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## The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C.S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition

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### The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C.S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition

#### Abstract

Closely scrutinizes Pullman's frequent denials of his quite obvious debt to C.S. Lewis, finding the hidden nuances in Pullman's statements by separating out his responses to Lewis as a reader, author, and critic. The inescapable conclusion is that not only is Pullman writing classic fantasy, he is in close agreement with Lewis on many points as a reader and critic.

#### Additional Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—As critic; Lewis, C.S.—Influence on Philip Pullman; Pullman, Philip—Criticism of C.S. Lewis; Pullman, Philip. His Dark Materials



THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL?  
PHILIP PULLMAN, C.S. LEWIS,  
AND THE FANTASY TRADITION

MAREK OZIEWICZ AND DANIEL HADE

PHILIP PULLMAN'S *HIS DARK MATERIALS* (1995-2000) is one of the most innovative and thought-provoking fantasy series of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The books won Pullman many awards and millions of devoted fans all over the world. By the author's admission the trilogy aims to create a "grand narrative" relevant for human situatedness in the world after the death of God ("Talking to Philip Pullman" 117). Pullman's most thorough exposition of this mythopoeic purpose can be found in his 2000 essay "The Republic of Heaven." In the light of his statements, *His Dark Materials* [HDM] is a secular humanist narrative, which seeks to expose manipulation and power games at the heart of organized religions. It is Pullman's attempt to create "a republican myth" whose power would be comparable to that of the Bible—a myth which would "do what the traditional religious stories did: it [would] explain" ("Republic" 665).

Notorious for his narrative attack on religion, Pullman has also created a stir by claiming that his fiction is not fantasy but stark realism, and by criticizing other fantasy writers such as J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, and especially C.S. Lewis, as the author of the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Our focus in this essay is Pullman's statements about fantasy and his declared self-positioning in regard to Lewis. We argue that *His Dark Materials* is fantasy, and that it fits the generic template of Lewisian fantasy much closer than Pullman would be willing to admit.

### Philip Pullman and the Fantasy Question

"*Northern Lights* is not a fantasy. It's a work of stark realism."

(Pullman, "Talking to Philip Pullman," interview, 1999)

"I suppose it's fantasy—*Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife*, and [...] *The Amber Spyglass*."

(Pullman, "Lexicon Interview," 2000)

"[T]here is [...] a fine tradition of [...] fantasy [...] which is where I find myself I suppose."

(Pullman, "Faith and Fantasy," interview, 2002)

"I'm uneasy to think I write fantasy."

(Pullman, "Pullman's Progress," interview, 2004)

Pullman's opinions on the question of fantasy and realism are, to say the least, baffling. They range from flat denial that HDM is fantasy, such as he makes in the Parsons and Nicholson interview ("Talking" 132), through uncertainty about "what's fantasy and what isn't fantasy" ("Lexicon"), to a kind of embarrassed admission that HDM belongs with "a tradition of writing that one has to call for want of a better word, fantasy" ("Faith and Fantasy"). Not only that: when Pullman allows that HDM is fantasy, he tends to qualify the acknowledgment in a way that almost undermines it. In the Lexicon interview he explains: "what I've tried to do there is use the apparatus of fantasy to say something that I think is true about human psychology and about the way we grow up and about the difference between innocence and experience and so on." In another interview that same year he speaks of "using the mechanism of fantasy" to tell "a story about a realistic subject" ("Philip Pullman Reaches the Garden"). Also in "Faith and Fantasy" he stresses that his "fantasy" is, in fact, "a realistic story" but told "by means of the fantastical sort of machinery." A realistic story, he adds, is one which "talk[s] about human beings in a way which is vivid and truthful and tells me things about myself and my own emotions and things which I recognise to be true having encountered it in a story."

