield the knife. Just like Lyra's cryptic receiving of the alethiometer, Will is given a quick lesson on how to use the knife to open and close the windows to other worlds and is left with the parting words from the knife's previous bearer Giacomo Paradisi, "You have come here for a purpose, and maybe you don't know what the purpose is, but the angels do who brought you here. Go. You are brave,

and your friend is clever. And you have the knife. Go” (*The Subtle Knife* 166). Again Pullman implies that all individuals inherit, physically or mentally, certain tools with which to affect change, but they must learn independently of help how to wield them. As discussed before, the Subtle Knife is the tool that creates the windows between the worlds. Pullman refuses to let the reader, or his characters, forget that, above all, the knife is a weapon, and, like any object of power, is as dangerous as it is helpful. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra’s friend, the armored bear Iorek Byrnison, defined this danger to help Will and Lyra understand the knife’s power.

I have never known anything so dangerous. The most deadly fighting machines are little toys compared to that knife; the harm it can do is unlimited. It would have been infinitely better if it had never been made. With it you can do strange things. What you don’t know is what the knife does on its own. Your intentions may be good. The knife has intentions, too. (161)

The ambivalent power of the knife is akin to the power of human consciousness and our capability to engineer and commit actions good or bad depending on the will or whims of each person.

The third tool is the amber spyglass that Mary Malone constructs to help her view “Dust.” Unlike the children who are given their tools, Mary is an adult and creates her own tool for understanding. Nonetheless, this process of creating the amber spyglass is equally as mysterious for Mary as the children’s discoveries of the golden compass and the subtle knife were to them. “She wasn’t sure what she wanted to do, except that she knew that if she fooled about for long enough, without fretting, or nagging herself, she’d find out” (*The Amber Spyglass* 201).

In the world of the *mulefa*, the Fall is depicted in a thoroughly positive light, as opposed to the Christian myth in which the acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil causes humans to be forever cursed with original sin. In the *mulefa* version,

The story tells that the snake said, “What do you know? What do you remember? What do you see ahead?” And she said, “Nothing, nothing, nothing.” So the snake said, “Put your foot through the hole in the seedpod where I was playing, and you will become wise.” So she put a foot in where the snake had been. And the oil entered her blood and helped her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the *sraf*. It was so strange and pleasant that she wanted to share it at once with her kindred. So she and her mate took the seedpods, and they discovered that they knew who they were, they knew they were *mulefa* and not grazers. They gave each other names. They named themselves *mulefa*. They named the seed tree, and all the creatures and plants. (*The Amber Spyglass* 200)

So, unlike the temptation story that was familiar in Lyra’s world, and our own, the gift of understanding and self-consciousness was a blessed and happy event for the *mulefa*.

With the amber spyglass Mary Malone is able to see and appreciate the *sraf* (i.e., “Dust”) that the *mulefa* celebrated. Malone’s consciousness was raised through her interactions with these otherworldly creatures and their immutable acceptance of the *sraf* as a blessing on their civilization.

Pullman uses these tools metaphorically to discuss the internal tool of consciousness, for human consciousness is the meter of truth, the helpful tool and dangerous weapon that can open windows onto new worlds, and the looking-glass that opens a vista onto the true essence of things. As they mature and age, all individuals grope towards understanding with the use of this multifaceted tool. Pullman’s own use of past writers, poets, and philosophers illustrates the point: such patient, careful, creative exertions of human consciousness, over time, bring into being a true world, the world of truth rather than of the pretty lies uttered by the Authority. Pullman’s characters rely on

their own tools to arrive at a mental state that connects them to all sentient creatures in each of their worlds.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

We've had nothing but lies and propaganda and cruelty and deceit for all the thousands of years of human history. It's time we started again, but properly this time...

John Parry in *The Subtle Knife*, 282.

