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Introduction

In the last decades, children's fantasy literature has established itself as a genre of ever-growing popularity that is quite frequently spearheading bestseller lists all over the world. This development does not appear to be surprising, considering the highly diverse nature of the genre. The possibilities of fantasy literature are endless, since its premise is transgressing human imagination, allowing a creation of imaginative fantasy worlds, where supernatural occurrences of any kind are often deemed possible and/or even normal.

There thus appear to be very few narrative restrictions in terms of what can or cannot be told, enabling developments such as a merging of different genres that goes hand in hand with a broadening of the target readership – all of which most likely further contribute to the genre's latest hype. Its flexibility also enables authors to comment on or critique certain issues from the real world metaphorically and symbolically through the use of fantastic devices, enabling manifold ways of reading and interpreting the story, thus making it accessible to not only adult readers but also children.

One of the most explored topics in the realms of children's fantasy fiction is that of religion and spirituality, which comes as no surprise, since both genres are deeply rooted in religious tradition (Lam 2007; Łaszkiwicz 2013). However, due to its emergence in the course of the 19th century, fantasy has often been associated with rationality. Hence, the depiction of religious content in fantasy narratives has been observed rather skeptically and sparked numerous controversies about the genre's possible subversive tendencies towards religion and religious institutions. In contemporary children's fantasy, the topic of religion is more present than ever, what seems quite interesting, considering the 21st century is perceived as the age of secularization. This development inquires whether fantasy literature might have even developed into a sacred place of its own, also considering the variety of secondary religions that have emerged from fantasy fiction.

Nonetheless, a variety of fantasy literature is presently still under fire for its alleged denigration of the concept of religion. Especially Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* received a considerable amount of public attention and criticism for its representation of organized religion, especially from the Catholic Church, who accused the author of "trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief" with a plot that serves to discredit religion (Watkins 152). Indeed, a critical representation of religious institutions is evident in various instances of the text, ranging from intertextuality in the form of canonical references, to numerous church-related concepts, motifs, and symbols that are explored and transferred into the story. Especially the extensive use of symbolism and metaphor allows for an allegorical reading of the story. Finally, the reluctance of religious doctrines and beliefs is further established through the deconstruction of different religiously created dichotomies such as innocence and experience and good versus evil. As can already be seen from only the few examples given, the question that merits further attention in this thesis is not *if* the text is a literary piece critical of religion – as this appears to be quite obvious – but rather *how* the trilogy enables a reading that is critical of it.

1 Defining religion and fantasy - A question of terminology

Before the relationship between religion and fantasy literature can be further explored, a definition of the terms in question is necessary. As the premise of this paper is to illustrate how fantasy literature offers a subversive representation of religion, the question what actually constitutes this concept should be clarified first. Therefore, not only the general concept of religion, but also its connection and distinction from institutionalized forms of religion and related terms such as religiosity, belief, faith and spirituality needs to be addressed. This is of utter importance, as the complexity of this term only illustrates how difficult it is to determine what a critique of religion actually entails.

1.1 Religion

At present we who work with the word religion are seriously handicapped, I believe, from the lack of such agreed conveniences for us to work with – or around, or against.
(Frederick Ferré 15)

In his paper from 1970, “The Definition of Religion”, Frederick Ferré addresses exactly this difficulty of working in the field of theology without a proper definition of the actual subject matter. Probably due to its complexity and vastness, up until today, no definite solution has been found to defining the term religion. This may be partially attributable to the fact that the majority of approaches in terminology research appear to use related terms, such as particularly the countable noun religion and the term religiosity, synonymously. The following approaches give a brief overview of contemporary attempts to define religion and some of its related categories. It should be noted that the presented conceptualizations are not ordered chronologically, as this section is more concerned with giving different perspectives on how religion is defined rather than the historical development.

What generally appears striking is that different approaches commonly neglect to properly differentiate between religion as mass noun and religion as countable noun. Broadly speaking, the mass noun refers to “[t]he belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods“ (OED).

A religion, in turn, would be specified as “[a] structured system of faith or worship, especially one followed by a large number of people, such as Christianity, Islam, or Judaism” (OED). Martin Southwold (1978) explains that a clear definition of the collective term religion is impossible, as the concept should not be perceived as confined subject, but rather as “polytheistic” system (370). For an entity to identify as a religion, however, certain criteria have to be met that are to some extent shared by all religions. In other words, he is convinced that all institutionalized religions share a basic set of principles (370). Southwold’s most characteristic element constitutes “a central concern with godlike beings” (362). Further parameters would be e.g.: rituals, dogmas, an ethical code that has to be followed coinciding with forms of punishment if the code is violated, the possibility of salvation, religious representatives such as priests, a type of Church, a mythology and a shared set of beliefs (370-371).

According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1993), different religions are strongly tied to the cultural system they are practiced in. He amplifies his approach by stating that without this affiliation of religion and culture, the former is elusive. Geertz’s understanding of cultural systems consists of an exchange of signs and symbols, whereby he understands organized religion as

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (Geertz 90)

For him, an essential part of dogmatic religion is the “aura of factuality“ that is especially promoted in practicing rituals. These rituals mirror the cultural system in which they are practiced in, and, therefore, contribute to the self-conception of the specific culture (Geertz 119).

Another anthropological approach addresses the topic from a different angle. David G. Mandelbaum (1966) allocates two different functions to dogmatic religion, a transcendental and a pragmatic function. He defines hierarchical religion as “all of a group’s beliefs and acts relating to their concept of the supernatural” including not only abstract belief systems such as cosmology but also practices that involve certain rituals that use “‘magical’ devices used to cure or exorcise” (Mandelbaum 1174).

He further elaborates that while these belief systems, practices and rituals differ from culture to culture, the prior aim of religion is to make sense of the world we inhabit, along with trying to “relieve some of the suffering that men are heir to” as well as to offer to the believers “certainty and determined order” (Mandelbaum 1183). The religious functions of giving purpose, context and orientation would be considered transcendental, as they are omnipresent and elementary. A pragmatic religious function, such as easing suffering and pain, is more individual.

Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark’s (1965/1968) contributions to the conceptualization of religion especially consider the closely aligned term “religiosity”, which basically means being religious. However, Glock and Stark argue that there are “different ways in which individuals can be religious”, hence, religiosity is not necessarily tied to dogmatic religion (qtd. in Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 69). The fact that there are multiple ways to experience religion only stresses its complexity, which is why this sociological approach attributes five dimensions that constitute religion, namely “the experiential, ideological, ritualistic, intellectual and consequential” (qtd. in Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 69).

These dimensions comprise of participation in religious rituals, knowledge and acknowledgment of certain dogmas and rules along with the consequences that might arise by living or not living by those rules, as well as the subjective experience of religion “involving some communication, however slight, with a divine essence, i.e., with God, with ultimate reality, with transcendental authority” (qtd. in Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 69). Especially the subjective experience of religion – also referred to as “religious feeling” and tied to the experiential dimension – “allows for a new interpretation and understanding of religion” as it paved the way for perceiving and experiencing religion free from “narrow theistic, or even denominational interpretation,” allowing to perceive religion as a concept that could also exist or be practiced outside the limitations of church-related institutions (Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 68-69).

This approach thus follows into the footsteps of Tillich and Buber, Hall, Leuba, Starbuck and James, whose works have been considered groundbreaking. They were among the first to “have [...] thrown the doors open for a new, broader and more incisive sociology of religion whose subject matter continues to be religion but whose key notion is no longer religion but *faith*,” even before “the second Vatican Council ratified this idea” (Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 68). Relatedly, Glock and Stark argue that in religious sociology, too much attention is given to church-related matters such as institutions, ideologies or morals, while the actual essence of religion, “which is faith and the experience of ultimate reality,” is neglected (Dux, Luckmann, and Matthes 69).

1.1.1 Faith, belief and spirituality

The terms faith, belief and spirituality are commonly used with regard to religion, but when looking at proper definitions in contemporary religious research, results are similar to the approach of defining religion itself, namely nothing but inconsistent. However, looking at various approaches, it appears that a general consensus has been reached that the terms faith, spirituality and belief can definitely be separated in meaning from another, especially in contemporary understanding of the terms. As for their affiliation to religion, it seems that they can be/ are used in reference to it, nonetheless, they are not necessarily linked to it.

Alan W. Watts (1951) uses the terms belief and faith cautiously. He claims that, actually, belief and faith very often mean the exact opposite:

Belief, as I use the word here, is the insistence that the truth is what one would “lie” or wish it to be. The believer will open his mind to the truth on the condition that it fits in with his preconceived ideas and wishes. Faith, on the other hand, is an unreserved opening of the mind to the truth, whatever it may turn out to be. Faith has no preconceptions; it is a plunge into the unknown. Belief clings, but faith lets go. (Watts 24)

According to this definition, faith can only be at the core of religions that are not self-deceptive. Simultaneously, Watts explains that this assumption of faith cannot exclusively be associated with religiosity, but very much qualifies as one of the primary virtues of science as well. On the contrary, he asserts that belief is more limited, as it is bound to and dictated by a religious institution, its dogmas, morals, rules and virtues (24-25).

In this sense, belief could be considered a controlled process that is guided towards a predefined divine authority, while faith may be aimed at anything or anyone, even outside religious contexts.

Spirituality, in turn, does not receive a specific conception either. Some explanations conceptualize spirituality as

‘the human response to God’s gracious call to a relationship with himself’ (Benner 1989: 20), ‘a subjective experience of the sacred’ (Vaughan 1991:105), and ‘the vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose’ (Tart 1983: 4). (qtd. in Zinnbauer et al. 550)

When it comes to spirituality’s affiliation with institutionalized religions, Zinnbauer et al. (1997) state that a connection is possible but not required (550). Historically, the two terms religiousness and spirituality have been used interchangeably. Both terms have been assigned institutional as well as individual characters, up until the beginnings of secularism along with the general increase in disbelief in organized religions. Subsequently, public interest in spirituality increased, especially in the last three decades. This resulted in a change of perception of spirituality, its steadily rising popularity and its distinction from dogmatic religion. Contemporary general conceptions of spirituality as opposed to religiousness especially stress its individual component and positive perception in terms of experiencing transcendence (Zinnbauer et al. 550).

In various books and lectures on the subject matter, Steve Taylor reflects on the current stance on religion, spirituality and their relationship. In *Back to Sanity: Healing the Madness of Our Minds* (2012), Taylor elaborates that a religion is based on a system of beliefs that go hand in hand with rules and conventions that have to be followed in order to reach salvation (128-129). Personal development thus depends on following preconceived guidelines along with worship and allegiance to a divine authority. Spirituality, however, is considered a process of development in consciousness, eventually leading to a change in the structures of the psyche (Taylor 129). Transformational practices such as meditation and yoga are said to be able to aid in attaining this changed state of consciousness.

Being spiritual means developing different perspectives on how to perceive reality and the world. Spirituality does not depend on prescribed and imposed beliefs or concepts, but is said to be an individual journey (Taylor 129).

When it comes to their affiliation to one another, Taylor (2012) explains that, similar to Zinnbauer et al., people can be religious and spiritual at the same time. Nonetheless, in this context one would, again, need to differentiate between spiritual religion and dogmatic religion, where principles of the latter do not coincide with the general aims of the former. Religious spirituality is based on how conventions and beliefs can help you grow and transform your consciousness spiritually, whereas dogmatic religion is not about transforming structures of consciousness, but rather about conforming to and maintaining a belief system that has already been constructed for you (Taylor 128-129).

To summarize, the collective term religion, as defined by the presented examples, is a concept that fulfills varying individual and collective purposes depending on the personal needs and culture. Organized religion, then, institutionalizes the principle of religion and combines it with elements such as participating in rituals, belief in and worship of a divine authority, abiding to and living by predetermined guidelines and rules as well as the connection and affiliation to a certain Church and its priests that are in charge of administering religious processes. Moreover, even though the terms spirituality, belief and faith have historically been used synonymously, their semantics have developed and, especially nowadays, differ in meaning. Thus, their connection to the concept of religion in general as well as dogmatic religion differs accordingly. While spirituality and faith seem to collide with institutionalized religion, they can be associated with the collective term religion, depending on the context, the term belief seems to be solely connected to organized religion.

This specification of religious terminology is especially important for the premise of this thesis, as, first, when discussing religious criticism, it should be clear what this actually entails. Second, *His Dark Materials* has often been loosely accused of pursuing an anti-religious agenda, without actually specifying what this entails. Thus, it may very well often be assumed that the trilogy simply dismisses the whole spectrum of religion, which is not correct.

A closer reading of the story clearly reveals that Pullman's primary concern is dogmatic religion and their predefined repressive doctrines. Nonetheless, Pullman focuses his critique neither on one specific religion – although admittedly specific allusions to the Catholic Church are made several times – nor on the concept of spirituality or faith that are detached from dogmatic religion, as defined in chapter 1.1.1. Quite contrary, taking into consideration Taylor's afore discussed definition of spirituality and relating this to one of the key concepts of the story, namely a quest for the truth, human growth and flourishing of consciousness, it even seems that the text, if anything, "promotes individualised spiritual seeking" apart from any institution (Feldt 557). Nonetheless, this analysis will solely focus on how *His Dark Materials* is critical of hierarchical religions and their respective doctrines, which will be further addressed in chapter 4.

1.2 Defining fantasy literature

Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible. It has many ingredients but analysis will not necessarily discover the secret of the whole.
(Tolkien 114)

Similar to the task of defining religion, finding an adequate conception for either mainstream fantasy or children's fantasy literature proves to be just as difficult. First, children's fantasy literature is considered a so-called "cross-over" that is the product of a merge between two independent genres, which makes a definition only more challenging (Nikolajeva, "Development" 61). Defining a literary genre in general is demanding, since genres should be considered more fluid than solid. Especially fantasy literature has various subgenres that are not clear-cut either.

Thus, defining fantasy fiction, as well as children's fantasy fiction, would initially require taking a closer look at the term *fantasy* in general.

1.2.1 Fantasy

Originally, the word derives from the Latin word *phantasticus*, which in turn stems from the Ancient Greek word *phantasia*. Several possible translations can be found reaching from the original meaning of "making visible" to medical terms such as hallucination and delusion to more vague descriptions like "wishful thing". These definitions also changed over time, but essentially *fantasy* was equated with something "unreal" (Prickett 5-6).

In his essay “On Fairy-Stories”, initially published in the 1930s, one of the first and most important theoretical works of the fantasy genre, J.R.R. Tolkien discusses the nature of fantasy. The title already points to its origins, as fantasy derives from the genre of fairy-tales.

Tolkien describes fantasy as a secondary world, a world of enchantment that is created by the author taking on the role as “sub-creator”: “[I]n such ‘fantasy’, as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator” (Tolkien 122). The essence of Faërie, as Tolkien argues, “the perilous realm itself, and the air that blows in that country” (Tolkien 114), is that all elements of the fairy-story, however marvelous they may be, need to be regarded as true and thus taken seriously by the reader: “Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world” (Tolkien 132).

This especially accounts for stories that contain magic, which for Tolkien is a fundamental part of fantasy, and is thus used by him as a possible translation for the word Faërie (Tolkien 114):

Faërie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician. There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away. (Tolkien 114)

The realm of the secondary world can thus be distinguished from the primary through its general “freedom from the domination of observed fact” (Tolkien). In order for this secondary world to be maintained, the reader needs to be able to actually perceive the events as truthful. For this process to be successful, Tolkien points out that readers have to develop what he calls a “secondary belief” (132).

The reader’s secondary belief constitutes the fundamental part of fantasy, since “[t]he moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside” (Tolkien 132). Tolkien names further elements and functions fairy-stories should comprise of, namely “recovery”, “escape” and “consolation” (Tolkien 145).

Fantasy, as already touched upon, is the enchanted secondary world created by a sub-creator. Tolkien perceives fantasy as “pure” art form that is at the same time “the most potent” (Tolkien 139).

Subsequently, its possibilities are highly diverse. Recovery in fantasy means “a regaining – regaining of a clear view” involving “seeing things as we are (or were) meant to see them” whereby readers can appreciate the story and all the parts that make it a whole (Tolkien 146). Escapist qualities of the genre allow the reader to escape from the dreariness of the real, the primary world, as “[i]t is part of the malady of such days – producing the desire to escape, not indeed from life, but from our present time and self-made misery” (Tolkien 151). Through allowing this escape from one’s sorrows, fantasy eventually offers the reader the experience of consolation in two different forms, namely “the consolation of ancient desires”, such as the escape from the fear of death, as well as “the Consolation of the Happy Ending”, the so-called *eucatastrophe* that according to Tolkien every proper fairy-story should exhibit (Tolkien 153). Nonetheless, the reader cannot experience the wonders of the secondary world unless he/she has the gift of imagination in the form of “the realisation, independent of the conceiving mind, of imagined wonder” (Tolkien 116). The stimulation of the reader’s imagination, Tolkien argues, simultaneously constitutes one of the primary aims of the Faërie (116).

Samuel T. Coleridge has already analyzed the concept of imagination even before Tolkien discussed the term. Coleridge emphasizes the importance of fantastic literature. He even argues that indulging in fantasy fiction is a necessity, as it “opens [...] minds to the most important metaphysical and presumably religious (!) issues of all” (qtd. in Levy and Mendlesohn 25). In his *Biographia Literaria* (1868), Coleridge elaborates on imagination in more detail and especially highlights its necessary distinction from the term *fancy*. First, there are two types of imagination, the primary and the secondary. While the first one is considered “the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite *I AM*”, the second depicts a mere “echo” of the first “co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in *degree* and in the *mode* of its operation” (Coleridge 363-364).

Imagination thus represents something utterly new and diverse, a force of the mind that he refers to as “esemplastic” (Coleridge 362).