The strategy of collapsing the two categories into a kind of "fantastic realism" has two advantages. On the one hand it allows Pullman to draw a sharp line between his own writing and that of Lewis, Tolkien or Rowling. In Pullman's assessment, they represent a tradition he calls "closed fantasy [...] escapist and solipsistic" ("Republic" 661). As he told Dave Weich, "when I made that comment [about HDM as stark realism] I was trying to distinguish between these books and the kind of books most general readers think of as fantasy, the sub-Tolkien thing involving witches and elves and wizards and dwarves" ("Garden"). This is a curious comment, which leaves the reader wondering in what sense Pullman's story, involving witches and angels and mulefa and harpies and armored bears and Gallivespians, is generically different from stories involving "witches and elves and wizards and dwarves." On the other hand—and this is another advantage of Pullman's strategy of collapsing fantasy and realism into one—it enables him to defend his work as serious, true and important in a way that those "closed fantasies" could never be. Given that for Pullman "some themes, some subjects, [are] too large for adult fiction [and] can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book" ("Carnegie"), and that "the most important subject" among those too large for adult fiction "is the death of God and its consequences" ("Republic" 655), Pullman can then assert the seriousness of HDM in terms of both its subject and its generic form in which, like in the Republic of Heaven, "fantasy and realism [...] connect" (661).

As we shall argue later, Pullman's defense of the seriousness of this "fantastic realism" aligns him with Lewis and Tolkien rather than sets him apart from them. Perhaps it is more important to note that Pullman's strategy of collapsing fantasy and realism is only partially successful. For one thing Pullman himself, inadvertently and on various occasions, tends to distinguish and appreciate the fantastic component of HDM over the realist one. In the BBC Radio 3 interview for Joan Bakewell's "Belief" program (2001) he admitted, for example, that HDM was a change for him "because previously, [he]'d done stuff which was entirely realistic" whereas in the trilogy he "had a sort of license to go and be fantastical" ("Interview with Philip Pullman"). In the May Hill Arbuthnot Honor Lecture (2002), he revealed that although he had "long felt that realism is a higher mode than fantasy" when he tries to write "realistically" he "moves in boots of lead." Only when a fantastic idea comes to him, he added, "the lead boots fall away, and I feel wings at my heels." "Suddenly I had enormous freedom," he told Harriet Lane in *The Observer* interview. "I didn't expect that. You see, I'm not a fantasy fan [and] I'm uneasy to think I write fantasy" ("Pullman's Progress"). This freedom came with the use of imaginative concepts such as daemons, the discovery of which Pullman called in the Parsons and Nicholson interview "the most exciting moment I've ever had in writing" ("Talking" 128). Pullman was even more forthright about his appreciation of fantasy—although seen in Freudian terms—in his 2003 "Why I Don't Believe in Ghosts" article for *NY Times*. "My daylight mind," he said, "the conscious and responsible me, might want to write stories about people who seem entirely real in situations that seem utterly plausible. [...] But my imagination doesn't" (1). That is why, he declared,

although I revere the great realists and read their work with devoted admiration, I know *I'm not one of them*. My imagination comes to life only in the presence of the uncanny; the despot I serve is the part of my mind that feels a thrill as fierce and sudden as lust when it encounters a deserted graveyard, or comes on the idea of personal daemons, or hears those old familiar words: "Once upon a midnight dreary. . . ." ("Why" 2, italics ours)

Another indication of the failure of the "denial strategy" is that for all his disclaimers, Pullman is a fantasist *par excellence* in the eyes of his readers and literary critics alike. We have not yet come across a single article which would see the author of HDM as a stark realist. Many have praised his psychological realism, as Margaret and Michael Rustin do in their 2003 "Where Is Home: An Essay on Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*." Others have applauded his "deeply felt examination of existential questions," "intellectual audacity," and the consistency of his alternative world, as Millicent Lenz does in her 2001 *Alternative*

*Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* (122, 123). Others yet have stressed his “blurring of the line that separates the ‘real’ from the fantasy worlds,” as Burton Hatlen does in his 2005 “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*” (75). Nonetheless these and other aspects have been seen as Pullman’s “contributions to the fantasy genre” (75) and markers of fully achieved fantastic creation rather than as indications to the contrary. Some critics have, tactfully, avoided generic names in regard to HDM. A case in point is Millicent Lenz in the “Introduction” to *HDM Illuminated* (2005), which refers to Pullman’s work as “cross-age classic trilogy” (1) and “a myth about the transformation of consciousness” (4). Yet, not one among the fifteen contributors to this collection attempted a defense of Pullman’s claims about the non-fantastic character of the trilogy, whereas three—Burton Hatlen, Lisa Hopkins and Karen Patricia Smith—explicitly demonstrated “how Pullman works within and draws upon the tradition of high fantasy” (74). Thus, whatever Pullman may feel about Lewis or Tolkien, the fact is that his work has been compared, contrasted, and placed alongside theirs, and not without reason. Nor is it irrelevant that the thrust of criticism leveled against HDM so far has not been about its genre, but about the implications of Pullman’s narrative theology. Altogether, we find it difficult to imagine that anyone among Pullman’s readers would resent the fact that Lyra’s story was served on a fantasy platter.

For fantasy it is. It does not take a specialist to realize that a story set and developing in several alternative worlds, involving marvelous beings such as animal-shaped daemons, cold-resistant, longevous flying witches, talking armored bears, soul-eating specters, stinking cliff-ghasts, misery-lusting talking harpies, diminutive belligerent Gallivespians, angels of various potency, allegiance, and sexual orientation, miserable ghosts stuck in Hell, personal anthropomorphized Deaths, seed-pod riding mulefa, talking elementary particles, unexplainable objects such as the truth-telling device called the aletheiometer, or the subtle knife which can cut windows to alternative universes—in short, that these things are not quite popular in realist literature. They belong with fantasy, and writing fantasy is nothing to be ashamed of. Rather, Philip Pullman may well take pride in joining the excellent company of, among others, J.M. Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, Rudyard Kipling, Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, T.H. White, Orson Scott Card, Madeleine L’Engle, Neil Gaiman, Terry Pratchett, Joanne Rowling, even J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. The fantasy tradition in literature is broad and includes so many diverse strains that no author is in any way compelled to brush shoulders with those whom they dislike. This is also the case for Pullman, whose compulsive relationship to Lewis invites a number of questions.

### **Pullman and Lewis: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell?**

"[T]he Narnia cycle [...] is one of the most ugly and poisonous things I've ever read."

(Pullman, "The Dark Side of Narnia," 1998)

"I am tempted to dig him up and throw stones at him!" That's how I feel about Lewis."

(Pullman, "Talking to Philip Pullman," 1999)

"[T]he sensible Lewis [...] [is] thrust aside in Narnia by the paranoid bigot."

(Pullman, "The Republic of Heaven," 2001)

"I loathe the Narnia books [...] because they contain an ugly vision."

(Pullman, "Heat and Dust," 2002)

In his interviews, speeches and articles Pullman has referred to Lewis more often than to any other author. One exception may perhaps be Milton, but even then most references to *Paradise Lost* tend to bring in Lewis and his orthodox Christian reading of the epic as a kind of false interpretation against which Pullman's heterodox Romantic reading is positioned. A glance at the critical assessment of Pullman's work reveals that scholars have compared or contrasted Pullman with Lewis more often than with any other author, fantasy or not. In all of those contexts Pullman's positive hatred of Lewis has been noted and commented upon.

Our own take on this issue is that Pullman's hatred of Lewis is a synecdoche and it actually melts on closer inspection. The loathing Pullman speaks of is a synecdoche because "Lewis" and "Narnia"—just like "fantasy"—seem to function for him as shorthand terms for a cluster of attitudes and a worldview Pullman vehemently opposes, in life as in fiction. They stand for the Kingdom of Heaven mindset, which Pullman contrasts with the Republic of Heaven mindset he so ardently advocates. The difference of opinion on this fundamental issue may lie at the core of Pullman's reasoning that if those Kingdom of Heaven attitudes of Lewis stand for fantasy, then Pullman's Republic of Heaven ideas represent not just realism but stark realism. This, of course, is a faulty comparison. The literary convention of fantasy is not chained to any specific ideology. It can be used to champion—or subvert—secular humanism just as well as religious supernaturalism, essentialism just as well as relativism, feminism just as well as misogyny, creationism just as well as evolutionism, and so forth.