So, we're starting over, changing the course of the collective history of humanity, and discarding the "old ways" in favor of the new. But what are the new ways? What exactly is Pullman encouraging his readers to change about their lives and how they lead them? What is the "Republic of Heaven," and how is it different from the "Kingdom of Heaven?" Pullman gives hints, but refuses to spell it out for us. Just as Lyra and Will must make their voyages of discovery, the reader too must work for the answers. As Claire Squires has observed, Pullman's use of an omniscient narrator allows him to evoke a reaction in his readers: "This is an omniscient narrator who does not narrate everything, and leaves open questions" (Squires 65). Having looked at Pullman's choice of genre, his employment of psychological realism, his criticism of religion and other authoritative systems, and his influences and ethics in writing *His Dark Materials*, we must now put the pieces of the puzzle that is Pullman's trilogy together to form a cogent picture of his "Republic of Heaven."

Pullman has referred to himself as an atheist and an agnostic. Both of these belief systems "consistently place responsibility for betterment of the human condition with

human beings themselves, for just as there is no elsewhere, there are no legitimate authorities to do the saving for us” (Lenz 12). Pullman’s announcement that God is dead is not meant to incite criticism from the religious fundamentalists, which it has, but to show that humanity can no longer expect that our individual responsibilities for creating a more perfect world will be taken care of by a greater authority. If change is to occur at the level of individual consciousness then, as Marcuse wrote,

It follows that the radical change, which is to transform the existing society into a free society, must reach into a dimension of the human existence hardly considered in Marxian theory—the “biological” dimension in which the vital, imperative needs and satisfactions of man assert themselves. Inasmuch as these needs and satisfactions reproduce a life in servitude, liberation presupposes changes in this biological dimension, that is to say different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind. (*An Essay on Liberation* 16-17)

Lyra and Will are charged with building the “Republic of Heaven,” not mending or fixing a damaged, pre-existing system of authority. This “Republic” will be a reinvention of every system of authority, may that be political, biological, economic, cultural, secular, or religious. The only way to heal the wounds in human consciousness is to create a new way of employing consciousness: discarding the alienating conditions humanity has been quietly or unwittingly cooperating with. By using our knowledge of historical systems to inform us of the mistakes of the past, we can develop new meanings for our symbols of authority. In the society that Pullman refers to in his lectures and interviews, individuals define their spiritual and physical needs by the dominant myths that tell them what their needs are. This is a problem for Pullman because,

If we can’t believe the story about the shepherds and the angels and the wise men and the star and the manger and so on, then it’s even harder to believe in Demiurges and archons and emanations and what have you. It certainly explains, and it certainly makes us feel important, but it isn’t true.

And it has the terrible defect of libeling—one might almost say blaspheming against, if the notion had any republican meaning—the physical universe; of

saying that this world is just a clumsy copy of a perfect original we can't see because it's somewhere else ("The Republic of Heaven" 656)

Pullman makes an important point in describing the Christian myth of Eden and Paradise as libel against the universe. If we believe that there is a place other than the known universe that a "perfect" representation of what we could have, then the world we actually live in can never be good enough. The "grass is greener" mentality will psychologically inhibit our ability to improve our daily lives, and will foment a desire for the other, intangible world. As a result, this belief system condemns us to accepting, or even embracing, our impoverished condition.

Although one cannot simply decide to avoid or ignore modern religion or politics, one can affect change even working within the contemporary civilization to a certain extent. In *The World, The Text, and The Critic*, Edward Said explains that the "critical consciousness is a part of its actual social world and of the literal body that the consciousness inhabits, not by any means an escape from either one or the other" (16). Lyra and Will are instructed to build the "Republic," but are forced to do so under specific circumstances. Initially Lyra and Will had thought that the "Republic" for which Lord Asriel was fighting must be a land to be dominated and ruled by him, a place apart from her world and Will's, on the other side of the Northern Lights. Then Will experiences a moment where the words of his own father are illuminated, and he understands that Lyra and he must go back to the worlds from which they came, never to see each other again, for the sake of the Republic's construction. A cruel joke seems to be played on the young couple who, moments before the news of their imminent separation, were basking in the newly found love that they shared. In making the fairy tale, happily-ever-after ending impossible, Pullman reinforces his view that no