As for the term *fancy*, Coleridge sees it as a fixed and definite expression that “is indeed no other than a mode of Memory [...] modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice” (Coleridge 364). Coleridge further argues that both, memory and will, are “made from the law of association” (Coleridge 364). Thus,

fancy takes the (primary) reality given through one’s senses and reason and modifies it through an act of will. A version of the same concept is apparent in Tolkien’s claim that we produce a secondary world through an act of ‘sub-creation’. (Aichele, *Postmodern* 4)

Tzvetan Todorov’s research in the field qualifies as groundbreaking, since it is considered one of the first structuralist works that focuses solely on fantasy fiction (Hawkins-Dady 260). His conceptualization of fantasy in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975) focuses “upon the analysis of the text on its own terms” thus its structure and form (Jackson 26). Todorov agrees with Tolkien on the creation of a secondary world, as well as that the reader’s response to the story holds the power of its maintenance. However, while Tolkien perceives the belief in this secondary world as fundamental, Todorov argues that the reader’s hesitation between belief or disbelief in whether the fantastic events derive from reality – the distinction between the marvelous and the uncanny – is what actually drives the story (Todorov 25). To specify, Todorov claims that fantastic texts evoke hesitation in the reader. This effect is triggered through the reader’s indecision whether the events in the texts should be considered true or metaphoric (Todorov 25). “Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous” (Monléon 10).

For this matter, he divides the fantastic into these two spheres (Todorov 41). Fantasy is considered uncanny, if “the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described”, while in the realms of the marvelous “new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena” (Todorov 41). Here, Todorov already draws on psychoanalytical research. The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, had at that time already introduced the concept of *the uncanny* as, very broadly defined, “certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening” (Monléon 13).

In fact, Todorov not only recognizes parallels between fantasy and psychoanalysis, but even states that, ultimately, psychoanalysis has replaced fantasy literature, since psychoanalytical literature deals with the same subject matter, but in “undisguised terms” (Todorov 161).

In his take on defining fantasy literature, Eric Rabkin (1976) generally agrees on the construction of a secondary world. Yet, from his point of view, this secondary world acts as a different version of reality, and is thus also created with the idea of reality, or the primary world, in mind (Rabkin, *The Fantastic* 37). He exemplifies by saying that

[f]antasies may be generally distinguished from other narratives by this: the very nature of ground rules, of how we know things, on what basis we make assumptions, in short, the problem of knowing infects Fantasies at all levels, in their settings, in their methods, in their characters, in their plots. (Rabkin, *The Fantastic* 37)

Moreover, he especially stresses that one of the key concepts of fantasy fiction is that these secondary worlds enable the reader to escape from “the prison of the mind”, implying a connection between psychoanalysis and fantasy akin to Todorov (Rabkin, *The Fantastic* 45). In his opinion, escapist qualities are realized through the story’s ability to create “a compensating change” in the form of, for instance, excitement (Rabkin, *The Fantastic* 45). In this context, however, Rabkin strongly argues against the common notion that escapist literature is trivial (*The Fantastic* 45). On the contrary, he believes that “we need feel no guilt in reading escape literature. In the literature of the fantastic, escape is the means of exploration of an unknown land, a land which is the underside of the mind of man” (Rabkin, *The Fantastic* 45). Furthermore, parallel to Tolkien’s and Todorov’s approach to the importance of the reader’s belief or disbelief for the survival of the fantastic narrative, Rabkin proposes another reader’s response through which the created fantastic lands can survive that is to say through repetitive experience of the story (Rabkin, *Fantastic Worlds* 168). He mentions this especially in connection with children and their joy for listening to the same stories over and over again. “Part of the security of the land of Fäerie is enacted in the audience situation by this exact repetition” (Rabkin, *Fantastic Worlds* 168).

Rosemary Jackson presents other important propositions to the conception of fantasy literature in her book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981). For her, the difficulty with the conception of the genre lies in its enormity and diverse qualities. “[I]ndeed the value of fantasy has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition, in its ‘free-floating’ and ‘escapist’ qualities” (1). Fantasy fiction is able to operate outside the conventional genre-restraints of other literary works, as it refuses “to observe unities of time, space and character, doing away with chronology, three-dimensionality and with rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, life and death” (Jackson 1-2). Thus, Jackson discusses the idea that fantasy fiction serves a certain purpose. In this context, she bases her research on the social context the literary works in question operate in (3). In her approach, she also takes psychoanalysis into consideration, as she is of the opinion that fantasy expresses unconscious drives (Jackson 6). However, her primary claim on the purpose of fantasy literature is that it practices cultural subversion, and “aims at dissolution of an order experienced to be oppressive and insufficient” (Jackson 180). However, even though Jackson’s work on fantasy fiction is considered an important contribution to the study of the genre, the fact that in her analysis she appears to completely dismiss transcendental features of the texts may limit her theory considerably (Hawkins-Dady 260).

The discussion about secondary and primary worlds as possible settings resulted in a further possibility of classifying the fantasy genre, namely in ‘high’ or ‘low’ fantasy (Rogers and Stevens 27-28). High fantasy would involve the creation of a secondary world that is independent from the primary world, with its own rules and logics. However, the secondary world(s) can be linked to the primary world via portals “or they may exist as secondary worlds within our world” (Rogers and Stevens 28). Low fantasy on the other hand avoids the construction of secondary worlds and rather locates fantastic elements and plot in the realms of the primary world (Rogers and Stevens 28). It should be kept in mind, however, that this constitutes only a very broad conceptualization of the terms, as the content of the stories and the style can differ accordingly to ‘high’ or ‘low’ as well (Sullivan 196). Due to the limitations of this paper, this will not be further explored, since the primary purpose of this chapter is only to illustrate the different conceptualizations of the genre.

One of the most recent approaches to conceiving fantasy fiction – delineated by Farah Mendlesohn in her book *The Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) – does not focus on finding an exact definition for fantasy, since she is convinced that various attempts at defining the field over the years eventually resulted in a collection of what Attebery (1992) already pointed out as “fuzzy sets” (Attebery 12) of definitions that do not require one further contribution (Mendlesohn xiii). Thus, in her opinion more regards should be given to the mode of fantasy rather than the nature of it (Levy and Mendlesohn 3). Subsequently, her approach is especially concerned with the specific construction of the genre, its rhetorics and language. She categorizes the genre in four rhetoric dimensions, namely *portal quest*, *intrusion*, *immersive* and *liminal fantasy* (Mendlesohn xiv). “These categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world” (Mendlesohn xiv). Furthermore, Mendlesohn delineates that certain types of fantasy require certain stylistic features that, if misused, “may undermine the effectiveness of an otherwise interesting idea” (xv).

As can clearly be seen, the attempts at defining the fantasy genre are as ambivalent as its ultimate qualities:

Fantasy is an extensive, amorphous and ambiguous genre, resistant to attempts at quick definition. It can incorporate the serious and the comic, the scary and the whimsical, the moral and the anarchic. It can be ‘high’ – taking place in alternative worlds – or ‘low’ – set in the world we know – or it can combine the two. Besides texts set in other worlds, fantasy includes stories of magic, ghosts, talking animals and superhuman heroes, of time travel, hallucinations and dreams [...] The various forms of fantasy are [...] ‘fuzzy sets, meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center’ and ‘there may be no single quality that links an entire set’. (Grenby 144)

It seems that what eventually sets the genre apart is that its possibilities seem endless, which subsequently lets the genre transgress literary boundaries on many levels. Consequently, a variety of subgenres developed under the wings of the collective term “fantasy”. Children’s fantasy literature represents just one of the many. Still, Grenby (2008) is convinced that mainstream fantasy and children’s fantasy share a special connection, since “as a concept, fantasy is clearly central to any understanding of children’s literature” (144). The complex relationship between mainstream fantasy and children’s fantasy, as well as children’s fantasy’s general origins will be further elaborated on below.

1.2.2 Children's fantasy literature

Discussions about the target audience of fantasy literature and whether or not its intended or natural primary readership are children, have emerged early on and are still debated up until today (Grenby 145). The often immediate assumption of a correlation of fantasy and children's literature might have originated from theories that all children's literature essentially originated from fantasy, as children's literature could not have properly emerged until "imagination had been given an entirely free rein to entertain children in unreservedly fantastical books" (Grenby 144). Levy and Mendlesohn argue that the heritage of children's fantasy literature "is essentially one of appropriation, both children appropriating texts and those who have written for children [...] appropriating and adapting their material for children" (11).

Tolkien argues that fantasy is not primarily written or even suited for children. He further suggests, "the association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history" (130). He delineates that this affiliation has falsely emerged, due to the initial restriction of the genre of fantasy literature to the "nursery", since "adults [did] not want it, and [did] not mind if it [was] misused" (130). Against many claims, he argues that fantasy is neither better suited nor more accessible to children. This, however, does not mean that Tolkien completely dismisses the idea that children may constitute a considerable readership, but rather that it is wrong to assume that fantasy exists merely for the entertainment of non-adults. He persists that this limitation of target audience would significantly implicate the genre's value (Tolkien 131). The claim or belief of children being well or even better suited for fantasy than adults emerged from the then common belief that children are more capable of developing and maintaining "what has been called 'willing suspension of disbelief'" by Coleridge (qtd. in Tolkien 132), which is an essential part of successfully engaging in any story told in literature. In this context, even Tolkien, strongly advocating against an immediate affiliation of fantasy and children, eventually at least admits, "there might be some truth in [this]. It may be argued that it is easier to work the spell with children" (133).

Children's fantasy literature, just as children's literature itself, only emerged in the course of the nineteenth century, when during Romanticism, the concept of childhood was initially acknowledged. In this process, the child was perceived as "innocent and untouched by civilization" (Nikolajeva, "Development" 50). Before the end of the eighteenth century, children were perceived as primarily sinful born creatures that require a strong and guiding hand to lead them away from sin and teach them the right way (Levy and Mendlesohn 2). Furthermore, children were not even perceived as such but rather compared with "miniature adults" (Sullivan 191).

In literature this meant a general dissociation from the fantastic and a convergence with literature that has a primarily didactic purpose that can teach children appropriate, often religiously related values (Levy and Mendlesohn 2). However,

as the Romantic movement took hold, and an emphasis on imagination, naturalness, and innocence developed, children, who were thought to possess these qualities in greater quantity and purer form than did adults, were assigned their own existence which, while still leading to adulthood, was significantly different from it (Sullivan 191).

Nevertheless, even though children's fantasy has developed and evolved since its early beginnings, "didacticism has consistently remained at the heart of children's fantasy writing" (Grenby 161). This may be due to the fact that elements from children's literature combined with the vastness of possibilities of fantasy "can so easily be adapted to provide lessons of all kinds, moral, political, practical and psychological" (Grenby 166).

During Romanticism, literature in general was specifically aimed at children. The Romanticists' close affiliation with fairy tales and folklore provided a convenient platform for this. Unfortunately, up until today, this appears to be the reason why children's fantasy literature is very often mislabeled as fairy-tales (Nikolajeva, "Development" 50). Nikolajeva explains that fairy-tales and fantasy differ in the sense that fairy-tales should be considered a completely autonomous story (*Magic* 12-13). There is one world where the story takes place and everything that happens, natural as well as supernatural, is neither questioned by any of the characters nor the reader. However, in fantasy, there are two worlds that coexist, the primary as well as the secondary world.

While the events that take place in the secondary world are not questioned either, they are perceived by the reader “against the background of the primary world [...] as being out-of-place and always cause a sense of wonder” (Nikolajeva, *Magic* 13). Furthermore, usually fantastic stories are told from a child’s perspective, which does not concurrently mean that children’s fantasy literature is solely aimed at children, but is rather characterized through “tangible double address” (Nikolajeva, “Development” 51). Thus, children’s fantasy cannot be completely separated from the fantasy genre in general, as not only core-essentials are shared, but also the target readership of both is not set in stone, as adults may very well like to indulge in children’s fantasy while children most certainly enjoy general fantasy literature as well. Still, children’s fantasy exhibits some features that set the genre apart from the mainstream, as will be illustrated in the following chapters.

1.2.2.1 Structure, content and themes

From its early beginnings until now, children’s fantasy has addressed issues such as power, entertainment and education. Disguised in a world of playful character, serious matters are conveyed through a variety of different contents that teach the reader certain lessons and are often intertwined in a power struggle of the characters. For instance, early modern works commonly explore the dynamics between children and adults, in which the child’s inferiority in relation to the adults is underpinned: “Empowered temporarily, the child protagonists are inevitably brought back into dependency upon adults” (Nikolajeva, “Development” 52). Another example – for instance realized in M. Barrie’s well-known *Peter Pan* (1911) – would be the theme of the lost childhood, realized in the protagonist’s longing to remain a child, offering the reader “insight into the inevitability and necessity of growing up” (Nikolajeva, “Development” 52). The delicate matter of death is also often addressed, ideally in an age appropriate manner. In this context, the secondary world functions as “the land of death; it precludes maturation and inclusion in the natural cycle of life” (Nikolajeva, “Development” 52).

Further concepts that are readily featured in children's fantasy are time displacements and alternative worlds. Providing a considerable educational impulse, time displacement allows the reader to indulge in serious topics such as "change, growth, ageing, and death," through visiting different historical epochs, their traditions, manners and representatives (Nikolajeva, "Development" 53). Furthermore,

time distortion is influenced by contemporary scientific thought, especially the theory of relativity, and the scope of problems which fantasy authors meet when they venture on the exploration of time patterns allows deep philosophical contemplations: the questions of pre-destination and free will, of the multitude of possible parallel times, of time going at a different pace or even in different directions in separate worlds, the mechanisms of time displacement, and the various time paradoxes. (Nikolajeva, "Development" 53)

A considerable amount of children's fantasy fiction worlds are inhabited by characters such as "anthropomorphic animals, animated toys and dolls, miniature people and mythical creatures" (Nikolajeva, "Development" 55). A strong relationship between the protagonist with one or more of these characters usually puts the latter in the role of the advisor or protector, such as for instance in *His Dark Materials* or *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Nikolajeva, "Development" 55). The occurrence of alternative worlds also presents a theme that is often visited in children's fantasy. However, while child protagonists, animated toys as well as time concepts are categories that clearly differentiate children's fantasy from other subcategories of the genre, alternative worlds are not solely experienced in this particular field. Substantially, however, children's fantasy literature is characterized by its

moral and spiritual guidance for young people, addressing an audience that has yet not any firm distinction between reality and imagination; that does not dismiss magical worlds and events as implausible; that has stronger potential for secondary belief (Nikolajeva, "Development" 60).

Hence children's literature can, at least to a certain degree, be distinguished from mainstream fantasy in terms of content and structure, but especially due to the specific themes that are explored. Ranging from the process of growing up to dealing with death, the afore-mentioned specific topics that are dealt with in children's fantasy may illustrate how the genre operates on a whole different level as well, possibly pointing to its psychological value. As has already been established in chapter 1.2.1, certain parallels can be drawn from fantasy literature to the field of psychology, which most certainly also applies to children's fantasy.

However, mainly due to the difference in target readership, the specific psychological functions that children's fantasy performs differ accordingly from those employed by mainstream fantasy.

1.2.2.2 Psychological implications of children's fantasy

In her paper "Fantasy" (2010), Karen Coats especially focuses on the psychological effects and benefits that children's fantasy can have on its readers. Besides the obvious function of entertainment, fantasy for children serves a variety of purposes that can aid in children's emotional development, constituting another aspect that sets the genre apart (Coats 85).

Yet, in order for the readers to benefit from the psychological value of the genre, the story has to be made accessible to children on a psychological and literary level first. Therefore, in order to achieve better accessibility, Coats argues that children's fantasy literature operates on three levels that create a "definitional matrix" (Coats 75). First, the reader is provided with certain signifiers that are responsible for the child's understanding and perception of its own and other bodies, involving "countless metaphors for the vicissitudes of embodiment" (Coats 75). Second, the conception, development as well as the sustainment of fantasylands "including developing psychic worlds that may or may not have referential ties to actual phenomena" (Coats 75) requires the use of specific inventive language that aids in developing "the abstract and substitutionary character of metaphoric thinking" (Coats 77). Third, "fantasy participates in an intertextual web of cross-reference, allusion and literary history for its themes, motifs and structures" that evoke a certain sense of familiarity in the reader which subsequently aids in fully grasping the contents of the story and successfully engaging with it (Coats 75). This means that through a balance of disguising and evoking certain "fraught emotional and developmental processes" in the storyline, the readers continually engage in these processes while reading (Coats 85).

This way, while experiencing the story and bonding with the characters, young readers connect with their bodies on an emotional level that allows them to "manage the horror of change and fragmentation while maintaining the necessary illusion of coherence and competence" (Coats 85).

Furthermore, subjectivities are supported and maintained “with a promise of a unified reality when present realities seem in danger of disintegrating,” thereby offering its readers a chance to develop “new ethical possibilities” that are realized through challenging these realities “even when subjectivities, bodies and histories suggest that violence and consuming desires are the only way of being in the world” (Coats 85). Subsequently, for children, the dynamics of children’s fantasy can be seen as a way to confront their own fears and explore their desires, hopes and dreams through entering the fantastic realm where everything seems possible.