Even more surprisingly, Pullman's declared hatred of Lewis seems to be really vexing only for Pullman-the-reader. It is in this capacity that he denounces Lewis for the "ugliness of vision" in the Chronicles of Narnia and Space Trilogy ("Heat and Dust"). Pullman-the-reader loathes Lewis for his Platonism, racism, misogyny, bigotry, essentialism, "the sado-masochistic relish for violence,"

“supernaturalism,” and “reactionary sneering” (“The Dark Side of Narnia”). However, Pullman-the-author is much more even-minded. On the one hand he still condemns Lewis for “the sheer dishonesty of his narrative method” (“Dark Side”), mocks his style, and calls Lewis’s influence in children’s literature “pernicious” and “thoroughly creepy” (“Talking” 131). On the other, though, he not only acknowledges that Lewis “had his hand on a number of powerful notions,” and “was a magnificent stylist” (131), but actually employs in his own writing a surprising number of motifs, character constellations, stylistic devices, scenes, themes, and patterns which were either invented by Lewis or featured prominently in his fiction. Pullman-the-critic, finally, has only praise for Lewis. In “The Dark Side of Narnia” he spoke about Lewis’s literary criticism as “effortlessly readable,” his psychology in *The Screwtape Letters* as “subtle and acute,” and his pronouncements “about myth and fairy tale and writing for children” as “both true and interesting.” On another occasion Pullman admitted to Huw Spanner that when Lewis “was talking *about* writing for children, and about literature in general, Lewis was very, very acute and said some very perceptive and wise things. As a critic [...] and as a psychologist [...] I rate him very highly” (“Heat and Dust”). These declarations are not mere courtesies. When Pullman talks about the crucial importance of story, describes the creative process, asserts his Romantic view of the imagination, reveals his fascination with the mythic dimension of specific literary works, declares the need for retelling and re-visioning myths to keep their pertinence to our modern situatedness, and insists on the seriousness and relevance of his story to real life, he speaks in one voice with not only Lewis but also Tolkien and MacDonald, frequently repeating, unconsciously it seems, the exact same phrases they had used.

Distinguishing the three faces of Pullman—reader, author, critic—can help, we think, to position him in regard to Lewis and to appreciate the real differences and similarities between their fiction. In the first capacity Pullman differs from Lewis sharply, in part because of his declared agnosticism and materialism as set against Lewis’s Christianity and philosophical idealism, and in part because of his modern views as set against Lewis’s traditional views on issues such as gender, race, culture, childhood, or education. In some of those differences—especially their positions on gender and race—Pullman comes out as being much closer to modern sensibility than Lewis; many other differences—their positions on religion in general and Christianity in particular, on the afterlife, childhood, family, or education—are, in fact, matters of personal opinion which hardly lend themselves to literary critical analysis. In the second and third capacities, however, the similarities between Pullman and Lewis outweigh the differences by far.



Pullman-the-author is so uncannily aligned with Lewis-the-author as to beg comparison, if not the question to what extent HDM can be said to be a reaction to the Chronicles. Burton Hatlen is among the scholars who have suggested this possibility, in his 2005 "Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman's Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*." In his essay Hatlen argues that "rather than simply rejecting Lewis as a model, Pullman has, in *His Dark Materials*, offered a kind of inverted homage to his predecessor, deliberately composing a kind of 'anti-Narnia,' a secular humanist alternative to Lewis's Christian fantasy" (82). Much of this alignment, we think, is due to what can be called "the pull of the genre." Writing in the tradition of what Karen Patricia Smith in her 2005 "Tradition, Transformation, and the Bold Emergence: Fantastic Legacy and Pullman's *His Dark Materials*" calls "high fantasy" (136), and we prefer to call mythopoeic fantasy—as outlined in Marek Oziewicz's *One Earth, One People* (2008)—Pullman in many ways follows its generic patternings, although he also reshapes its boundaries. He follows the generic template of mythopoeic fantasy, among other things, in his choice of adolescent protagonists on whom the fate of the universe depends, in his description of their life-altering, other-worldly quests which move between our world and alternative realities, in his use and re-imagining of mythic patterns, characters, objects, motifs, and structures—the Fall, angels, the aletheiometer, temptation, the harrowing of Hell—all of which are presented as true in realistic criteria, and in his insistence on the importance of moral and ethical implications of his story. At the same time he pushes at the boundaries of mythopoeic fantasy by dismantling hierarchies—especially those of gender and species—by denying supernaturalism and supernatural causality, and by questioning religion and religious belief. In the process, the strands and motifs of Pullman's story often so closely resemble those used by Lewis that there seem to be more parallels between HDM and the Chronicles than between HDM, or the Chronicles, and any other fantasy to date.