meaningful solutions can be achieved through escapism. Will cannot close all the windows and live in Lyra's world forever because, as his father explained, it makes a person and their daemon fatally ill to live away from their own world. Also, Will cannot leave a window open for only himself and Lyra without causing an imbalance of the "Dust" of each world. Lyra explains to Pan that they could have gone to Will's world forever, or Will could have come to theirs, "But then we wouldn't have been able to build it. No one could 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, all of us, in all our different worlds, and then we'll build" (*The Amber Spyglass* 464). It is imperative to be conscious of the world and environment that one is born into for it is only through participating in the system that one can change it. If one participates in hopes of causing a revolution, then the selfless actions of Lyra and Will are more important than they initially seem to be. The magnitude of their sacrifice is conceivable in Walter Davis's observation that "One must do what is good because it is good irrespective of one's self-interest, inclinations, and desires and irrespective of the cost. Pure Duty is the sole motive that can guarantee a good will" (220).

Rather than being used as a tool to escape from reality, human consciousness must develop in full awareness of the social systems in which it grows and their effect on the psychological and physical atmosphere of humanity in order to accurately respond to the needs of the people. For instance, the Magisterium of Lyra's world declares sin to be something that should be eradicated at any lengths, even if such lengths prove emotionally and spiritually deadly. But by experiencing other worlds, like the world of the *mulefa*, where the community appreciates aspects of consciousness that her own

world derides, Lyra comes to see alternative realities that she can use to help her shape the real-world Republic for her own world. The *mulefa* treat “Dust” or *sraf* as a blessing that endowed them with knowledge, while the Church of Lyra’s world interpret “Dust” as sin. In Will’s world Lyra is exposed to yet another interpretation of “Dust” through the instruments of Mary Malone’s laboratory; there Lyra experiences “Dust” as particles of dark matter that interact and communicate with her. All of these varied explanations highlight the importance of human interaction with the environment as well as the ease with which those in positions of power can manipulate individual and/or collective knowledge. After coming in contact with evidence contrary to her previous point of view, Lyra becomes dedicated to building a “Republic” that is mobilized around one purpose: in Pullman’s words, “Our purpose is to understand and to help others to understand, to explore, to speculate, to imagine. And that purpose has a moral force” (“The Republic of Heaven” 661).

The conclusion of the trilogy is framed around a conversation that Lyra and her daemon Pantalaimon are having about their imminent futures. Lyra, remembering what Lord Asriel told her about the demise of the “Kingdom of Heaven,” remarks that now the “Kingdom” is no more, “We shouldn’t live as if it mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place” (*The Amber Spyglass* 454). “Pullman is showing us that escapism is fatal to consciousness, for it means neglecting to deal with the world at hand, the ‘here and now’ of everyday life, and it also means missing out on the joys of being in the present moment” (Lenz 8-9). The act of escape, if taken to the extreme, establishes a person as anti-social. In escaping, the individual cannot improve his or her surroundings, only avoid them; most likely, such

avoidance will make thing worse, as one is detached from the fellow-feeling and community of man. Only through approaching life with an attitude of awareness and cultural consciousness can we change the problems that are inherently built into the structures and systems of those claiming to be the authorities. Pointing fingers at the structures of authority solves little, whereas protest that manifests itself through moral choices focused on enriching the individual's life can actively supplant the causes of mass misery. Happiness is the ultimate goal, and can be partially achieved by avoiding the escapist mentality. Far from escaping into an otherworldly fantasy in an attempt to find happiness, Pullman's Republic "enables us to see this real world, our world, as a place of infinite delight, so intensely beautiful and intoxicating that if we saw it clearly then we would want nothing more ever. We would know that this earth is our true home, and nowhere else is" ("The Republic of Heaven" 660).