In 1972, Penelope Farmer argued that fantasy, mainly due to its operation on a symbolical level that offers strong imagery, has the power to

communicate, and particularly to communicate the almost incommunicable – that is feelings and experiences of every kind – emotional, spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic; all of which helps to lessen the huge distances between ourselves and other people, so making us feel less isolated, less alone. (Farmer 30)

Moreover, with this approach to the genre’s psychological implications, Farmer and Coats simultaneously rebut Tolkien’s argument that “Fantasy, Recovery, Escape, Consolation [are] all things of which children have, as a rule, less need than older people” (138). Quite contrary, the child’s physical and psychological development is accompanied by a variety of inner and outer changes that need to be dealt with. Fantasy with its psychological functions can support and accommodate the reader in coping with these changes. For instance, children’s fantasy can help “to negotiate between impulse and social propriety [...] as a child’s life becomes more complex” (Coats 84) as well as offer “an acknowledgement of the demons young people have to fight and the didactic impulse to move the fight into a particular direction” (Coats 85). The often highly anarchic plots of children’s fantasy, with characters that exhibit an almost “anti-social drive,” eventually offer a conservative happy ending, where stability is restored and the protagonists eventually conquer their difficulties, conveying not only consolation but a sense of empowerment (Coats 83). Altogether,

the monsters of fantasy encode our current views about what it means to be human, and how we should respond to those whom we consider other [...] helping children see and contest the often unexamined ideologies concerning such things as gender, entitlement and consumerism that are operative in their life-worlds (Coats 84).

Subsequently, qualities and characteristics of children's fantasy point to its psychological value, and should thus not be underestimated. Not only can the stories aid in the emotional development of the child, but may also function as a source of consolation while simultaneously serving the purpose of an outlet.

2 Is this the real life? Is this just fantasy?

The only thing you can do if you are trapped in a reflection is to invert the image.
(Mitchell qtd. in Jackson 1)

Grenby argues that it is a common misconception that all literary works can be successfully categorized as either purely mimetic or purely fantastic “so that to increase the level of fantasy is to diminish the level of reality” (146). This may be true for some texts, such as for instance Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), where deviation from reality is used as a narrative tool to depict Alice's “gradual disintegration [from] the normal life” (Grenby 146). Nonetheless, there are fantasy works in which exploring the supernatural is just as important as depicting reality. What needs to be taken into consideration as well is that the general perception of what actually constitutes realism changes with time. Looking at the different literary epochs, the concept of realism has been reinvented on several occasions (Sieber 167). Still, it cannot be denied that from the genre's early beginnings, fantasy literature has invited a reading where it “is often easy to discern its entanglement in the ideological controversies of its day” (Grenby 154). Yet, this may be due to the fact that fantasy, like no other genre, is able to disguise possible allusions to the primary world as transcendental and magical elements and creatures “that so readily [invite] symbolic readings” (Grenby 154).

2.1 From mimetic to symbolic – approaching reality in fantasylands

The discussion to what extent fantasy literature mirrors reality exists since the genre's emergence. In general, the polemic can be divided into two approaches, namely modernist and postmodernist. “Modernist theories of fantasy depend upon the metaphysical polarity of real and non-real, and they agree that fantasy is logically and metaphysically secondary to the reality given through ordinary human experience” (Aichele, “Literary Fantasy” 324). In turn, “[p]ostmodernism stands in contrast to the modernist division of reality and fantasy, and in paradoxical relation to modernist metaphysics” (Aichele, “Literary Fantasy” 325).

Exactly this opposition of the dynamics of reality and fantasy constitutes the conflict of modernists and postmodernists. In modernist theory, fantasy is perceived as the creation of an independent secondary world with marvelous and transcendental features that cannot be found in the real world (Aichele, "Literary Fantasy" 323). In postmodernist theory, fantasy fiction is assigned the power of exploring, addressing, and transforming issues of the primary world through the secondary world (Aichele, "Literary Fantasy" 324-325).

Attitudes to certain functions and purposes of fantasy fiction vary accordingly. Especially when it comes to its escapist qualities, the stance on whether, or to what extent, fantasy mirrors reality becomes vital. Modernist approaches in general perceive escape through fantasy as "trivial and perhaps even irresponsible, acceptable only as moral instruction for children or as a distraction from misery for the oppressed," while postmodernist theories use escape as a tool "offering a power of transformation, the ability of the secondary world to invade and conquer the primary world – psychologically, socio-politically, or theologically" (Aichele, Literary Fantasy 324). Consequently, what divides these two approaches is their perception of the relationship between reality and fantasy as well as their disagreement on the genre's escapist effects either serving distraction or subversion.

As mentioned before, what strongly influences the perception to what extent fantasy depicts or approaches reality is the historical context. For instance, in the late 20th century, the demand for children's fantasy decreased since people increasingly longed for portrayal of social realism in literature (Levy and 161). Thus, writers intentionally started to incorporate reality into their fantastic spheres, or vice versa. Some writers adapted their stories accordingly and proved that magic generally does not need to be condoned to the secondary world, but can easily be located in everyday life as well (Levy and Mendlesohn 162). This development naturally resulted in a more obvious treatment of themes related to the primary world such as socio-historical developments including political or religious ideologies. In turn, this invited postmodern approaches to interpreting fantasy literature to become more dominant.

In this context, Rosemary Jackson assigns fantasy literature two spheres, the “mimetic” and the “marvellous” (Jackson 34). Broadly described, the marvelous is defined as representing true past events that have no influence on the present while the mimetic “make[s] an implicit claim of equivalence between the represented fictional world and the ‘real’ world outside the text” (Jackson 34). The fantastic then internalizes both “assert[ing] that what they are telling is real – relying upon all the conventions of realistic fiction to do so – and then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what – within those terms – is manifestly unreal” (Jackson 34).

It seems the answer to the question whether or to what extent fantasy literature represents reality cannot be generalized. The answer may strongly diverge from one fantasy work to another, or furthermore, be dependent on the historical circumstances.

Certainly the relationship between “imagination” and “reality” is a fluid one, with some Fantasies allowing for more reality-functions to the imagination even to the point of believing that everything conceivable can happen [...] while others go to the opposite end of the spectrum where imagination would be restricted almost solely to the realm of the unreal. (Fredericks 39)

In “Problems of Fantasy” (1978), Fredericks therefore asserts that fantasy should be perceived as “dynamic literature” (39). However, it seems that exactly this possibility of dynamism along with the sheer inexistence of literary limitations is what eventually enables fantasy to touch upon or incorporate issues of the primary world more easily into its stories than other genres, even if it is only in disguise.

2.1.1 Fantasy as a platform for social criticism

Richard Mathews (1997) describes the fantasy genre as “a literature of liberation and subversion. Its target may be politics, economics, religion, psychology, or sexuality. It seeks to liberate the feminine, the unconscious, the repressed, the past, the present, and the future” (xii). Fredericks further asserts that fantasy literature “is really only capable of portraying imaginary worlds and situations as a way of reacting to (rejecting, reversing, transcending) present conceptions of reality shared variously by author and reader” (Fredericks 40).

Relatedly, Rosemary Jackson argues that fantasy operates on the premise of cultural subversion as it is “like any other text [...] produced within, and determined by, its social context” (Jackson 3) meaning that the text cannot be completely understood without being put into relation to its socio-historical context. In her approach, she also discusses the role of the author in this process: “Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy” (Jackson 3). Therefore, she claims that fantasy can never be “free” (Jackson 3).

Similarly, Charles I. Glicksberg (1972) explores the role of the author in literature in general. He asserts that literature pursuing social criticism “creates an imaginative world of its own” (Glicksberg 141) that is based on filling the “gap between the ideal and the real” (Glicksberg 143). The former refers to the author’s perception, notions and expectations of how reality could or should eventually be shaped, while the latter describes the actual reality in which the literary work is created. Through indulging in this newly created world, readers will ideally be able to encompass faults of their own reality (Glicksberg 143).

In relation to this, Jackson further argues that fantasy emerges from and works against exactly these societal restrictions “for fantasy attempts to compensate for a lack of resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (Jackson 3). She further explains that there are two ways in which fantastic texts express desire:

[I]t can *tell of*, manifest or show desire (expression in the sense of portrayal, representation, manifestation, linguistic utterance, mention, description), or it can *expel* desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (expression in the sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, getting rid of something by force). (Jackson 3-4)

Not seldom both ways are featured in fantasy works since expulsion of desire can be “told of” as well, enabling an experience of desire by both, author and reader (Jackson 4). In this context, Jackson compares the effect of fantasy to Sigmund Freud’s ambivalent conceptualizations of the uncanny as “that which is concealed from others: all that is hidden, secreted, obscured” but then also “functions to discover, reveal, expose areas normally kept out of sight” (Jackson 65).

Now, what other genre would be more capable of fulfilling such desires by engaging in and exposing “that which society renders silent or invisible,” than fantasy with its seemingly limitless possibilities (McCulloch 97). Relatedly, José Monléon (1990) points out that “the exposition of the repressed is not necessarily a subversive act, if by subversion is meant a challenge to the causes of repression, a defiance of order, an assault on dominant ideology” (Monléon 14). Through the depiction and exploration of certain ideologies, fantasy often achieves the exact opposite effect by “channeling and managing the eruption of the irrational it depicts” (Bould and Vint 103). He further delineates that “[i]f anything, it served precisely to help modify hegemonic discourse in order to justify the survival of [for instance] bourgeois society, a fact that also explains why the fantastic appeared only after the bourgeoisie had consolidated its power” (Monléon 14).

Nonetheless, fantasy with its supernatural characters and creatures, magic, secondary worlds, etc. are all elements that allow the genre to operate on a metaphorical, allegorical and symbolical level, inviting diverse interpretations of the purpose of the story: “[T]he supernatural and the normal exist together [...] in various proportions and combinations, but there is no ratio which governs their relationship” (Grenby 150). This naturally opens doors for critique “that approaches reality through an alternative narrative lens to realism to say something differently” (McCulloch 97).

As Armitt (1996) points out, this renders the genre of fantasy as an ideal “form of writing which is about opening up subversive spaces” (qtd. in McCulloch 97). In this context, Bould and Vint argue that especially the immersive type of fantasy “[w]ithin Mendlesohn’s scheme” is “most amenable to political readings” (Bould and Vint 107).

If done skillfully, the construction of an entire other world in which to set the narrative – often working out detailed maps, charts, languages, lineages and bestiaries – focuses the reader’s attention on the necessary interdependence, and radical contingency, of its elements. (Bould and Vint 107)

In these constructed immersive worlds, reality is conveyed in a way that “everyday semiotic structures convey reality, but unlike ‘myth today’ [obscuring] contingency by transforming ‘history into nature’, [they] potentially [lay] bare the operation of world-building” (Bould and Vint 107).

What can be gathered from the information presented in this chapter is that fantasy fiction, if intended by the author, may be perceived as the ideal genre to address social or political issues of the primary world. The seemingly limitless literary possibilities that allow for a creation of parallel worlds with supernatural, magical and transcendental elements and characters can be considered ideal conditions for “opening up subversive spaces,” as Armitt concluded. What should be kept in mind though is the fact that exactly these elements of fantasy at the same time readily invite allegoric readings and interpretations of all sorts that might not even be accurate. Nonetheless, one topic that is repeatedly encountered, explored and discussed in a variety of different contexts within the realms of fantasy fiction is that of religion.

3 Crossing paths – The interconnectedness of religion and fantasy

The interwoven relationship between religion and fantasy has existed from the fantasy genre’s early beginnings until now. It seems that religion constitutes one of the most dominant topics explored within the fantasy genre. Much of their interconnectedness can be traced back to the resemblances religious and fantastic stories share on a narrative level. Moreover, many of the first fantasy texts, especially children’s fantasy, were still used for didactic purposes educating children to appreciate and cherish “Christian” values, thus not only comprising of but also promoting religious content. However, the dynamics as well as the nature of their relationship have changed over time. While early in history, religion in general and thus religious narratives enjoyed high prestige, as time progressed, this perception changed and religion along with its narratives moved more into the background. Nowadays, it is argued that the 21st century has developed strong tendencies towards secularity and nihilism, resulting in a strong skepticism towards religion. It seems, however, that a high percentage of contemporary fantasy literature is still concerned with religious matters and the question of spirituality (Feldt 553). This sparks the question why religion and fantasy are still so closely affiliated, what this dynamic relationship exactly constitutes of and how it developed and emerged over time.

3.1 The origins of fantasy's affiliation with religion

Due to its emergence in the “rational age”, fantasy has since been assigned skeptic qualities, and is therefore often associated with matters of “secularisation, [...] the post-Enlightenment era and its particular concerns” (Feldt 553). Literary theorists that pursue this perception of fantasy literature mainly “treat religion as a fantasy narrative’s negative other” (Feldt 553). Oddly enough, a large variety of fantastic texts still commonly feature or address religiously related content, and not solely for critical purposes. Moreover, religion has since the fantasy genre’s emergence played a vital role suggesting that fantasy and religion must be initially connected on a whole different level than mere intended subversion.

Religious narratives have existed long before fantasy literature established. The genre of fantasy only emerged in the course of the 19th century. Both genres have thus coexisted from the very beginnings of the fantasy literature genre. Even though religious and fantastic narratives should not be used interchangeably, considering the contents and structure of both genres, it can be seen that they indeed share some common ground, which most certainly constitutes one of the reasons for the interconnection of religion and fantasy in general. Indeed, religious and fantastic narratives are connected in their mutual reliance on metaphor, myth, mysticism, folklore, and symbolism:

In terms of the typical content, such as trans-empirical or superhuman events, actors, actions and spaces, the modern fantasy genre resembles or overlaps with narrative religious genres such as myths, stories of marvels, and epic literature considerably. (Feldt 554)

Especially the dependence on myths, their structures and contents that are deeply rooted in religion are commonly used in fantasy narratives as well: “Myths from around the world have long been a source of inspiration and a repository of ideas for writers of fantasy who indiscriminately use the various fantastic images and themes” (Łaszkiewicz 26). Steve Campbell (2008) points out that the world’s myths – independent from their origins – follow a certain pattern that involves “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (Campbell 28). These elements eventually form the framework for “the hero’s quest” (Łaszkiewicz 26) that is referred to as *the monomyth* by Campbell (1).

Similar to Campbell's formula, fantasy fiction, as well as religious narratives, pursues a very similar approach. "[T]he cosmic struggle between good and evil, the figure of a savior, the rites of passage" as well as "the hero's quest" are commonly borrowed by and featured in fantastic and religious stories (Łaszkiewicz 26). Especially the righteous savior figure who has to overcome several obstacles and "frequently encounters gods and goddesses, enters a land of the dead, and even undergoes the process of divinization before (s)he is able to achieve the final goal" realized through some sort of self-sacrifice, are all concepts that are deeply rooted in mythology and religion (Łaszkiewicz 26). Subsequently, as this formulaic mythological pattern is so often pursued in fantasy literature, it appears to be one of the reasons why religious content is repeatedly revisited in fantasy fiction. Otherwise, religious narratives also feature elements that are characteristic of fantastic texts.

One of the misconceptions regarding the content of religious narratives is that people appear to assume that only because these texts are tied to religion in general, does it mean that these works solely include contents about institutionalized religions. It is perfectly possible for this genre to feature any kinds of "ancestor worship, communication with and about ghosts, elves, magic, [or] cults" (Feldt 554). Therefore, elements that are featured in religious narratives often closely resemble those presented in fantastic literature. This then inquires what actually differentiates religious from fantastic narratives. Feldt (2016) argues that "[t]he decisive differences between fantasy fiction and religious narratives lie [...] in the realms of pragmatics [...] not in text-internal features" (Feldt 555). Religious texts pursue a certain agenda. They are assigned a certain "status and authority" used by religious institutions to convey specific religious dogmas (Feldt 555). Davidsen (2016) delineates that religious narratives "can be constituted by religious practice engaged in by the characters of the story, or by the instructions given by authoritative characters on how to engage in such practice [...] The function is to offer a 'model' of religion" (Davidsen 527). Feldt even claims that every literary text could somehow be turned into a religious text, solely depending on the context of its use (Feldt 555).

The question of pragmatics leads to another possibility of fantasy's affiliation with religion, namely its didactic background. Early children's literature with its didactic agenda dealt with religious virtues, trying to teach children "Christian" values.

Educational lessons were mainly conveyed via a religious context, up to the point where some texts almost resembled a “medieval morality play” as Grenby points out (161). Children’s fantasy on the other hand has been assigned a more revolutionary approach, “representing the antithesis of the didactic tradition” (Grenby 160). However, this differentiation cannot be determined that easily since some of early didactic children’s fiction was often wrongfully categorized as fantasy fiction. This might explain why didacticism is still widely pursued within contemporary children’s fantasy (Grenby 160-161). Considering the influence religion once had on didacticism in children’s fantasy fiction, this might illustrate how certain moral values that are promoted in contemporary fantasy fiction stem from a religious source. Hence, to some extent, today’s exploration of religious themes in children’s fantasy – notwithstanding its promotion or critique – may be attributable to its initial didactic purpose that was supported by religious virtues.

Some scholars argue that a clear distinction between religious and fantastic narratives can be made on the grounds of fact or fiction. However, this would entail being able to assign either one of the categories to specifically one of the two genres in question. Though, limitations cannot be set that simple. Peterson (2016) suggests that a general difference between a fictional and a religious text is evident in the fact that the latter operates on the premise of historical facts, claiming that told events and characters have actually occurred and existed at some point in time in the real world (Peterson 417). A reason for this might be to further credibility (Davidsen 528).

However, considering the afore-discussed approaches of Coleridge, Todorov and Tolkien to defining fantasy literature, it has been established that a central part of fantasy is also made up by the belief, hesitation, or suspension of disbelief in the events depicted in the story. Religious narratives work on a similar basis, as “indeterminacy with respect to p-s-t [person-space-time] -coordinates” (Peterson 518) is what “invites the audience to inscribe itself into the recounted story and interpret their own present as the narrator’s foretold future” (Davidsen 529). Filmer (1992), however, argues that it is exactly “the tension between scepticism and belief, the dialectic which is lived out in every human life, the ultimate requirement which each individual faces to make some kind of choice” that again constitutes “a commonality of theme” of religious and fantastic works (Filmer 4).