These parallels are something more than generic similarity though. According to Naomi Wood,

Pullman's vehement opposition to Lewis, coupled with his seemingly deliberate rewriting of crucial moments and characters in Lewis's fiction, suggests a deep connection between the two: both stories begin with children hiding in a wardrobe and being jettisoned from there into world-shaping adventures; both feature beautiful, deadly women wearing furs who tempt and betray children through sweets; both feature youthful heroines—Lucy and Lyra—who have special relationships with powerful, dangerous beasts—Aslan, Iorek. (239)

While this life-altering friendship between a male beast king and a female child devotee is perhaps the most striking and sustained parallel between Pullman and Lewis, this motif is one among several other motifs—such as prophecy, fate, sacrifice, or the journey to the underworld—which these authors share. For example in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the prophecy concerns the end of the White Witch's reign which will happen after four humans claim the four thrones of Cair Paravel; in HDM—the end of the Church's reign which will happen after a new Eve brings about a new fall, and thus a new age of the world. On this level strong correspondences link Pullman's HDM with not only with Lewis's Chronicles but also with *Perelandra*. For example, Pullman's "restaging of the temptation in Eden" parallels Lewis's description of temptation in *Perelandra* so closely as to prompt William Gray, in his 2008 *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth*, to speculate "whether Pullman is deliberately reworking Lewis's version" (166). Also the mystical "Great Dance" passages in *Perelandra*—with their descriptions of "Dust" which is "at the center" and "whereof all worlds, and the bodies that are not worlds, are made" (*Perelandra* qtd. in Gray 176)—seem to be, says Gray, "one of the sources for Pullman's idea of Dust" (176). With the use of those motifs each author creates a redemption story in which death is overcome, and a kind of eternal existence is achieved. While Lewis's characters enter the "real Narnia" where they will supposedly live forever in their physical bodies, Pullman's ghosts laugh in surprise as they find themselves "turning into the night, the starlight, the air . . ." (*Amber Sympglass* 382) in a materialist subversion of "dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return" (*Golden Compass* 373).

Also, like Lewis in the Chronicles, Pullman in HDM engages in what may be called narrative theology. Interestingly, Pullman's engagement may even be said to go deeper than Lewis's. Whereas Lewis's story is at best "derivative of, and analogically related to, the Great (Fairy) Story of the Gospel," says Gray, "Pullman is competing with the grand narrative itself" (171). In the process, Gray notes, Pullman "seems possessed by a kind of virulent theological hatred of those he disagrees with" (171). To discredit the Church he invents doctrines such as "pre-emptive penance and absolution" (172), composes "an alternative *version* (rather than an alternative *interpretation*) of the Fall narrative in Genesis" (173), alters the Scripture by inserting phrases into Biblical verses (173-4), and, most ingeniously, reinterprets the biblical "dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return" (*Golden Compass* 373).

Last but not least, as authors and critics—here the distinction is often blurred—Lewis and Pullman are drawn to the same themes, concepts and literary sources. Paradoxically, the fact that they interpret some of those themes and concepts differently locks their stories in an even closer engagement within the same tradition.