Pullman's view of Christianity as a myth that humans can no longer rely upon directly opposes a malignantly escapist mentality, fostered, if not doctrinally required, by much traditional Christian theology, whether Catholic, Protestant, or non-denominational. The dogmatic "Kingdom of Heaven" gives individuals hope that if their lives on Earth are not satisfying then they need only wait patiently, avoid sin, and abide by the laws of the Church in order to experience a blissful afterlife. This may be why Pullman chose to reformulate the Fall in positive terms and to recreate the monarchical Kingdom as a democratic "Republic of Heaven." As Tony Watkins asserts,

Pullman sees Adam and Eve before the Fall as God's lapdogs, clever pets that trot around the Garden of Eden doing exactly as they're told, with no freedom and no will of their own. In contrast, the act of taking the fruit was an act of self-determination, of freedom. This was the moment at which humanity took responsibility for itself and its destiny. This was the moment at which we cast off

God's shackles and grew up so that we could stand on our own two feet. This was the moment at which we became wise. (*Dark Matter* 126)

With such wisdom and freedom comes responsibility, and Pullman recognizes that the sort of religious institutions portrayed in the novel are not the only enemies of the new "Republic." Those who would manipulate technology, education, spirituality, and community for nefarious ends, aiming to constrain or extinguish the human desire for knowledge, are also a threat. "We must make it clear that trying to restrict understanding and put knowledge in chains is bad too" (Pullman, "The Republic of Heaven" 661).

If Lyra and Will are to control their future they must pay attention to the differences between a "Kingdom" and a "Republic," learning from the structures of the old administrations to create a new world that diverts people from the path of oppression and alienation. But this is a crucial point, for as Adorno emphasized in his essay "Culture and Administration,"

Whoever makes critically and unflinchingly conscious use of the means of administration and its institutions is still in a position to realize something which would be different from merely administrated culture. The minimal differences from the ever constant which are open to him define for him—no matter how hopelessly—the difference concerning the totality; it is, however, in the difference itself—in divergence—that hope is concentrated. (*The Culture Industry* 131)

This point applies not only to the characters that Pullman has created but also to Pullman himself. Many of the characters—Lyra, Will, Mrs. Coulter, Lord Asriel, and Iorek, to name a few—are faced with changing institutional practices, whether in part or in whole. Pullman, as is exhibited in *His Dark Materials* and his interviews, is attempting to elucidate the problems that our authorities have established and that we, by and large, have accepted or embraced. Outside of the ruling powers though, Pullman sees the opportunity for removing the figurative blindfold and inciting a revolution, first in the

mind and then in the practices of everyday life. Trapped within the system, people cannot always comprehend a difference from their own lives because there is nothing to which they can compare their own situation. “But out there somewhere is the source of all truth, and we belong with that, not with the corrupt and dishonest and evil empire that rules this world” (“The Republic of Heaven” 656).

Pullman, like Marcuse, views the world through a critical lens, patiently analyzing and dismantling the ideological structures which govern our lives and our perception of our lives, while also remaining hopeful. Having written a philosophical trilogy for children that uses fantasy to explore reality and to discredit escapism, Pullman calls upon his readers to appreciate and take control of the world in which we live. In his explanation of why such a work is aimed at children, especially though not exclusively, Pullman notes that the Republic of Heaven is well suited to the genre and its intended audience. “I can see glimpses of such a republic in books that children read, among other places. I think it’s possible to point out in children’s literature some moments or some qualities that are characteristic of a republican attitude to the great questions of religion, which are the great questions of life” (657). *His Dark Materials* ends in an overthrowing of the harmful political presence of the religious “Authority,” thus leaving open the possibility for the world to start anew. In the Republic of Heaven, we may actively choose the route to happiness, as well as the materials of which that happiness will consist, so long as we also take the responsibility of creating and maintaining the conditions for its possibility. In the “tiniest of details,” in the particulars of consciousness, imagination, knowledge, and friendship, our Republic of Heaven is built. Individual and collective participation in abolishing all tyrannical institutions: this is the



battle between Heaven and Hell, or between two very different and opposed conceptions of Heaven, that Pullman figures forth in his trilogy. This battle, in a sense a very literal one where our bodies are on the front lines and our psyches right behind, is fought in the name of happiness and in hopes that, through the active participation of individuals working together, those who are exploited, enslaved, and miserable—like the ghosts that Lyra emancipates in their otherworldly life-in-death—will experience happiness in this world.

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