Moreover, fantasy and science fiction are no less didactic texts. And indeed if they engage with the issues of doubt and disbelief, they do no more than the sceptical book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, the great number of doubting and/or sulking prophets, or the frankly disbelieving apostle Thomas of the New Testament. (Filmer 4)

In this context, Davidsen substantiates Peterson's claims by referring to one of the key elements that distinguishes religious narratives from other fictional texts, namely "the narrator's claim to speak about the actual world rather than about a fictional world" (Davidsen 528). The narrator thus pursues what Pettersson refers to as "reference ambition" that "claims to communicate the truth about the actual world," which is generally not true for fictional texts (qtd. in Davidsen 528):

[w]hereas fiction remains within its own world into which the reader has to transport himself, [the religious narrative] intrudes into the life-world of the reader. Fiction speaks about the world of the reader, but only indirectly. It tells of a fictional world which the reader can use as a mirror for his own world. The religious text does not only speak about, but blends into, its reader's world. (qtd. and tld. in Davidsen 528)

Consequently, it has clearly been established that one of the early reasons for the ongoing interconnection of religion and fantasy can be led back to not only the initial didactic purpose of the first fantasy texts that addressed religion via incorporation of religious virtues, but also to the similarities of fantastic and religious narratives, due to their mutual mythological heritage.

3.2 Contemporary developments – Fantasy as a sacred place of its own

Towards the end of the 20th century, a considerable shift in the depiction of religion in fantasy literature was observed by a variety of scholars. In general, the 21st century is often referred to as "the rational age" or "the scientific age" (Feldt 553). A tendency towards secularization seemed to have emerged and developed over time, which, by many religious scholars, is perceived as problematic (Feldt 553). Nonetheless, it appears that the topic of religion and spirituality is still widely and thoroughly explored, at least in contemporary fantasy literature. "Although many factors influence the process of reception of literature, it is thus relevant to take up the mediation of religion in literature," as the dominant presence and continued discussion of this specific topic may point to its "social significance" (Feldt 553). Filmer argues that fantasy literature has always commented on and made contemporary social developments a subject of discussion (Filmer 4).

Subsequently, it appears only logical that prevalent, ever-growing critique and subsequent absence of religion in society, as it is commonly practiced in contemporary discourse, is featured in fantasy literature in manifold ways and instances. “The *angst* of this secular, nihilistic age is explored in the growing number of science fiction and fantasy texts which address, as worthwhile fantasy has always done, human concerns, psychological and spiritual” (Filmer 4).

However, what religious institutions have lost in prestige and credibility, fantasy fiction has gained in popularity. This raises another interesting question, namely whether nowadays fantasy has established itself as a form of religion itself. What underpins this idea is that several religious groups have emerged and formed from fantasy fiction. So-called “Jediists” believe in “the Force” as portrayed in the saga and partake in rituals such as meditation to experience it. Followers of the “Tolkien spirituality” communicate in rituals with the Elves, with Gandalf, and with the so-called Valar, the gods of Tolkien’s cosmology” (Davidsen 525). The Boston Globe (2016) reports that the Cambridge podcast “Harry Potter and the Sacred Text” that was launched in May 2016 tops the iTunes podcast charts on religion and spirituality. Among other things, the podcast mainly discusses the idea of how the canonical texts of Harry Potter may function as a separate and new form of religion, since “[n]ot everyone can find themselves in the Bible or the Torah or the Koran [...] [f]inding a spiritual connection in secular fiction is “unorthodox and radical and something there’s been a real need for,” (Boston Globe ch. 1). Vanessa Zoltan, one of the hosts, explains that the main spiritual and moral value or agenda of Harry Potter would be “love first” (ch. 1).

It should be kept in mind though that mere fans of *Star Wars* or *The Lord of the Rings* do not necessarily share these beliefs, while practitioners of Jediism and Tolkien spirituality might not be part of the fandom community (Davidsen 525).

Within the constraints of these genres there is now a discourse which addresses itself to these concerns in a manner which suggests that religious discourse has been displaced from its contextual siting in the social rituals of worship to the private experience of engagement with a written text. (Filmer 4)

As mentioned, these developments can be traced back to developments of spirituality as outlined by Taylor in chapter 1.1.1.

The loss of power of religious institutions and organized religions does not necessarily coincide with a decrease in people's faith, what Davie (2007) refers to as "believing without belonging" (qtd. in Feldt 568). Generally, Feldt argues that society seems to be drifting towards a more individualized approach to experiencing religion (Feldt 568):

Yet, in addition to investigations of traditional forms of religions, focusing on individualization, changing beliefs and self-based spirituality, we must also inquire about the social significance of broader, societal communication not only *with* supernatural beings and powers but also *about* superhuman beings, powers, experiences, events, practices, and so on, and consider aspects of religion which move at the margins of what standard conceptions allow. (Feldt 568)

Moreover, Filmer further delineates that it is possible for fantasy literature to serve a religious purpose, for elements of the fantastic discourse strongly resemble those of religions "with all the features of didacticism, persuasion and emotive language" that can also be found in religious practices as well (Filmer 4). Referred to as "special effect religion" by Feldt, these fantastic texts serve a religious purpose, offering the reader the possibility to reflect on his/her beliefs and attitude towards religion in general, while being entertained at the same time (Feldt 570). "They explicitly draw on phenomena and expressions from the broad category of religion, and they stimulate their readers to see the everyday reality plane through a double lens" (Feldt 570).

In relation to this, Mircea Eliade (1957) introduces the concepts of the *sacred* and the *profane* – originally *sacrum* and *profanum* – that can be located within the realms of mythology and describe the "two modes of being in the world" (Eliade 14). The *sacred* in its broadest sense describes a sphere where religious sentiment is a natural part of the human cosmos (Eliade 13), while the *profane* refers to a universe "divested of all religious presuppositions" (Eliade 23). Eliade explains that through exploring religious practices such as ceremonial rituals and symbolism, the sphere of the *sacred* could be maintained within mythology. Contemporarily, through the process of modernity, and the subsequent deviation from religion, people have created a vast space between the two spheres furthering the process of the modern world becoming a "desacralized cosmos" (Eliade 17).

Nonetheless, Eliade further suggests that *the sacred* can be preserved in all kinds of art, including literature, as “the experience of cosmic sanctity can be rarified and transformed until it becomes a purely human emotion – that for example, of art” (Eliade 155). “As a result, fantasy literature, which greatly relies on mythological heritage, can also be treated as one of those modern forms that preserve the *sacred* once found in mythology” (Łaszkiwicz 27).

Fantasy can thus function as a sacred space on its own. This coincides with Tolkien’s vision of the “sub-creation” and its effect on the reader. Readers become “sub-creators” in the process of envisioning the depicted fantasy world and believing in it. “[W]e realize [...] the image of the creator-God in us, and thus narrative fantasy is able to bring to us *evangelium* [...] that there is more to life and reality than the deadening, technocratized world of ordinary modernist experience” (Aichele, *Literary Fantasy* 324). Filmer elucidates that “[f]antasy more than ever, performs its priestly, prophetic function, alerting readers to the social and spiritual dangers of apathy and cynicism; while offering reassurance and hope for a better tomorrow” (Filmer 137).

Changes in literary perception and depiction of religion can also be ascribed to the effects that mass media, consumerism and new technology has on the Western world. Due to these developments, a general acceleration can be observed in almost all private and public spheres of contemporary society. In this context, the emergence of “new virtual-reality public spheres” is discussed (Feldt 568). These changes in society also affect people’s current reading habits. “The new virtual-reality public spheres have made many readers appreciate the provisionality of fictional texts, of normative interpretations of reality, [and] the constructedness of identities” mainly caused through the vital role that virtual reality has received and how it is perceived as opposed to the actual reality (Feldt 569). In this sense, virtual reality is not perceived as “fake” but rather as an alternative reality, thus, “a double, simultaneous awareness of fictionality and reality” which “marks an increasing comfort with the idea that reality is, to some extent, a contingent and changeable construction” (Feldt 569-570). This change in the perception of reality opens doors for the genre of fantasy, as it “combines with its older and higher use as an equivalent of Imagination the derived notion of ‘unreality’ (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the domination of observed ‘fact’” (Tolkien 139).

Simultaneously, this explains why current popular culture is almost obsessed with supernatural phenomena of all sorts. These phenomena have been explored by religious narratives sufficiently enough as well. Fantasy, however, offers another access to explore these topics authentically: “Myth, magic and religious phenomena are framed in new ways, as cool, exciting, fascinating and thrilling attitudes, and these elements are mixed with commerce and consumerism” successfully mirroring the century they are illustrated in (Feldt 570).

Perceiving fantasy as a possible religious sphere subsequently inquires where in this scenario the role of the author would be positioned. In a religious context it seems that Tolkien’s idea of the author as “sub-creator” receives a whole different meaning, as it draws parallels to the Judeo-Christian concept of God as the Creator, who, akin to the process of how fantasy authors create their secondary worlds, created the primary world according to his imagination.

3.2.1 Fantasy authors – The gods of literature?

And by the word of my power, have I created them [...] My works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease.
(Moses 1:32; 1:4)

Throughout history, people have looked to priests and pastors for guidance. In their speeches and with their words they attempted to give people hope and guidance by preaching the word of God. However, in an increasingly secularized society, where religion has lost its credibility, so have its representatives. When in need of hope, people nowadays usually do not primarily turn to the Church anymore. Filmer thus predicts

‘the rise of ‘the author-guru’; whether the book concerned deals with losing weight from hips and thighs, or methods of reconstructing one’s psyche through meditation and carrot-juice, the role of the author is the same and the procedure which ensues is ritualistic-television interviews, book signings, seminars and other publicity stunts’ (Filmer 13).

However, this presents only a small portion of what book authors can mean to readers. As previously addressed, considering the power of the author to create new fictional worlds with the power of his words, similarities can be found between the language of God’s creation of the universe in the book of Genesis, – “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26) – Coleridge’s ideas concerning imagination as “the eternal act of creation in the infinite *I AM*” (Coleridge

363), and Tolkien's definition of the author as a "sub-creator" who embarks in the creation of secondary worlds (Tolkien 122). Furthermore, no other genre seems to supply a better platform for the creation of a new world in the image of one's own expectations and values than fantasy, operating on a literary level that appears to have no limitations in terms of structure and themes explored.

The achievement of the expression, which gives (or seems to give) 'the inner consistency of reality,' is indeed another thing, or aspect needing another name: Art, the operative link between Imagination and the final result, Sub-creation. For my present purpose I require a word which will embrace both the Sub-creative Art in itself and a quality of strangeness and wonder in the Expression, derived from the Image: a quality essential to fairy-story. [...] in short of the fantastic. (Tolkien 138-139)

In this scenario, Filmer assigns fantasy authors the title "author-priest" (Filmer 13). They have the power to create worlds with their words "whose role is to minister hope to readers and to construct visions of a reality in which humanity might transcend itself [...] appeal[ing] to the emotions and the imagination of the readers" (Filmer 13). Taking on this role, the author must provide his/her readers with consolation for them to develop a sense of hope in a world devoid of something sacred to believe in. Yet, this gift in the form of hope and guidance, the author may bestow on its readers also comes with a responsibility. The author has the power to form and shape the fantastic worlds, as he would like to imagine it, creating characters that follow and pursue his/her rules and virtues that also he/she determines. In this scenario, "[t]he author of fantasy is [...] the author of 'truth' – someone who can mediate to readers the truth about life, expose the shams of daily existence, and admit them to something [...] that will help them to transcend themselves" (Filmer 19).

As has been established, the relationship between religion and fantasy dates back to the latter's emergence as an independent genre, and, despite the considerable changes in the dynamics of this special connection, can still be considered intact in modern days. The interconnectedness can be traced back to fantasy's mythological heritage that is especially evident in similarities of images and themes explored in fantastic and religious narratives. Children's fantasy, however, owes its religious relatedness mainly to its didactic background.

Religion and fantasy's connection is furthered through the fact that even though the 21st century is mainly considered an era devoid of religion, contemporary fantasy literature does not cease to explore religion in its multifarious varieties up to the point where it is debated whether fantasy literature itself is in the process of becoming a sacred space on its own.

The writers' endeavors to address religious themes in their fiction not only enrich the secondary realities, but also prove that fantasy literature – by asking questions about the religious/spiritual quality of life and by inventing a fantastic sphere of *sacrum* for the literary heroes – is interested in connecting its readers, and the authors as well, with the *sacrum* present in the primary world. (Łaszkiwicz 35)

However, due to its dominant status in the realms of fantasy literature, the specific representation of religion is also very often criticized by religious institutions, and especially contemporary children's fantasy literature such as *Harry Potter*, or *His Dark Materials* are commonly accused of promoting heretical values.

3.2.2 Religious criticism in fantasy literature

First, it should be clarified that it is not that easy to simply name various instances where fantasy literature evidently employs religious criticism, as this constitutes a much more delicate and diverse subject matter. To be able to define critique strongly depends on how the issue is approached and presented in the specific book. Furthermore, interpretations strongly vary depending on the individual reader. Moreover, the author's stance on the discussed theme is also often factored in. All of these things contribute to whether a work of fiction is considered a critique or not. Thus, presenting a clear overview of religious criticism pursued in fantasy literature seems difficult.

Graham Sleight (2012) categorizes literary fantasies that deal with the topic of religion as “fantasy of religion [...] that depicts or makes use of commonly understood religious tropes, but which recasts them in the context of additional fantastic narrative elements” (Sleight 248). There are different ways in which fantasy fiction approaches the topic of religion. While some “approach their subject obliquely or through misdirection,” others choose to explore the subject matter more directly (Sleight 250). Łaszkiwicz (2013) for instance exemplifies that some fantasy authors create secondary religions that may or may not resemble religions from the primary world.

“[T]hey turn religious/spiritual issues into a more or less significant part of the narrative [...] or an antagonistic element [...]; they also imbue the narrative with allegory or criticism of a particular faith [...]” (Łaszkiewicz 35). Newly constructed secondary religions

might either simply enrich their imaginary lands or become a central theme in the narrative. These imaginary religions frequently come fully equipped with gods, venerated figures, holy places, dogmas, codes of conduct, mythologies and prophecies; they are well-established and believable within the boundaries of the imaginary realms. (Łaszkiewicz 27)

However, simply employing religious motifs and images does not lead to accusations of the stories conveying heretical content, but rather the fact that in various instances, these religious concepts are linked to transcendental and supernatural elements such as magic, “extraterrestrial visitations, and pseudoscientific monsters” (Fredericks 40). Moreover, especially in contemporary fantasy literature, “traditional religions are regularly presented as impotent and ossified over against practitioners of magic, who are portrayed as spiritually potent,” such as in exactly *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials* (Feldt 554). Therefore, stories that incorporate religious tropes into a fantasy genre context are often prone to allegations of pursuing an anti-religious agenda. However, considering that fantasy literature is also well known for mirroring current social status and developments, this would inquire whether contemporary fantasy literature that happens to present religion in a negative light, is merely an authentic representation and exploring of contemporary societal conditions.

The writers’ endeavors to address religious themes in their fiction not only enrich the secondary realities, but also prove that fantasy literature – by asking questions about the religious/spiritual quality of life and by inventing a fantastic sphere of sacrum for the literary heroes – is interested in connecting its readers, and the authors as well, with the sacrum present in the primary world. (Łaszkiewicz 35)

In this context, Scott (2005) interestingly points out that in an era that is largely deprived of religious sentiment, even

a radically secular literature may have a profoundly fruitful religious function to perform. For, by the very resoluteness with which it may plunge us into the Dark, it may precipitate us out of our forgetfulness, so that, in a way, our deprivation of the Transcendent may itself bring us into proximity to its Mystery. (qtd. in Filmer 4)

While it has to be admitted that a variety of fantasy literature, especially contemporary works, appear to be predominantly critical of religious matters, there are “religious fantasies” that explore the concept of religion without critiquing it. Quite contrary, two of fantasy’s most successful authors J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis are strong devotees of the Catholic Church. Accordingly, their fantasy sagas *The Chronicles of Narnia* as well as *The Lord of the Rings* are often treated as religious allegories. As for the former, the story allegedly pursues a “distinctly Christian message [...] because of [...] e.g. the motifs of treason, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, redemption, and the ultimate glory of the Narnian savior figure” (Łaszkiewicz 30). *The Lord of The Rings* then is considered “an unquestionable repository of Christian morality” which is especially evident in “the genesis of Middle-Earth; the recurring motifs of temptation, sin, and self-sacrifice; the presence of a benevolent Providence, and the angel-like existence of the elves to name just a few” (Łaszkiewicz 24-25).

However, the problem with allegorical readings is that they are open to various different interpretations. “Thus we make a mistake if we try to chase symbols up and down the landscape [...] or if we try to pin down allegories. [...] Fantasies are stories, not preachers” (Dickerson and O’Hara 59). This does not mean that fantasies do not allow an allegorical reading, as many clearly do, however it should be kept in mind that these allegories then “serve the story, and not the other way around” (Dickerson and O’Hara 59).

In this context, the role of the author is also often discussed. C.S. Lewis for instance is known to be “a fairly orthodox Christian” (Fredericks 40). It is therefore easy to simply assign its works a pro-religious agenda. On the other hand, works from outspoken atheists such as Philip Pullman, who repeatedly railed against the concept of religion and its institutions, are immediately presumed to convey an anti-religious message in their stories. However, “we do a disservice to both, the author and ourselves if we limit our understanding to mere allegory” (Dickerson and O’Hara 59).

Fredericks sums it up perfectly when he explains that

[...] Fantasy fiction is not intended to incalculable dogmatic beliefs. If it were, why should Fantasy also always be so idiosyncratic, so unique and personal in its vision of reality, so individualistic in its style and expression? This does not sound like a very intelligent or effective way to proselytize for one's own narrow religious or philosophical cause. The stronger thesis is that Fantasy should make us sensitive to the bad beliefs that we already have and open to new, better ones. Fantasy is in this sense intellectually subversive. [...] Fantasy thus seems to appeal to the intellectual non-conformist in us all. (Fredericks 40)

“Thus, elevating the religious message over other qualities of the fantastic narrative is perhaps not the most desirable option, and interpreting a fantasy book only for the religious message might be equally wrong [...]“ (Łaszkiewicz 30). Consequently, premature labeling of certain fantasy works, and literary works in general, may deprive the reader of the many other gifts and messages the stories in question seek to convey.