Pullman-the-critic's ideas about literature and imagination mirror those of Lewis to a surprising degree. This has been widely discussed, although the most extended analysis so far of Pullman's relationship to Lewis on this level has been offered by Gray. In our opinion Pullman-the-critic's close alignment with Lewis can be summed up in five convergence points: his belief in story with its all-age appeal and truth imperative, his description of the creative process, his fascination with the mythic dimension of specific literary works, his assertion about the need for relevant myths, and his high Romantic view of the imagination.

Like Tolkien in his 1938 "On Fairy-Stories," and Lewis in "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," "On Stories," and "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said" in the fifties and sixties, Pullman today is one of the most vocal defenders of *story*. According to Gray, "one of the surprisingly numerous ideas that Pullman actually *shares* with Lewis and Tolkien [...] is a deep suspicion of what he sees as the modernist contempt for 'the story'" (154). Indeed, Pullman's declarations that "I am the servant of the story" ("Heat and Dust"), and "I don't write for anyone, [...] I write for the story" ("Lexicon"), coupled with his dislike of modern adult literature which eliminates the story and replaces it with "artistic capers for the amusement of [...] sophisticated readers" ("Carnegie") place him squarely in the same storytelling tradition as Lewis.

Like Lewis in "Sometimes Fairy Stories," Pullman claims that "[t]here are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book" ("Carnegie"). At the same time, and like Lewis, he states that he does not write specifically for children, and that his stories are not addressed to any particular age group. Compare Pullman's statement from the Lexicon interview—"the author has to tell the story that he or she wants to tell. It's usually not the author who puts 'For nine year olds' on the cover; publishers do that"—with that of Lewis in "On Three Ways"—"the neat sorting-out of books into age-groups, so dear to publishers, has only a very sketchy relation with the habits of any real readers. Those of us who are blamed when old for reading childish books were blamed when children for reading books too old for us" (36). Also Pullman's statement "I'm delighted that I have an audience of grown-up people. I'm also delighted to have an audience of young readers as well. But I do not write for one section or for another section" ("Lexicon") sounds uncannily like that of Lewis in "Sometimes Fairy Stories":

I was therefore writing 'for children' [...] not in the sense of writing what I intended to be below adult attention. I may of course have been deceived, but the principle at least saves one from being patronising. I never wrote down to anyone; and whether the opinion condemns or acquits my own

work, it certainly is my opinion that a book worth reading only in childhood is not worth reading even then. (47-8)

Like Lewis asserts in “Sometimes Fairy Stories” and “It All Begun with a Picture . . .” Pullman denies having an agenda in telling his story—“I tell the story that comes to me that wants to be told” (“Lexicon”)—but, again like Lewis, acknowledges that his concern for the story has unavoidable moral and philosophical implications (Gray 154).

In the Lexicon interview Pullman admits:

[m]y aim is to tell a story, which does have other resonances, if you like; some of them being moral. That’s not to say I set out to preach. I’m in the wrong trade if I set out to preach. When you undertake a task of any length, of any sort of intellectual weight, when you set out to write a book that’s going to take you seven years to finish, as I did with *His Dark Materials* for example, then necessarily you do have some sort of moral commitment to it: you do it because you think it’s a good thing to do. You wouldn’t spend seven years doing something that you didn’t believe in with some part of your moral being. So there is that dimension to it, yes. If that’s what people want to see and talk about then that’s fine; if they want to go for the story and ignore the other stuff equally that’s fine. I’m not telling them how to read any more than I’m telling them which people are allowed to and which aren’t. I just tell the story that I want to tell. (Lexicon)

These sentiments sound quite similar to Lewis’s explicit rejection of the moral or didactic approach in the last pages of “Sometimes Fairy Stories”:

I think we can be sure that what does not concern us deeply will not deeply interest our readers, whatever their age. [...] Let the pictures tell you their own moral. For the moral inherent in them will rise from whatever spiritual roots you have succeeded in striking during the whole course of your life. But if they don’t show you any moral, don’t put one in. For the moral you put in is likely to be a platitude, or even a falsehood, skimmed from the surface of your consciousness. It is impertinent to offer the children that. [...] Anyone who *can* write a children’s story without a moral, had better do so: that is, if he is going to write children’s stories at all. The only moral that is of any value is that which arises inevitably from the whole cast of the author’s mind.