4 Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

Tell them stories. [...] But they need the truth. You must tell them true stories, and everything will be well, everything. Just tell them stories.
(Pullman 1012)

4.1 The polemic and the author's role

The trilogy *His Dark Materials* has repeatedly been accused of pursuing an anti-religious agenda. Philip Pullman's personal dismissive attitude towards dogmatic religion, which he has gladly expressed publicly on various occasions, further reinforces these accusations:

The trouble is that all too often in human history, churches and priesthoods have set themselves up to rule people's lives in the name of some invisible god (and they're all invisible, because they don't exist) – and done terrible damage. In the name of their god, they have burned, hanged, tortured, maimed, robbed, violated, and enslaved millions of their fellow-creatures, and done so with the happy conviction that they were doing the will of God, and they would go to Heaven for it. That is the religion I hate, and I'm happy to be known as its enemy. (qtd. in Gray 30)

This clearly illustrates that, as already mentioned in chapter 1.1, Pullman's “religious critique” primarily focuses on religious institutions.

In this context, especially the Catholic Church expressed concern due to the specific representation of religious content in the series, the primary problem constituting the killing of God, accusing the author of “trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief” with a plot that serves to discredit religion, for apparently “[t]he Catholic Church hierarchy is caricatured” (Kedveš 6). Even though, admittedly, the Christian belief system is addressed and critiqued on various occasions, Pullman focuses his critique not particularly on one specific dogmatic religion, but rather on the systematics behind every organized religion. This may already be evident in the fact that God/the Authority is addressed by various different names such as “God, the Creator, the Lord, Yaweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty” (Pullman 671), probably referring to our varying divine figures in real religions.

Killing God was one event in *His Dark Materials* that particularly sparked controversy. Pullman also repeatedly admitted that his stories are about killing God. Yet, when asked whether he believes in God or not, Pullman does not necessarily dismiss his existence, he rather explains that he simply does not know whether there is a God or not (Guardian ch. 1). This led to speculations of the story suggesting the characters’ “search for truth, support and love does not point to an evil God [...] but a God who is painfully absent from the story” thus claiming that “the visible absence of true God, paired with the presence of love, courage, and sacrifice, points to Pullman’s own quest to understand God” (Łaszkiewicz 34). Another interesting point is Pullman’s personal stance on spirituality, which seems to further suggest that his works do not pursue the aim of diminishing a general spiritual sentiment:

The religious impulse - which includes the sense of awe and mystery we feel when we look at the universe, the urge to find a meaning and purpose in our lives, our sense of moral kinship with other human beings – is part of being human, and I value it. I’d be a damn fool not to. (qtd. in Gray 30)

Now, since the story generally employs a majority of the earlier discussed characteristics of mythological storytelling, religion clearly constitutes one of the most prominent motifs of the trilogy. Pullman himself, however, pointed out that his primary intention was “to tell a story – [...] because the story comes to [him] and wants to be told” (Kedveš 6). Nonetheless, looking at how religious institutions are approached within *His Dark Materials*, it would be negligent to preclude a certain agenda behind the specific representation, as the text is quite obviously critical towards the concept of organized religions, along with their predefined religious doctrines.

Still, overall, the ideas that have been developed within the series seem far too complex and elaborate to simply assign one specific aim to it, also with respect to religious contents. What can certainly be established, however, is the core of the story's critique that emphasizes on every hierarchical and institutionalized religion that uses God as means to an end to take advantage of people's faith in a divine figure, in order to gain and maintain their power over them, hence, (ab)use it for their own purposes. Pullman himself puts it as follows: "[I]n my view, belief in God seems to be a very good excuse, on the part of those who claim to believe, for doing many wicked things that they wouldn't feel justified in doing without such a belief" (Guardian ch. 1), "whenever you get a political structure, with ranks and hierarchies, you get corruption; you get people who are more interested in progressing through those ranks than in doing good. Power corrupts" (Guardian ch. 1). Freitas (2007) thus suggests that this "trilogy is not filled with attacks on Christianity, but with attacks on authorities who claim access to one true interpretation of a religion. [...] Pullman's work is not anti-Christian, but anti-orthodox" (1).

The following sections are concerned with illustrating how the trilogy enables a reading that is critical of dogmatic religions and their respective religious doctrines they seek to convey, which will be done by initially displaying the highly negative representation of religious institutions and their representatives. Second, topic related intertextuality will be analyzed. Then, instances of symbolism and metaphor will be demonstrated that allow for an allegorical reading of the text. This will be followed by addressing how old-established religious concepts such as original sin, the fall, or heaven and hell, as well as religiously constructed dualistic concepts of innocence and experience and good versus evil are not only deconstructed, but reinvented by Pullman.

5 Depiction of religious institutions

The churches in every world are corrupt and weak.
(Pullman 696)

First and foremost, to give a brief overview of the most straightforward critiques pitted against religious institutions, the story's representation of the Church, its executives and representatives need to be addressed.

Pullman does not hold back in his dismissive approach and appears to let his personal reluctance of and opinions on dogmatic religions resonate through his highly negative representation of religious institutions but also through the hostile attitude of his main characters towards these entities.

Mary Malone for instance ascertains that “the Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that’s all” (Pullman 1019). That Mary Malone’s character is a reformed nun probably constitutes one of the most ironic revelations of the text that significantly contributes to the debasement and mockery of religious beliefs, as she not only serves as Pullman’s version of the devilish serpent initiating the Fall, but also “abjured a loveless and meaningless church for significant and joyful relationships with other beings and with the natural world” (Scott 97). Another example would be the portrayal of “[t]he passionately depraved priest, Father Gomez” (Scott 97) who in his frantic attempt to please the Church, and to fulfill his mission to murder Lyra in order to prevent the Fall, is eventually killed by a weak and wounded homosexual rebel angel. As if the irony represented in these events was not enough to contribute to the ridiculing of his character, his daemon additionally settled in the form of a dung beetle, revealing his true nature.

Set in a time era that, as Ebert suggests, resembles Victorian England with its aristocrats, traditions, and, most importantly, the institutions of the Church still in a place of power would appear to further contribute to the demeanor of organized religion (243). It may not be a coincidence that the one specific world in *His Dark Materials* that eventually initiates the revolution against religious authority bears resemblance to the 19th century, as historically, during this time period “rationalist, materialist stance came into conflict with Christianity,” mainly through “teaching of thinkers such as Marx and Darwin” (Snowden 78). Moreover, historically, the reader might also draw parallels to the Spanish Inquisition or the Salem Witch Trials – as it is not only specifically referred to the threat of a “permanent inquisition” by Metatron (AS 696), but also “of how they capture witches, in some world, and burn them alive [...]” (SK 581). By incorporating these particular events, Pullman manages to remind the reader of the many unethical wrongdoings Churches all over the world have been part of.

Other references to people or events inspired by the primary world can be found in the person in charge of the religious institutions, Pope Calvin, as well as the chosen titles for the clerical organs. For instance, while Pope Calvin was historically actually in charge of setting up a Consistorial Court of Discipline in Geneva in the 16th century (Squires 61), Pullman's "Magisterium" also exists in reality and refers to the hierarchical system of Catholicism (Sullivan 25-26). Moreover, the fact that Pullman bases the Church in Geneva "enables him to depict his Church as exhibiting at once all that is most deplorable both in popery and in puritanism" (Pridmore 55). The many references to the primary world seem to "[make] it clear that Pullman's argument with organized religion extends beyond the fictional frame of his narrative" (Squires 66).

It is also revealed that the Church in the novels is involved in a variety of gruesome schemes in order to purge humanity and the world "from the hideous burden of sin" (Pullman 705). This for instance involves the attempt to prevent children from growing up and turning into conscious beings, as in the Church's perception this is equated with sin, by severing them from their souls in the form of daemons by so-called "intercision" (Pullman 147). However, as outlined by Lord Asriel, the Church has long been involved with torturous experiments, whereby intercision even presents one of the more humane methods by comparison:

Do you know what the word castration means? It means removing the sexual organs of a boy so that he never develops the characteristics of a man. A castrate keeps his high treble voice all his life, which is why the Church allowed it: so useful in Church music. Some castrati became great singers, wonderful artists. Many just became fat spoiled half-men. Some died from the effects of the operation. But the Church wouldn't flinch at the idea of a little cut, you see. [...] [Intercision] would be so much more hygienic than the old methods, when they didn't have anesthetics or sterile bandages or proper nursing care. It would be gentle by comparison. (Pullman 317)

All of these methods either kill the tortured or turn them into human shells devoid of any emotion, which is presented as advantageous for the Church's purposes to cultivate sinless and obedient followers which aids in maintaining their power and authority, since "conscious beings have become dangerously independent" (Pullman 696). "Pullman draws on the familiar stereotypes of the Church as oppressive, cruel, obsessed by sin – especially by the sin of the flesh – and ever the enemy of free enquiry" (Pridmore 55).

Finally, *His Dark Materials* rids dogmatic religion of their primary raison d'être, as is revealed that the God they are allegedly serving is an "Imposter God," as Freitas and King (2007) suggest. Hence, not only does the story "[depict] a debased church plagued by a Machiavellianism of the basest kind" but also demeans its actual premise by "replacing God with the Authority – a withered, decrepit old man in a glass box – and Metatron, the usurping spirit tormented by human lust who has seized tyrannical power for evil purposes" (Scott 96).

From this brief overview of the portrayal of hierarchical religions and their customs, it appears obvious that *His Dark Materials* is eager to present clerical organizations as "destructive use of power in which politics and debased practices have joined with the forces of evil to seduce and bully people from the truth" (Scott 97). Nonetheless, besides the previously discussed points of critique, the following chapters will reveal that *His Dark Materials* employs subversion of religious doctrines on much deeper levels as well.

6 Intertextuality

Read like a butterfly, write like a bee.
(Pullman qtd. in Squires 115)

One of the indicators for the employment of religious critique is Pullman's specific choice of canonical references. With *His Dark Materials*, Pullman created an intertextual network for religiously related discourse. The main intertextual reference represents John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem that reinterprets parts of the Bible to "[...] tell the story of man's first obedience to God [...] [and to] justify the ways of God to men" (Scott 95). Pullman even asserts that *His Dark Materials* was meant to be a rewriting of Milton's work, only for children (McCulloch 113). Moreover, themes and images of William Blake's poetry, especially taken from *Songs of Innocence and Experience* as well as "Auguries of Innocence", are worked into the story as well. Milton and Blake are considered to be part of "a longer tradition of English radicalism" due to their revolutionary and anti-religious literature (Butler 231). The controversy surrounding Pullman and his works certainly qualifies him to join these ranks.

While Pullman references Milton as well as Blake in *His Dark Materials*, Blake also repeatedly commented on Milton's works. He dedicated the poem *Milton* to him, and referred to the author as being "of the Devil's party without knowing it," a party that both Blake and Pullman joined voluntarily (Scott 95). In addition to that, since Blake's poetry traditionally embarks on the subversion of religious canon and the premise of Milton's *Paradise Lost* basically constitutes a rewriting of the book of Genesis, it comes as no surprise that mainly through incorporating these texts into the story, the trilogy also references the King James Bible on various occasions.

However, the fact that Pullman reinvents the parts he worked into the story, such as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, only shows his discontent with the original material and message it sought to convey. The original content is "discarded as a fairy tale imposed by the Church, and used as a template for developing an entirely new image" (Kedveš 8).

Thus, while Pullman, Blake, and Milton all interpret the biblical themes and narratives in the context of contemporary thought and church doctrine, Blake also interprets Milton's interpretation, and Pullman reflects and re-creates them all. In this way, Pullman's trilogy becomes a triumph of intertextuality, with text quoting text and image quoting image in a metaphorical reflective hall of mirrors. (Scott 96)

Now, what indicates a critical stance on religion is that Pullman specifically chose to incorporate texts into the story that are well known for their anti-religious agenda. However, not only the simple choice to embed those specific texts appears to be reason enough to designate *His Dark Materials* critical attributes towards religious doctrines, but also the certain way in which they are reinvented and adapted in order to serve the purpose of the story contributes accordingly.

6.1 William Blake

I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's.
(Blake qtd. in Mason xi)

Generally, Blake and Pullman seem to share a mutual hostile attitude towards the concept of organized religion. It has already been established that Pullman's agenda is not to blatantly attack people's faith or spirituality, but rather hierarchical religions. Blake pursues a similar approach, as he was actually considered a highly spiritual man, whose problem was not with God, but with authoritative religions (Eaves 150 ff.).

Therefore, his reasons for railing against the Church were less related to his lack of faith, but rather to his conviction that religious institutions actually separate man from God (Kedveš 5). Blake thus advocates that people should not follow and obey an external force or authority, since God is something they can find within themselves (Kedveš 5). Here, it should be mentioned though that Pullman as a proclaimed atheist does not share Blake's enthusiasm for God.

Nonetheless, in the course of *His Dark Materials*, Pullman repeatedly borrows from Blake's poetry. Besides incorporating entire passages word for word such as in *Amber Spyglass*, where the epilogue consists of Blake's poem "America: A Prophecy," Pullman heads various chapters of the last part of the trilogy with a passage from Blake's poetry. Moreover, Pullman explores themes akin to those addressed in various works of the author, especially those expressed in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* as well as "Auguries of Innocence". Immersing deeper into the former, a variety of parallels to *His Dark Materials* can be established. Not only did Pullman seem to find inspiration for his main protagonists Will and Lyra in Blake's "Little Girl Lost" and "Little Boy Lost", but *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *His Dark Materials* substantially resemble each other in their critique of religious doctrines and institutionalized religions. This critique, it seems, is particularly performed through their respective exploration and reinvention of the religiously constructed dichotomy of innocence and experience as well as their highly negative representation of clerical institutions their doctrines, beliefs and customs.

It can be observed that both works strongly deviate from the traditional religiously related conception that clearly favors innocence over experience. Generally, these two traits are not represented as opposite ends of a spectrum, whereby "dualistic attitudes of monotheistic religions," in which innocence equals good while experience equals evil, are challenged (Taylor, "Spontaneous Awakening" 75). While both authors approach this dualism differently, several parallels can be drawn. On the one hand, Blake creates two distinct spheres of innocence and experience in his *Songs of Innocence* as opposed to his *Songs of Experience*; on the other hand, Pullman appears to manifest this binary mainly in the characters of Lyra and Will and their relationship to each other.

Assuming Pullman actually based his two protagonists on Blake's little girl lost and little boy lost, he may have used Blake's diverse representation of innocence and experience, realized in the creation of their two respective spheres in *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, to create his own juxtaposition in the characters of Lyra and Will.

Will's character may very well be shaped after Blake's little boy who lost his father and is looking for him:

'Father, father, where are you going?
Oh do not walk so fast!
Speak, father, speak to you little boy,
Or else I shall be lost.' (Blake 8.1-4)

Admittedly, however, since it seems that Blake has referred to God as "father" in other poems of the collection, it might be possible that God is also referenced here. Furthermore, in "The Little Boy Found," the boy is reunited with his mother who it seems was desperately looking for him. Will, too, had a good and strong relationship with his mother. Their reunion is eventually implied in *The Amber Spyglass*. Thus, the boy in Blake's poems and Pullman's character Will bear a certain resemblance.

A clearer correlation can be established between the characters of Lyra and Lyca. In Blake's poem, Lyca is lost, sleeping alone under a tree, no father or mother in sight:

Do father, mother, weep?
Where can Lyca sleep?
'Lost in desert wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep
If her mother weep? (Blake 25.19-24)

The verse "Do father, mother weep?" which she appears to ask herself suggests that she does not know where her parents are. The only ones who eventually take care of her are animals:

Leopards, tigers, play
Round her as she lay;
[...]
And naked they conveyed
To caves the sleeping maid. (Blake 26.41-52)

This most certainly coincides with Lyra's story. Not only has she initially no idea where she is from, or who or where her parents are, but when she leaves Oxford, she is specifically described as "a lost little girl in a strange world, belonging nowhere" (Pullman 413). "Lyra's journey in *His Dark Materials* echoes this idea of a little girl who is lost, in the sense that she doesn't know who she is or what her origins are and then becomes, after an adventurous quest, the little girl found" (McCulloch 115). Moreover, the ones who eventually protect and care for her are in most cases animals. Particularly her daemon Pantalaimon, who shape-shifts into different kinds of animals, and Iorek the polar bear, who accompanies Lyra on her journey and is eager to protect and help her along the way. Different than in "The Little Girl Found," however, Lyra's parents abandoned her on purpose, while the parents in Blake's poem appear to simply have lost their child and are looking for her as "[t]hey traced the desert ways [...] [a]nd dream they see their child" (Blake 27 8-11).

More importantly, however, Lyra and Lyca share one crucial trait, namely their innocence. The fact that it is specifically mentioned that Lyca is a virgin, "[...] And the virgin viewed [...]" (Blake 26 38), might further point to her serving as template for Lyra, since Lyra's virginity is presented as a vital part of the story as well. Moreover, there are theories that suggest that the poem "The Little Girl Lost" addresses sexual transgression (Dike 354). This theory would explain why Lyca's ascribed (sexual) innocence, Blake features the poem in his *Songs of Experience*, which actually appears contradicting. However, this only connects the two characters further, since Lyra experiences her first sexual encounter in a similar setting, also surrounded by animals, but in the form of daemons. Assuming the solicited theory on Blake addressing sexual transgression is actually valid, this depiction of innocence transcending into experience might have served as an inspiration for Pullman's character development of Lyra, since Lyra's innocence morphing into experience threads its way through the story and eventually climaxes in her first sexual experience that simultaneously constitutes the key moment of the trilogy. "Like her namesake Lyca in Blake's poems, Lyra is the little girl lost insofar as she is ignorant of the path she is about to embark upon, and then becomes the little girl found as she attains wisdom" (McCulloch 121).