Indeed everything in the story should arise from the whole cast of the author’s mind. (41-2)

It is for this reason that, again like Lewis argued in “On Three Ways” and “On Stories,” Pullman contrasts true stories with false stories. This opposition is fundamental for both authors and is not, as Gray points out, “essentially between fact and fiction” (157); rather, it is one between fantasizing about the world and representing some truths about it in imaginative categories—a division that goes back to Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* and ties in with Lewis’s and Pullman’s ideas about imagination. Lewis in “On Three Ways” and “On Stories” makes the distinction between cheating, sheer-excitement stories and “good stories” which offer readers “certain profound experiences which are [...] not acceptable in any other form” (15). Similarly, Pullman believes that, as he told Laura Miller in 2005, “there is, inherently, ‘a right shape and a wrong shape’ for any given story”—a story can be “either whole or broken” (“Far From Narnia” 7). A story which is “right” and “whole,” as Lyra learns from the harpies, is one that is true and nourishing (*Amber Spyglass* 332). This idea also appears in the Parsons and Nicholson interview. “If I’m telling the story right,” Pullman said,

the story itself will bring the meaning to [the children’s audience] in just the way that Bettelheim explains to us about fairy tales. [...] If this meaning is implicit in it, then the child will pick it up somehow and want to hear the story again, and again, and again, until they’ve exhausted the nourishment they can get out of it for the time being. (“Talking” 122)

The same concept of a right story as true and nourishing appears in Lewis too: “Where the children’s story is simply the right form for what the author has to say [...] readers who want to hear that will read the story or re-read it, at any age” (“On Three Ways” 33). This view of the story as a free, nourishing medium, which has serious relevance to real life, has profound implications for Lewis’s and Pullman’s fiction and may be one of the reasons for these books’ appeal.

Also Pullman’s description of the creative process as unfolding from mental images which were then consciously connected to form a consistent plot is very similar to those offered by Lewis and earlier by Tolkien. Tolkien’s account of the invention of the hobbit is almost exactly like that of Pullman’s about daemons. In a letter to W.H. Auden Tolkien recalled: “On a blank leaf I scrawled: ‘In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit’. I did not and do not know why” (*Letters* 215). He admitted in other letters that “it was some time before I discovered what it referred to!” (219), but that he definitely invented this word (406). These statements read like Pullman’s account of the invention of a daemon in the Parsons and Nicholson Interview. Pullman could not get the story going, he said,

until after one of these days of sitting and groaning and wishing, I wrote the words *Lyra and her daemon*, and then I realized I didn't know why she'd have a *daemon*, or what her daemon was, but thought it sounded intriguing, and so I wrote the rest of that chapter. Then I knew I was on the verge of something. ("Talking" 127-8)

Also Lewis's account in "It All Begun with a Picture . . ." of how the Narnia books began with seeing pictures in his head is very similar to Pullman's depiction of his own creative process. "I don't have a theme," Pullman said in a 2002 "Guardian online Q&A," "I have a series of disconnected pictures or scenes, which I think about in order to find out what connects them; and I discover more as I wrote the whole thing, and revise it later." It is difficult not to agree with Gray, when he comments: "the almost verbatim repetition of Lewis's words about the genesis of the Narnia books by a writer who arguably misreads and rewrites Lewis's work [...] is curious" (155).

Pullman's fascination with the mythic dimension of the same literary works that almost obsessed Lewis has not gone unnoticed either. Like Lewis, Pullman is under a lifelong spell of Milton and in HDM draws on Milton's *Paradise Lost* as profoundly as Lewis did in his Space Trilogy and the Chronicles. In the fantasy tradition proper, Pullman admits to have been impressed with David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus* which, although "poorly written and clumsily constructed [...] nevertheless has the force, the power, the intensity of genius" (FitzHerbert Interview, qtd. in Gray 153). These sentiments, Gray points out, mirror Lewis's assessment of both Lindsay and MacDonald (155). In "On Science Fiction" Lewis places Lindsay and MacDonald in the same category of works which "enlarge our conception of the range of possible experience" (66); in "Preface to George MacDonald: An Anthology," speaking about MacDonald, he states that the "undistinguished, at times fumbling" quality of his writing does not diminish its mythopoeic genius (ix, x). "Thus," says Gray, "in a kind of uncanny relay, Pullman's views on Lindsay precisely mimic those of Lewis on both Lindsay and MacDonald" (155).

Another very important link between Pullman and Lewis is their shared belief in myth as "a means to, and expression of, truth" (Gray 178). Like Lewis and other mythopoeic writers, Pullman asserts the need to retell and re-vision myths to keep them relevant to actual human situatedness. "We need a story," he famously declares in "The Republic of Heaven,"

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? [...] It must provide some sort of framework for understanding why some things are good and others are bad. [...] We need a myth, we

need a story because it's no good persuading people to commit themselves to an idea on the grounds that it's *reasonable*. (665-666)

In this way Pullman's statements about the vital need for myth and his claims about how myth works echo those of Lewis's to an amazing degree. In his 2005 "A Word or Two about Myths" Pullman not only repeated Lewis's claims from *Experiment in Criticism* about the extra-literariness of myths but actually supported his arguments by referring them to Lewis's authority on the subject. In Pullman's words:

In one way, [myth] is the very opposite of poetry. Robert Frost said that poetry is what gets lost in translation: we could say that a myth is a story that is not lost, or harmed, or diminished as it sheds the skin of one language and assumes that of another, because as C.S. Lewis pointed out, a myth is a story whose power is independent of its telling. Our first experience of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice would affect us just as strongly in whatever version we came across it, because it's the shape of the events that contains the power, and not merely the language. ("A Word or Two")

These claims are exactly what one can find in Lewis's "Introduction" to George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (ix-x) and in Lewis's chapters "On Myth," "The Meanings of Fantasy," and "On Realisms" in *An Experiment in Criticism* (40-73).

This mythic convergence, in part, may be due to the fact that Pullman shares with Lewis what Gray calls the "high Romantic view of the imagination" (158). It has not gone unnoticed that in his interviews and fiction Pullman stresses the distinction "between imagination and fantasy, or between fantasy in a creative sense and fantasy in a negative sense" (158). A much-quoted example of this idea can be found in *The Amber Spyglass* when the angel Xaphania tells Will and Lyra that imagination is a way of traveling between worlds—that it is "a form of seeing, [...] nothing like pretend, [...] hard, but much truer" (523). In asserting the "truth" of imagination Pullman echoes Lewis and other fantasists who said that imagination enriches realistic thinking by liberating it from too close a dependence on immediate perception; specifically in "On Three Ways" where Lewis talks about two kinds of fantasy—the positive one which, "far from dulling or emptying the actual world, gives it a new dimension of depth," and a negative one which "is all flattery to the ego," offering a retreat into a world of egoistic wish-fulfillment (38).

## Conclusion

The parallels between the work of Pullman and Lewis, between their literary critical opinions, their descriptions of the creative process, and their fascination with the Romantic tradition and the mythic dimensions of literature, are not coincidental. They suggest that Pullman's HDM continues the same tradition of mythopoeic fantasy as was practiced by Lewis. Both authors use many of the same literary-mythical referents, such as the Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but use them to a different effect. This difference, and Pullman's republican-humanist subversion of Lewis's monarchical-religious notions, makes the reading of HDM so compelling. If the Chronicles show a material world that is broken and needs to be redeemed from evil, HDM celebrates the material world as good and complete, needing redemption from religious zealots. This and other powerful differences between Pullman's and Lewis's works must not be ignored. However, all of those differences can be dialogically accommodated within the same generic tradition of mythopoeic fantasy. Within this framework, Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia and Pullman's His Dark Materials make one of the most successful marriages of heaven and hell there can be.

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