This interplay of the two traits is further established and developed by Pullman in the diverse characters of Lyra and Will. Even though Lyra's innocence is illustrated as crucial prerequisite for the fulfillment of her destiny, Lyra can only overcome all major difficulties through lying and deceiving people. Therefore, her character development strongly depends on her balancing innocence and experience. Will, as opposed to Lyra, is from the beginning described as a highly experienced child, particularly as he has already, even though unintended, killed someone. However, akin to Lyra's portrayal, Will's character is illustrated just as multifarious and complex, who is in some respects even as innocent as Lyra. Thus, even if Lyra were to qualify as personification of innocence, while Will were to portray experience, both appear to inhabit certain traits of the respective other:

'How lucky Will was that she was awake now to look after him! He was truly fearless, and she admired that beyond measure; but he wasn't good at lying and betraying and cheating, which all came to her as naturally as breathing.'
(Pullman 790)

Despite their differences in character, they complement and rely on each other. It seems that only through the process of innocence transforming into experience and vice versa, Will and Lyra can truly develop and master their challenges.

On a larger scale, Blake addresses this transgression of innocence and experience through creating their vicarious spheres in the two parts of his collection of poems. Neither *Songs of Innocence* nor *Songs of Experience* illustrate a world that is ideal; there is no favoring either one of these qualities. Even on a strictly structural level, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are constructed as "two complementary groups of songs" (Dike 355), similar to Will and Lyra's relationship. At first glance, it seems that in *Songs of Innocence*, a gleeful and joyful world is portrayed. Children are singing, dancing and laughing. Blake's choice of children as protagonists only enforces the sense of innocence he is eager to convey, for children are often perceived as the embodiment of innocence (Nikolajeva, "Development" 50). The strong correlation between children and innocence is also explored in *Northern Lights*, "Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?" (Pullman 35). This may also constitute the reason why Pullman chose two children as his main characters.

However, Blake's illustration of Utopia is deceptive, as the happiness can apparently only be maintained as long as its inhabitants obey an authority, as for instance portrayed in "The Chimney-Sweeper":

And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father,
and never want joy.

[...]

Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm:
So, if all do their duty, they need not fear harm. (Blake 7.19-24)

The children are manipulated by the subtle threat "[...] if all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (Blake 7.24). As God and angels are mentioned, it stands to reason that the implied oppressive authority represents the Church. God in this context appears to only be used as leverage, to ensure that people stay obedient, as "if he'd be a good boy, He'd have God for his father" (Blake 7 19). Similar to Blake's illustration, the repressive character of the Church is also alluded to in *Subtle Knife*, as a way of restraining people from rioting against the church: "It's death among our people [...] to challenge the Church" (Pullman 392).

The Church's manipulative tactics are further explored in the second part of the poem that is featured in *Songs of Experience*: "'They are both gone up to the church to pray [...] And are gone to praise God and his priest and king, Who make up a heaven of our misery'" (Blake 29 4-12). Moreover, as outlined in the second part of "The Chimney Sweeper", Pullman's witches address the oppressive character of religion as well:

'For all its history— and that's not long by our lives, but it's many, many of theirs—it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. [...] That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, [and] obliterate every good feeling.' (Pullman 395-396)

Innocent children of course are particularly prone to this kind of manipulation, as they are still naïve and dependent on a guiding figure in their lives. They are not yet able to distinguish between right and wrong, which can be taken advantage of by (religious) authorities, "for they know not what they do" (Luke 34:34).

In this context, Blake and Pullman explore the idea of consciousness. The innocence of children is further underpinned in *His Dark Materials* through the fact that Dust, "the physical evidence for original sin," (Pullman 314) as the Magisterium claims, only attaches to adults.

As it turns out later in the series, this has to do with the fact that children cannot yet be considered conscious beings, which is why Dust is not attracted to them. Pullman's idea of Dust may very well originate from even two of Blake's texts. As for instance the first verse of the poem "Auguries of Innocence": "To see a world in a grain of sand" (qtd. in Fuller 285), as well as: "Shew you all alive the world, where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy", taken from the poem "Europe," which also heads a chapter in *Amber Spyglass* (qtd. in Scott 101).

Blake's idea of consciousness equates with imagination (Kedveš 5). The utopian realms of *Songs of Innocence* can only be maintained, as long as no one uses their imagination, as this would probably lead to people questioning the Church's ways. Children and their lack of consciousness or imagination may thus also serve as a metaphor for critiquing a society that willingly follows an authority without questioning its intentions. A similar observation is made by Lyra and Pan in *Northern Lights*: "We believed them, even though we could see that what they were doing was wicked and evil and wrong [...], because they were grown up and they said so," (Pullman 336) which might convey the idea that innocence in a way compares to ignorance.

However, Lyra's lack of imagination, which could also somehow be perceived as some kind of ignorance, is actually portrayed as an advantage, since it not only saves her from doubting herself, but also improves her greatest power, lying. "Being a practiced liar doesn't mean you have a powerful imagination. Many good liars have no imagination at all; it's that which gives their lies such wide-eyed conviction" (Pullman 212). The value of imagination and its relation to knowledge is established later in the books, when Lyra, as a side effect of losing her innocence, also loses the ability to read the alethiometer. However, Xaphania ensures Lyra that she will be able to regain the ability by learning: "Yes. You could learn to do it, as Will's father did. It uses the faculty of what you call imagination. But that does not mean making things up. It is a form of seeing" (Pullman 1067).

As has been established, Blake's depiction of the realms of innocence is portrayed far from ideal. Now, in *Songs of Experience*, mankind appears to have managed to free itself from the religious constraints prevalent in *Songs of Innocence*. However, a general sorrowful tone pervades the sequence of poems.

Even though people appear to have freed their imagination and mind, the realm of experience is not painted as necessarily happier or more fulfilling. While in *Songs of Innocence* religious forces seem to imprison people's imagination, *Songs of Experience* expresses an "invasion and subsequent enslavement of imagination by reason" (qtd. in Kedveš 5) described as "mind-forged manacles" in the poem "London" (Blake 40.8). It seems that in either of Blake's constructed spheres, people are constrained by something. The desacralized universe that is free from spirituality of any kind is presented as dreadful, whereas inhabitants of the religious realm can only maintain their happiness by blindly following an authority that oppresses their spirit and imagination. Similar to Will and Lyra's mutual dependence on each other, it seems that Blake's spheres of innocence and experience represent two entities that need to co-exist in order to achieve fulfillment.

Another point of Blake's criticism towards organized religions is God's relationship with humankind. As already explained beforehand, Blake was convinced that hierarchical religions assign themselves an exceptional mediating position between man and God, making people believe that the only way to be close to God is through them. Blake, in turn, seems to argue that people can actually find God within themselves, as suggested in his poem "Divine Image":

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine:
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.
And all must love the human form,
In heathen, Turk, or Jew.
Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell,
There God is dwelling too. (Blake 12.13-20)

"Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace" are all virtues that people pray for to God. However, for Blake, they can actually be found within themselves, and so can God. Blake's separation of God from the Church becomes especially obvious as he suggests that "heathens" carry God within themselves as well. In *Amber Spyglass*, Will's father shares a similar thought with Will and Lyra, although not specifically in relation to God, when he explains to them, "we have to build the Republic of Heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere" (Pullman 952).

An almost identical passage can be found in Blake's poem "Jerusalem" where it says,

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land. (qtd. in Gilroy 59)

Even though their approach differs especially in connection to their conviction of God's existence, it appears that the message both Pullman and Blake want to convey is that people can find the virtues, guidance, and fulfillment they are praying for right where they are, in their own worlds, and in themselves.

As can be seen, various religious themes and motifs that Blake addresses in his poetry have been employed, adapted and further developed in *His Dark Materials*. However, primarily, both Pullman and Blake appear to be eager to free the concepts of innocence and experience from representing either side of a religiously constructed spectrum of good versus evil. Subsequently, Blake and Pullman's representative exploration of this dichotomy is far more diverse than any religious context would allow, as neither one of these two traits is depicted as clearly separable from the other. Rather, outside a religious sphere, innocence and experience represent two balanced entities that interact in a reciprocal relationship, each one equally complementing the other. "In this sense, Pullman appears to share Blake's acceptance and appreciation of the human being as a dynamic, inclusive being [...] and that opposites are inadequate unless synthesized" (Bird 122).

6.2 John Milton

Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.
(Milton 7 l.263)

As already previously addressed, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* may generally be considered a reinterpretation of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which, in turn, is a retelling of the myth of the Fall from the book of *Genesis*. Therefore, not only the narrative structure, but multiple plot elements such as various characters, themes and images of *His Dark Materials* accordingly resemble those featured in *Paradise Lost* (Squires 119). However, similar to Blake's primary exploration of the juxtaposition of innocence and experience, *Paradise Lost's* overarching motif is the exploration of another particularly religiously loaded dualism, namely the fight between good and evil that likewise occupies a dominant role in *His Dark Materials*

(Scott 97). Generally, both works resemble each other mainly in their exploration of “the passage from innocence to experience, the nature of good and evil, the consequences of knowledge, and the notion of free will or individual responsibility” (Gurley 2).

Generally, Milton pursues a neo-platonic approach in the construction of good versus evil, meaning that “[a]ll things emanate from the essential substance of God the father in a progression of lesser beings” which also means that “[l]ike everything else, evil ultimately originates with God” (Gurley 3). This collides with the more common “Protestant-Christian belief that God creates only what is good” implying that Milton’s idea that “evil ultimately originates with God is to concede that God must be fallible” (Gurley 4). Now, even though this seems rather revolutionary, Milton seems eager to restore the goodness of God, which is why Milton creates “Chaos”, the realm created from “the dark materials of God” in order to purify himself and to purge him from all evil that originated from him (Gurley 4). This, again, maintains the “origin nature of good and evil as black and white. Chaos and Satan merely personify and physically embody the fuller capacity for evil that ultimately originated with God himself” (Gurley 5).

The universe is now created from what has been “gathered within Chaos [...] wearing the disguise of organization and harboring the seeds of sin and evil within matter, which, of course, is evil” (Gurley 4).

[...] Into this wild abyss,
 The womb of nature and perhaps her grave,
 Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,
 But all these in their pregnant causes mixed
 Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,
 Unless the almighty maker them ordain
 His dark materials to create more worlds,
 Into this wild abyss the wary fiend
 Stood on the brink of hell and looked a while,
 Pondering his voyage [...] (Milton 40 II.910-919)

This addresses what seems to be one of the major anchor points of reference, namely Milton’s idea of “dark materials” that Pullman’s trilogy not only owes its title to, but also inspired the idea of “Dust”.

“His dark materials to create more worlds” (Milton 40 ll.916) introduces two commonalities at once, the idea that there may exist more worlds than only one, along with a suggestion for a substance that aids in creating these universes. Milton’s idea of “dark materials” is the matter that remained after God purged himself from creating the world, which, in the hands of the Creator, can be used to create more worlds (Bird 114). This, however, should not be “interpreted in a literal or scientifically accurate sense,” as Bird annotates (114). It rather reveals that this matter is given “limitless potential that merely awaits the Maker’s transmutation” (114).

Pullman’s version of dark materials is the concept of “Dust”. Even though these particles share a similarity in their allocated role of contributing to the creation of the universe, there are significant differences in their realization. Dust is illustrated as a substance that evolves and creates on its own, without requiring support from another party to trigger its potential. Dust does not need a Creator, it is the Creator itself, but none hierarchically; it rather serves as unifying emulsion to “connect the plethora of seemingly incompatible elements that make up the universe” (Bird 113). As Bird specifies “Dust and the universe appear to be interchangeable in that there is no distinction between the ‘source’ and the ‘product’” (qtd. in Oliver 297).

Milton’s pursued depiction of the creation as “hierarchic emanation from God – creation ex-Deo” is thus not realized in *His Dark Materials* (Gurley 3). Rather, Pullman’s Dust is a neutral source that neither is nor creates good or bad. Dust only receives attributions of constituting either good or evil in the form of a “warring dialectic” from different characters’ relation to it (Gurley 7-8). Therefore, Dust performs a synthesizing function, as good and evil are unified in the emulsion and thereby neutralized (Gurley 7-8).

Pullman's trilogy elaborates a fictional struggle to shift the transcendental signified from Milton's God to Pullman's Dust. Dust becomes the external point of reference upon which a philosophy or concept may be built, and the concept or philosophy Pullman builds around Dust is one of inclusion and fusion as opposed to exclusion and separation. In the case of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, religion as symbolized by God conceives the irreconcilable nature of opposites—spirit/matter and good/evil—as a moral imperative [...] Pullman removes the pretension of necessity to impose a moral dictate on interdependent and often unclear terms like good and evil. (Gurley 9)

Furthermore, contrary to Milton's dark materials, with the conception of Dust, there is a realistic scientific accuracy to contemporary research on dark matter that can be observed (Gribbin 26). This will be further amplified in chapter 8.1.

Moreover, both emulsions are connected to the myth of the Fall, however, Milton's metaphor ends with a mere suggestion that "the material that comprises the bulk of the universe's mass is made up of sentient particles in a state of rebellion" (Bird 114). Pullman draws on this approach by describing Dust as "the physical evidence of original sin" (Pullman 314), as proclaimed by the reigning Church in the trilogy.

Yet, he develops the metaphor further by also specifically linking Dust to consciousness suggesting that loss of innocence and gaining consciousness are two interrelated processes. The established differences in the development of Milton's dark materials and Pullman's Dust is essential for differentiating *His Dark Materials* from *Paradise Lost*, as

the development of Milton's dark materials into an all-inclusive metaphor in which physical particles and abstract metaphysical concepts are one and the same, enables Pullman to avoid making the absolute distinctions that characterise both Gnostic and Christian thought. (Bird 121)

As can already be seen from this brief conceptualization, Dust constitutes a value-laden metaphor that touches upon a variety of themes. It should thus be noted that this is still only a very broad generalization of Dust and deserves much more attention, as it represents one of the key metaphors for how religious doctrines are subverted in the trilogy. Therefore, Dust will be explored in much more detail in chapter 8.1.

While on the surface it may seem that *Paradise Lost* maintains the traditional distribution of roles in God representing good and Satan representing evil, Milton's specific portrayal of the different characters of each side of the spectrum shows first stirrings of a subversion of the characteristic "Christian belief [that] good and evil are diametrically and irrevocably opposed" (Gurley 2). Besides the afore-mentioned presentation of God as fallible, especially Milton's representation of Satan constitutes one of the most controversial aspects of the poem. "Satan's remarkable intelligence, great boldness and fiery passion significantly detract from the depravity of his agenda; his spirit compels admiration and respect" (Kedveš 4). Lord Asriel is described akin to Satan's glorious portrayal.

He is illustrated as “a man [...] admired and feared greatly” (Pullman 11), “a tall man with powerful shoulders, a fierce dark face, and eyes that seemed to flash and glitter with savage laughter. It was a face to be dominated by, or to fight: never a face to patronize or pity” (Pullman 17). Moreover, both are given the ability to travel through different worlds and both take on the role as leader of the army of the rebel angels.

Pullman’s specific interest in the figure of Satan might also be evident in that some of the essential issues that are addressed in the trilogy appear to originate from “the persuasive speeches Satan delivers” against the ways of God in *Paradise Lost* (Kedveš 4). “Half of the quotes Pullman chooses from Milton come from [...] where Satan attempts to re-create in hell the pomp and magnificence of heaven” (Scott 99). Especially significant seems his question on the importance of knowledge and how it relates to God: “Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe, Why but to keep ye low and ignorant, His worshippers [...]” (Milton 176 IX.703-705), inquiring why God would want his creation to live in ignorance. His answer then implies that by depriving them of knowledge and awareness, God would maintain his superior position over them, since “he knows that in the day/ Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere/ Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then/ Op’nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods“ (Milton XI 176.705-708). *Northern Lights* features an almost identical passage: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and your daemons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Pullman 315).

With this question, the devil manages to tempt Eve by sparking curiosity in her, which eventually leads to Adam and Eve tasting the forbidden fruit. Similarly, Mary Malone, the former nun, who ironically constitutes Pullman’s version of the serpent, tempts Lyra by telling her about her first love, which results in Lyra’s interest in love itself, even overshadowing her prior curiosity for Dust, which started her quest in the first place. In both stories knowledge is represented as the force that initiates Eve’s disobedience and the Fall of humanity.

Forbidden them to taste: Knowledge forbidd’n?
 Suspicious, reasonless. Why should thir Lord
 Envie them that? can it be sin to know,
 Can it be death? and do they onely stand
 By Ignorance, is that thir happie state,
 The proof of thir obedience and thir faith?

O fair foundation laid whereon to build
 Thir ruine! Hence I will excite thir minds
 With more desire to know, and to reject
 Envious commands, invented with designe
 To keep them low whom knowledge might exalt
 Equal with Gods; aspiring to be such,
 They taste and die: what likelier can ensue? (Milton IV 73.515-527)

Interestingly, Bird makes the connection between Milton's Satan and Pullman's Dust, in their shared position as bearers of knowledge and consciousness (121). "In Pullman's universe, what Satan offered was Dust. Moreover, in this universe, as a rebel angel, Satan *is* Dust [...]" (Bird 121).

However, while the Fall has terrible consequences for Milton's Adam and Eve as well as their Paradise, which seemingly incessantly deteriorates underpinning that "Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit/ Of that Forbidden Tree [...]/ Brought Death into the World, and all our woe" (Milton I 1.1-4), Pullman's Fall is portrayed as necessity, since eventually it is what keeps Dust from vanishing. Will and Lyra's sexual transgression saves the mulefa's universe, which appears to be Pullman's version of the Garden of Eden, as Dust is what keeps their delicate ecosystem alive.

The terrible flood of Dust in the sky had stopped flowing. It wasn't still, by any means; Mary scanned the whole sky with the amber lens, seeing a current here, an eddy there, a vortex farther off; it was in perpetual movement, but it wasn't flowing away anymore. In fact, if anything, it was falling like snowflakes. She thought of the wheel trees: the flowers that opened upward would be drinking in this golden rain. Mary could almost feel them welcoming it in their poor parched throats, which were so perfectly shaped for it, and which had been starved for so long. (Pullman 1045)

Subsequently, while Milton's doctrine that "man's disobedience [is what] brought death into the world" (Erskine 573), Pullman essentially "rewrites the fall of Adam and Eve as a moment of salvation for the universe" (Oram 418).

Another parallel can be drawn to the portrayal of the rebel angels, present in both stories and both led by Satan/Lord Asriel to defend God/the Authority. Especially the human-like illustration of angels constitutes another overlap. Milton as well as Pullman provide the angels with physical qualities and desires, especially realized in their ability to digest and their longing for food.

With this illustration, Milton laid the groundwork for challenging a religious concept that Pullman later further developed in *His Dark Materials*, namely the religious belief of the superiority of spirit over matter: “The poem’s model of digestion as a capacity shared by humans and angels alike [...] legitimates matter in part by legitimating human appetite,” as deGruyer specifies (117). In *His Dark Materials*, angels are equipped with bodies weaker than those of humans thus they “long to have our precious bodies, so solid and powerful, so well-adapted to the good earth” (Pullman 962). What should be considered though is that while Pullman illustrates this as disadvantage for the angels, “for Milton, [...] material thinness is an advantage: the refinement of matter corresponds to a strengthening of spirit” (Oram 423). This derives from the notion that “matter becomes more spiritual by becoming more rarified” (Oram 421) illustrating that Milton still supports “a hierarchy of matter” (Oram 420). Thus, although realized differently, what both stories share is the “common denial that one can divorce spirit from matter” (Oram 418) that is also underpinned by what Mary Malone is told by angels through her computer in *Subtle Knife*: “[F]rom what we are, matter; from what we do, spirit. Matter and spirit are one” (Pullman 563).

Oram further suggests that the spirit-matter debate leads to another concurrence of *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials*, namely “to face death and to dispel its terror” which is another way to “celebrating matter” (418). Near the end of *Paradise Lost*, God “tells us that death is not a curse but a comforter, not the gift of Satan but the gift of God” (Erskine 573):

I at first with two fair gifts
 Created him endowed, with Happiness
 And Immortalitie; that fondly lost,
 This other serv'd but to eternize woe,
 Till I provided Death; so Death becomes
 His final remedie [...] (X Milton 215.57-62)

This certainly appears to contradict the former relation that has been established between sin and death, the former initiating the latter. Nonetheless, Erskine argues that this might be a sign that towards the end of his epic, Milton may have realized that “perhaps we should have lost something, had our original parents clung to their innocence; perhaps we should have lost some spiritual benefit, which no saint would be without” (574).

Pullman, in turn, creates, similar to the concept of the daemon, physical manifestations of people's deaths that "differ strikingly from the traditional fearsome figure" (Oram 425). It is further suggested that people still do not know when they are going to die, however, the mere presence of their deaths serves as comfort, as "[...] you know they're close by, and that's a comfort" (Pullman 866). Both of these approaches particularly "[stress] the naturalness of death – it is not only inevitable, but a kind of security" (Oram 426).

Concluding, a variety of religiously related themes, motifs and images explored in *His Dark Materials* seem to have originated from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Nevertheless, what still strongly resonates in Milton's works is his devotion to God, which similarly clearly constitutes the strongest disparity to Pullman. John Milton was a deeply religious man. It thus does not seem surprising that "their theological approaches are highly divergent" and even though "each danced with heresy, [...] Milton's approach was imbued with logical, even legal care, working strictly within biblical parameters" (Scott 95). Consequently, Pullman rewrote and reversed the majority of themes he borrowed from *Paradise Lost*. However, similar to Blake and Pullman, Milton was suspicious of religious institutions and the perception of a "need for intercession with God, through a priesthood specially trained to act as intermediary for the people," which particularly addresses the Catholic Church (Mitchell 57). He pursued a rather individual approach to religion, for he believed that "he should obey only God and God's law, which was immediately obvious to everyone with a pure heart" (Mitchell 57). It seems that Milton's innovative attitude towards experiencing religion that required a sense of individuality and self-reliance rather than a medium in the form of dogmatic religion seems what rather resonated with Pullman's attitude towards religion.

7 Transcending religious dualisms

[A]ll the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity. [...] [T]he followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and his churches have always tried to keep them closed.
(Pullman 1053-1054)

As can clearly be seen, the works of William Blake as well as John Milton serve as a source of inspiration for a significant amount of religiously related approaches of criticism that are further developed in *His Dark Materials*. Particularly, however, both of these instances of intertextuality seem to serve as template for the trilogy's tendency to explore and eventually subvert "conceptual opposites that form the basis of religious dualism" (Bird 111) such as the previously broached themes of innocence and experience as well as good and evil that are in a religious context also often referred to as "moral dualisms" (Gurley 3). Pullman treats these binaries similar to how *His Dark Materials* "concerns itself with the spatial concept of boundaries and ways in which these can be rendered porous" (McCulloch 120). Instances of the text that explore these themes have already been broached in the chapters before, however, since these juxtapositions occupy the prevalent conflicts addressed in the trilogy, their realization and eventual deconstruction in the story should be discussed in more detail.

7.1 Innocence and experience

*And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense.*
(qtd. in Durrant 40)

Pullman himself explained that his story is about innocence and experience, about growing up and that part of growing up is to experience things (Waldman ch. 1). In the story, innocence transcending into experience is illustrated as a natural and positive process, which is metaphorically realized in the positive outcome of the myth of the Fall: "Lyra is the new Eve and her prophesied Fall is welcomed in the trilogy as the only way to move forward towards knowledge and enlightenment and to celebrate the consciousness symbolized through Dust" (McCulloch 116).

“This fall – not into sin but into love and mature self-knowledge” (Hughes-Hallett xvii) stresses the beauty and importance of experience in every sense and form, and therefore, presents “a vindication of a very different morality from that espoused by the Church [...] of *His Dark Materials*, but also the real world Christian Church, and its tortured and repressive stance towards sex [...]” (Squires 78).

Nevertheless, innocence is not depicted as something negative either, quite contrary, not only Lyra’s sexual inexperience but also her naiveté and unawareness of the role she is playing in the continuum of the story is presented as even elementary to its final resolution, as for instance explained by a scholar at Oxford: “[...] that’s the saddest thing: she will be the betrayer, and the experience will be terrible. She mustn’t know that, of course...” (Pullman 33). Lyra maintaining her innocent state and unawareness is led back to her lack of imagination, which is presented as advantageous, if not essential, to fulfill her destiny, for

[n]o one with much imagination would have thought seriously that it was possible to come all this way [...]; or, having thought it, an imaginative child would immediately have come up with several ways in which it was impossible. (Pullman 212)

Furthermore, her innocence is also what makes her able to use the alethiometer. As soon as she becomes an adolescent, she loses this ability. Yet, this is, again, not illustrated as a necessarily negative development, as conscious and experienced people are still able to use the instrument, it just takes more effort and dedication, as pointed out in *Amber Spyglass* by the angel Xaphania:

You read it by grace [...] and you can regain it by work [...] Your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you again. (Pullman 1064)

Even though it will be harder to acquire the skills for reading the instrument again, Lyra will eventually develop a skillset that is more sustainable, namely knowledge, another positive outcome of experience, which is something that is presented as more reliable and substantial that no one can take away. While innocence clearly has its favors, as it allows Lyra to read the instrument without much effort, knowledge is presented as a certain type of experience that can even be considered more favorable, as it is described as “deeper and fuller,” even though it requires more effort.

This specific example of compensation for the loss of innocence may point to another instance of intertextuality, as it reminds of William Wordsworth's idea of "abundant recompense" that he introduced in his poem "Tintern Abbey". He addresses the issue that with the loss of innocence, the world can never be viewed and experienced again in this specific state, however, he ascertains that "for such loss, I would believe, [a]bundant recompense" (qtd. in Durrant 38) which he determines "the power of intellectual insight" meaning that the state of innocence must be left in order to acquire consciousness and knowledge (Durrant 38). This is necessary to see "the world in its relationship to human needs" (Durrant 41).

Compensation for the loss of innocence is also addressed with regards to the irrevocable settling of humans' daemons, which Lyra perceives as dreadful, but the seaman delineates that "there's compensation for a settled form [...] [k]nowing what kind of person you are" (Pullman 144). Pullman himself shares Wordsworth's opinion, when he says that

coming of experience and sexuality and self-consciousness is a thing to be welcomed, because it's the beginning of true understanding, of wisdom. My book tells children that you're going to grow up and it's going to be painful but it's going to be good. (qtd. in McCulloch 121)

Interplay of innocence and experience is thus also realized via daemons in their function similar to Dust as "physical proof that something happened when innocence changed into experience" (Pullman 316). The moment when daemons settle, when children leave the realms of childhood, when innocence transgresses into experience, however this may be achieved, is also when people start attracting Dust, "an essential and dynamic force, which initiates the process of awakening from potentiality (as symbolised by the changing forms of the child's daemon) to actuality (symbolised by the fixed form of the adult's daemon)" illustrating "the necessary convergence of contraries" (Bird 121-122).

As already extensively discussed in chapter 6.1, the interdependency of innocence and experience appears to be especially observable in the characters of Will and Lyra and their relationship to one another. The ultimate merging of innocence and experience is then realized in their love for each other, mentally and physically, leading to an immense attraction of Dust, the emulsion that "connect[s] everything with everything else" (Bird 113).

“[T]hey would seem to be made of living gold [...] Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all” (Pullman 1046). Squires specifies by saying that

[t]he vision of young love and new moral order at the end of *Amber Spyglass* is a contradiction to the repressive morality of the Church of *His Dark Materials* and is a crucial element of the trilogy’s alternative morality. (78)

In the series, innocence and experience are presented as two valid and valuable states of the human mind; each one is presented with advantages and disadvantages.

Even though it is clear that at one point at a certain stage in life, innocence transcends into experience, it does not necessarily mean that innocence is something negative, or that an experienced human being cannot harbor innocent traits. As soon as it lasts it should be cherished, as it is presented as a state that is easy and comfortable, just as childhood should be. However, without experience, innocence may very easily turn into ignorance. Similarly, it could be argued that even though with gaining experience comes consciousness and knowledge, in the process hardship and difficulties of any kind will be encountered, which is a natural part of an adult’s life. Hence, maintaining some kind of innocence, in whatever sense, may make an adult’s life easier.

Most importantly, however, just as presented in the trilogy, the process of innocence transforming into experience is natural and necessary. Experience is not a “mortal sin,” as Father Gomez frames it in *Amber Spyglass* (Pullman 1040), but rather “necessary but not necessarily evil” (Gurley 6). With this representation, *His Dark Materials* transforms an old-established religious “paradigm of disobedience and divine punishment” into a natural, positive and welcome process that is a necessary part of every child’s life in order to become a fulfilled and conscious human being (Bird 112).

7.2 Good versus evil

'There are two great powers,' the man said, and they've been fighting since time began. Every advance in human life, every scrap of knowledge and wisdom and decency we have has been torn by one side from the teeth of the other. Every little increase in human freedom has been fought over ferociously between those who want us to know more and be wiser and stronger, and those who want us to obey and be humble and submit.
(Pullman 623)

Similar to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the fight between good and evil represents one of the main conflicts in the series and "is expressed both externally, through church powers and supernatural forces [...], and internally, in the landscape of the soul, where innocence meets experience, and human emotions and thoughts interplay" (Scott 97). Contrary to Blake and Milton, who mainly pursued a clear distinction between good and evil in their works, in the realms of *His Dark Materials*, "ascertaining the good and evil powers, people, and actions is challenging" (Scott 98). With the exception of the Church and the majority of its representatives who are clearly identified as evil, Pullman's characters can hardly be categorized. What especially defines them is their ability to "change and transition" (Scott 98).

This is particularly evident in Lord Asriel, Ms. Coulter, and Mary Malone. Despite his cold and dismissive attitude towards Lyra, initially, Lord Asriel is introduced as a character akin to the traditional savior figure, smart, fierce and strong. However, as the story progresses, it soon becomes clear that in order to achieve his scientific endeavors, he is willing to even sacrifice a little boy. Nonetheless, in the end he is also willing to sacrifice himself in order to defeat Metatron, along with the help of Ms. Coulter. She constitutes another highly multifarious character. Akin to Lord Asriel's first impression, the reader might prematurely label her as intrinsically evil. However, as soon as her maternal instincts are triggered, she turns on the Church she was so eagerly serving in order to protect Lyra. Eventually, she also sacrifices herself in the final battle against Metatron in order to leave a better world for her child.

Mary Malone could be considered the embodiment of a paradox, as she is introduced as a reformed nun who then became a scientist. In a conversation with Lyra, she explains that she left the Church exactly to escape these strict religious distinctions, "One of the reasons I became a scientist was not to have to think about [good and evil]" (Pullman 435).

Lyra, however, explains to her that especially with Dust, or in Malone's case, "dark matter" or "Shadows," "You got to think about it [...] You can't investigate Shadows, Dust, whatever it is, without thinking about that kind of thing, good and evil and such. [...] You can't refuse" (Pullman 435). Hence, ironically, in this context it is Dust, simultaneously perceived as "the essence of goodness or epitome of evil, depending on the character's allegiance or perception" (Scott 100), that appears to serve as unifying component that does not allow categorization, not even with science and religion:

[Dust], in turn, constitutes [another] attempt to mend the dichotomies of religious division, which, rather than acknowledging the mutuality between opposing ends of being, create the sense of the exclusive and distinctly separate states [...] By envisaging everything as connected with everything else, Pullman effectively upsets and transforms the antithesis between conventionally divided entities, rendering them as two halves of a more complex and integrated whole. (Bird 122)

It is also Mary Malone who offers an innovative insight into the perception of good and evil, as she explains that after she stopped believing in God, she also reconsidered the doctrines she lived by, including the distinction of what constitutes good and evil, "which gives a truer representation of Pullman's belief in the combination of opposites" (Squires 76):

'When you stopped believing in God', Will went on 'did you stop believing in good and evil?' 'No. But I stopped believing there was a power of evil that were outside us. And I came to believe that good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are. All we can say is that this is a good deed, because it helps someone, or that's an evil one because hurts them. People are too complicated to have simple labels.' (Pullman 1024)

The fact that through leaving the Church, Malone stopped believing in the idea of good and evil as intrinsic personal entities, and rather connects it to people's behavior "is an indication of the attitudes towards religion which *His Dark Materials* conveys and which Pullman's rewriting of the myth of Adam and Eve promotes" (Squires 77).

This is further realized in the characters of Will and Lyra, Iorek, Lee Scoresby, Serafina Pekkala, Mary Malone or John Faa who despite their flaws can be considered "clear touchstones of value [...] strongly defined by their capacity for love, which proves, through Lyra and Will's loving, to be the symbol of the world's redemption" in the story (Scott 98).

On a larger scale, by leaving out the figure of Satan in the first place and portraying God as primarily absent from the story, Pullman negates “the conceptualizations of good and evil as perpetuated by the myth [of the Fall] [...] good and evil do not originate from God but rather from mankind’s often-dogmatic ideas about God and God’s plan [...]” (Gurley 6). Even though God exists, he is eventually revealed as a fraud by a rebel angel: “He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel” (Pullman 671).

By reinventing the traditional religiously biased perception of good and evil, it makes sense that in *His Dark Materials* the concepts of heaven and hell are refuted as well. If there are no distinct categorizations of what constitutes good and what constitutes evil, then how would it be possible to determine who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. And even if it were, in *Subtle Knife* it is told that good or bad, pious or godless, traverses into a joint “land of the dead” (Pullman 870), falsifying the conveyed notion by some religious institutions that “[t]hey’ll separate out the sinners and the righteous” (Pullman 857). The underworld the Authority has set up is

as close to emptiness as conscious beings can get [...] ghosts remain suspended between their former lives and full dissolution that would make them part of new life [...] in death, they erode, losing more and more of what they were, limiting even the possibility of torment. (Oram 426-427)

This unmasks the promise of heaven and the dread of hell as just another attempt of the Church to keep their devotees in place, ridding religious institutions of their leverage over humankind by revoking the idea of an afterlife for those who abide to religious doctrines. Pullman’s idea of life after death, where the particles we are made of rejoin the universe from which we originated from, as opposed to going to heaven or hell, rather conveys a sense of equality and unity and dismisses any “difference but insists that diversity and unity can synthesize in a way that allows for gray areas of interpretation rather than dogmatic proclamations of good and evil” (Gurley 8).

Relatedly, and similar to the metaphorical transition of innocence and experience, in the scene where Lyra and Will taste the forbidden fruit in the world of the mulefas, the metaphorical fusion of good and evil may very well be observable in the scene where Lyra stares at the *Northern Lights* that are presented not “as divisive binary [...] but, rather, a marriage of heaven and hell” (McCulloch 118):

As if from Heaven itself, great curtains of delicate light hung and trembled. Pale green and rose-pink, and as transparent as the most fragile fabric, and at the bottom edge a profound and fiery crimson like the fires of Hell, they swung and shimmered loosely with more grace than the most skillful dancer. Lyra thought she could even hear them: a vast distant whispering swish. (Pullman 157-158)

“Her awakening allows her to see beyond the veiled myopic gaze of polarized society and into the spectrum of new, hitherto unexplored possibilities” (McCulloch 118). As can be seen, “(t)he trilogy stresses a synthesis/’play’ between binary opposites – good and evil, obedience and rebellion, innocence and experience – rather than a strict adherence to their respective positions” (Gurley 6).

8 Symbolism and metaphor

8.1 Dust

The universe is in your bones, the stars in your soul [...] And in the end we are nothing more than love and space dust.
(David Jones ch. 1)

As already discussed in previous chapters, Dust not only originated from Milton’s idea of “dark materials to create more worlds” (Milton 40 ll.916) and Blake’s vision “to see a world in a grain of sand” (qtd. in Fuller 285), but references to Dust are also found in the King James Bible, where it says that “[i]n the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). All of these textual instances point to the idea that the universe is made up of certain particles, in the form of dust or sand. “Indeed, by developing Milton’s ‘dark materials’ into an extremely composite metaphor, Pullman is suggesting that every elementary particle of Dust contains the entire universe (which is, in turn, akin to the Blakean metaphor)” (Bird 114). It thus seems natural to assume that with the idea of Dust, Pullman is joining the debate on how the universe came into being. The complexity of Dust, however, allows for various interpretations of the concept. Nonetheless, with regards to religious doctrines, it probably constitutes one of the strongest metaphors used against the notion that is at the core of not only Judeo-Christian tradition, but many other world religions, namely that any god is responsible for creating the universe.

The very term, Dust, is highly ambiguous. Its indistinctness lies in its intrinsic amorphousness. Consequently, it is an extremely adaptable concept, offering an almost infinite number of possibilities or meanings. To the God of Genesis, Dust contains mankind's origins and is literally the substance that marks his demise. (Bird 113)

The mystery of Dust is a concept that is first introduced by Lord Asriel in *Northern Lights*. He is convinced that there is a connection between Dust and the Aurora, or Northern Lights that are presented as a gateway to another world, as streams of Dust seem to be "leaking" from the sky where this spectacle of nature is visible. In the course of the story, it becomes steadily clearer what Dust actually represents.

Initially vaguely referred to as "theological riddle" (Pullman 33), it is later revealed that Dust was also formerly known as "Rusakov Particles," after the scientist who discovered it (Pullman 80). As the story progresses, it is established that Dust is attracted only to conscious beings, delineated by the angel Balthamos: "Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself" (Pullman 671), hence, "Dust came into being when living things became conscious of themselves" (Pullman 1029). The fact that Dust simultaneously does not attach to children until they reach puberty leads to the conclusion that it functions as "catalyst that initiates the child's journey toward adulthood" (Bird 116). Since it is suggested several times in the books that children also immediately reach the stage of adolescence as soon as they become sexually experienced establishes a clear connection between the myth of the Fall and Dust. The fact that Dust is specifically referenced in the book of Genesis, further supports the notion that Dust was somehow involved in Adam and Eve's disobedience to God, which eventually forced their daemons to settle.

It is hence the Magisterium's conviction "that Dust [is] the physical evidence for original sin" (Pullman 314), referring to

the disastrous moment when the gulf between innocence and experience was traversed with the result that Adam and Eve's 'eyes were opened' and they became aware of their nakedness; a condition that, in terms of traditional Christian interpretations, became connected with guilt, shame, and sin. To the Church then, Dust symbolizes the awakening of sexual awareness, humanity's rejection of the heavenly for the earthly, and thus, a descent from spirit to matter. (Bird 116)

Therefore, Dust seemingly further contributes to the spirit versus matter debate that was already addressed in chapter 6.2.

It appears that not only the idea of the physically manifested soul in the form of the daemon challenges the traditional spirit versus matter hierarchy of Christianity, but Dust in its unifying function of linking human and daemon, body and soul, spirit and matter, as well. In fact, Bird argues that the conscious matter of Dust is what actually animates humans and their daemons in the first place and is therefore also “vital to human existence” (117). Since, however, Dust only starts to settle on humans during adolescence suggests that only experienced human beings, in whatever sense, can be considered fully animated, and able to live out their full potential. The more experienced the person, the more Dust settles on him/her, and the more conscious and aware he/she becomes.

This further explains why the process of intercision causes affected people to become zombie-like creatures without any emotions, akin to the fact that a universe deprived of Dust, “will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life” (Pullman 263).

The idea that the separation of body and soul constitutes a ‘psychic death,’ a descent from ‘human being’ to ‘non-being,’ is expanded by the suggestion that the severed individual not only lacks a soul but is deprived of Dust: ‘the energy that links body and dæmon’ (Bird 117)

This presents a situation that is beneficial on two levels for the Church represented in *His Dark Materials*, as not only is the child not able to mature and become sexually experienced, resulting in “a permanent end to an imminent sexual awakening” (Bird 116), but at the same time, the personality of the affected is eradicated, leaving only the human body as an empty shell.

Given that intercision is final, the individuals who have undergone this operation can never possess full subjectivity; thus they cannot become ‘dangerously independent’, but instead are slaves to the oppressive Church [...] The adult automata, irrevocably alienated from their humanity, represent a further condemnation of the totalitarian Church whose major concern is not worship but a concerted effort to eradicate those elements that might threaten its absolute power, namely, individuality, liberty, and human consciousness. (Bird 118)

This process of ridding people of their individual personalities to form sinless, spineless and submissive creatures casts a highly negative shadow on the ways of religious institutions in general. Moreover, it seems that the process of intercision also represents just another attempt of the Church to pursue their endeavor to protect the human soul, the spirit, from the “dark intentions” that constitute Dust.

In this scenario, the body is rendered as “material and sinful,” and, therefore, of secondary concern to the Church. This might be one of the strongest comments on contemporary religious institutions, as they are illustrated as bigoted, unscrupulous and desperate in maintaining their traditions.

However, when Mary Malone introduces Lyra to her studies of “dark matter” and “shadow particles” or “Shadows,” it becomes apparent that there is a scientific depth to the idea of Dust:

‘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.’ ‘We think it’s some kind of elementary particle. Something quite different from anything discovered so far. But the particles are very hard to detect.’ ‘[...] We call them shadow particles, Shadows. [...] They’re conscious. That’s right. Shadows are particles of consciousness.’ (Pullman 427-428)

This quite closely resembles contemporary research on dark matter. In order to explain how galaxies move, it would take fifty more times of baryonic material – material that is made up of all atoms there are in the universe. However, current work on the Big Bang Theory actually claims “there cannot be more than ten times as much baryonic material as there is in all the bright stars in all the galaxies put together” (Gribbin 26). Thus,

(t)here 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 never yet detected on Earth. And it cannot shine, or we would see it. It is dark material. (Gribbin 26)

It seems that Dust in *His Dark Materials* is presented as an emulsion that on the one hand poses a great threat to the organs of the Church, as it is brought into relation with the myth of the Fall in the form of original sin, and, on the other hand, a matter that is of great value to science and the question what the world in its entirety actually consists of, how it came into being, and how the universe and its inhabitants are connected (Bird 113). Through Dust, the conflicting worldviews of religion and science as to how the universe was created are addressed,

so Pullman unites spirituality with the study of the physical universe, conflating the two dynamically opposed ways of knowing – religious and scientific – into one: thus God’s “Dark Materials” are allied to Mary Malone’s Dark Matter Research Unit. (Scott 99)

With the concept of Dust, Pullman seems to follow into the footsteps of Charles Darwin, who with his theory of evolution provided an alternative approach to how the universe came into being – which collided with the worldview of different religions – for all instances point to the conviction that Dust is a power that partakes in creating and shaping the universe and humanity (Scott 100). Moreover, “Pullman’s trilogy moves even further in this direction, so that Dust is the central life force of an intelligent and caring universe, affecting not only humankind but the entire natural world as well” (Scott 101).

The concept of Dust thus completely dismisses the idea of God as the Creator. In Pullman’s trilogy, Dust is the Creator, the creator of God, the angels, humans and the entire universe. This is further evident in the fact that it is never clarified where Dust actually originated from, implying that Dust was actually the force that started it all. But other than the religiously constructed divine figures, such as God, Dust is not presented as an external force that dominates its creation; rather, Dust serves as an all-inclusive emulsion “connecting everything to everything else” (Bird 113). Considering that “religion is often concerned to project ideas about the origins and purpose of life [...] producing moral codes and laws to which adherents are expected to conform” (Bradley ch. 1), by challenging the idea of God as the Creator, Pullman in a way refutes the basis on what dogmatic religion built their entitlement, eligibility and premise.

By revoking the almighty superior God we need to obey, since he gave us the gift of life, hierarchical religions seem to lose its one important leverage, as “[t]raditional monotheism radically separates God from the created universe, and from mankind itself, and sees God as a rational, rule-giving authority standing over the mind of man” (Fairweather 43). Ironically, it is then conscious matter that presents an alternative to God. After God dies in *His Dark Materials*, the universe does not cease to exist. Instead, the universe flourishes as the natural flow of Dust is restored. This also relates to Freitas and King’s suggestion that Dust could be considered to be “a panentheistic notion of the divine” (49). Panentheism represents the idea that

God is relational, a community even, and that humans are to imitate this interconnectedness. Panentheism not only insists that God is not just a model for human existence; it also affirms that God is inextricably related and bound to human creatures and to creation itself. (Freitas and King 48-49)

Fairweather further suggests that Pullman with *His Dark Materials* does not advertise atheism, but rather panentheism, with Dust representing an alternative to the orthodox “tyrant God” (Fairweather 43), with the exception of “respecting [people’s] freedom [while] also making them connected to each other and to the Divine” (Freitas and King 49). The fact that Dust apparently can give people the sense of belonging, purpose, and connection they so often seek in God and religion makes both of these entities obsolete:

This was the very thing she’d told Will about when he asked if she missed God: it was the sense that the whole universe was alive, and that everything was connected to everything else by threads of meaning. When she’d been a Christian, she had felt connected too; but when she left the Church, she felt loose and free and light, in a universe without purpose. And then had come the discovery of the Shadows and her journey into another world, and now this vivid night, and it was plain that everything was throbbing with purpose and meaning, but she was cut off from it. And it was impossible to find a connection, because there was no God. (Pullman 1027)

Nonetheless, killing God would in this case not mean a blatant attack against the notion of God *per se*, but rather an act that makes room for a new and unorthodox interpretation of the idea of God, such as Dust. Moreover, the fact that the killing of God is definitely not represented as heroic, revolutionary climax of the story only further supports the notion that, even though often minimized to it, *His Dark Materials* is not solely about killing God.

While this keeps Pullman at odds with the Catholic Church and other mainstream religions, the panentheist interpretation has Pullman engaging in intra-religious debate over the true nature of God, rather than casting a dagger into the heart of all gods. Perhaps Pullman is redefining rather than killing God. Perhaps *His Dark Materials* is just a rallying cry against oppressive religious institutions, rather than an attack on religion, *per se*. (Fairweather 44)

Akin to the concept of daemons, the already previously addressed psychoanalytical theory of Carl Jung may also be relatable to Dust. A connection can be made between Jung’s idea of the human psyche’s “shadow” and Dust, since Mary Malone also refers to Dust as “Shadows”.

Even though the shadow generally constitutes “the dark side of our nature,” it should not be considered as “necessarily ‘bad’” since “[i]f we face our shadow properly, then it can offer us integration between the conscious and unconscious parts of our psyche” (Snowden 35). Dust may thus perform the function of the shadow, as it seems to serve as a gateway for unconsciousness turning into consciousness.

Akin to Jung's description of the shadow, Lyra at one point describes Dust as "dark intentions, like the forms of thoughts not yet born" (Pullman 330). Since these "dark intentions" are referred to as "something bad, something wrong, something evil and wicked" by Mrs. Coulter makes it clear that these „troublesome thoughts and feelings“ refer to initial sexual thoughts that enter the mind of children at the edge of adolescence.

Yet, as Jung pointed out, the shadow can have a positive transitional influence on the human psyche, "[i]f it were to be sought and welcomed and cherished...," as it is similarly suggested for accepting Dust in *Northern Lights* (Pullman 336). Akin to Jung's idea of the shadow that can have a positive and advantageous influence on the development of the human psyche, in the trilogy, gaining (sexual) experience is portrayed as the path to consciousness.

Moreover, interestingly, Jung explored the concept of the shadow also in relation to the religious conception of the inherently good and sinless God, and declared this perception as "a total denial of the shadow" (Snowden 78). Furthermore, "if God is all-good, then where does evil come from, and how does God permit it to exist?" (Snowden 78). This relates to the moment where Lord Asriel explains to Lyra the different interpretations of the reference to Dust in the Bible, whereby the possibility of God's sinfulness is reflected on as well:

'Church scholars have always puzzled over the translation of that verse. Some say it should read not 'unto dust shalt thou return' but 'thou shalt be subject to dust,' and others say the whole verse is a kind of pun on the words 'ground' and 'dust,' and it really means that God's admitting his own nature to be partly sinful.' (Pullman 316)

At this point it seems the analysis has come full circle, as the idea of a sinful God has already been discussed in relation to Milton's representation of God as fallible in *Paradise Lost*. Even though Dust in its complexity most certainly harvests further meaning that could be explored, as for the limitations of this paper, another crucial and strong metaphor will be discussed in the following chapter, namely Pullman's creation of daemons.

8.2 Daemons

The favour of the gods has given me a marvellous gift, which has never left me since my childhood. It is a voice which, when it makes itself heard, deters me from what I am about to do and never urges me on.
(Socrates qtd. in Bobby ch. 1)

Daemons as depicted in *His Dark Materials* represent the “outward manifestation of the soul” (Maughan 25). Every human being in Lyra’s world possesses a daemon in the form of an animal. These animals are almost always of the opposite sex. During childhood, daemons have the ability to shape shift into different types of animals. However, as soon as children reach adolescence, which also coincides with becoming sexually experienced, these creatures “settle” into a fixed form. In this sense, daemons represent the process of transgressing the spheres of childhood and entering the realms of adolescence and adulthood, thus, manifesting how innocence transcends into experience (Bobby ch. 1). People are not supposed to be separated by their daemons, an event described as “pulling,” as this would “send [both] mad with grief and terror” (GC 97), and eventually lead to their death. Moreover, it is an unwritten law to never lay hands on another person’s daemon. Solely from this brief conception of this creature, its complexity can already be established. Therefore, on a symbolic and allegoric level, it appears that the daemon may serve a variety of purposes. “[A]s Pullman’s work can be analyzed on various levels of interpretation, so can the daemon and its symbolic representations” (Bobby ch. 1). With regards to a possible connection to dogmatic religion, however, the daemon appears to bear resemblances to the Judeo-Christian concept of the human soul as well as the guardian angels of Christianity.

The human soul is a concept that is deeply rooted in various religious traditions and can be traced back to ancient Roman times, where people believed in “mediating spirits” that accompanied and watched over them, as well as served as a mental guide (Bobby ch. 1). Generally in Greek mythology, the so-called “daimons” were considered “demigods” and perceived as intelligent guiding forces of humans with abilities “akin to a second sight” (Bobby ch. 1). The illustration of this relationship also compares to early mythology, in which a variety of philosophers such as Socrates firmly believed that they were accompanied by something “that would warn [them] of consequences of [their] actions and that served as a spirit guide or conscience to [them] to lead [them] through life” (Bobby ch.1).

However, these descriptions also apply to another Judeo-Christian concept, namely that of the guardian angel, “looking out for his or her human companion and providing security in times of loneliness” (Bobby ch. 1). Akin to the concept of the daemon as “outward manifestation of the soul” (Maughan 25), Barr asserts that various instances in the Bible point to a general assumption that it is possible for the soul to transgress the limitations of “bodily existence” (qtd. in Hickman 6-7).

Nonetheless, no general consensus has been reached as to what extent the relationship between the body and the soul should be considered monistic or dualistic (Hickman 6-7). This also depends on the specific religion. However, in Judeo-Christian tradition, a certain tendency towards the dualistic approach can be observed as this coincides with other principles of the religion (Hickman 6). For instance, a holistic view of body and soul would collide with the common Judeo-Christian notion of the immortal soul, as opposed to the mortal body, where the soul “may return to God or it may continue to exist in some other ways” (Hickman 7).

A variety of early Judeo-Christian theologians also advocated a dualistic stance on the connection between body and soul. St. Thomas Aquinas for instance referred to the soul as “a motivating principle of the body”, while at the same time constituting it as an independent entity. Nevertheless, for the soul to be perceived as independent, a certain connection to the body is required (Encyclopædia Britannica ch. 1). Especially open for all kinds of interpretations concerning the soul, the body and God is Genesis 2:7, where Adam is created. “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). A dualistic interpretation of this text passage makes more sense, as “[t]here is nothing here to suggest that ‘soul’ should be interpreted as just the totality of the human person” (Hickman 6). Based on this passage, it is also suggested that the soul represents God’s breath, able to leave and enter the body at equal parts, through which the Christian belief that God lives in all of us is maintained (Hickman 6). Hence, commonly in Christian tradition, it is the soul that is considered “as that part of the human that partakes of divinity” (Bird 115). Through this perception, along with the claim of its immortality, the soul is awarded a superior status towards the mortal body.

As can be seen, several parallels between the daemons portrayed in *His Dark Materials*, and the concept of the human soul or guardian angels of Christianity can be drawn. Consequently, the daemon could very well be considered Pullman's way of introducing "a theological allegory - ... the soul as your companion, God as your companion" (Waldman 2). However, Pullman's specific representation of daemons in general, as well as the nature of their relationship to human beings both show a strong deviation from the traditional Christian conception of the human soul.

Even though Pullman employs the common dualistic approach to the body and soul dynamic in the sense that each part presents an independent entity, still, neither part is presented as superior to the other, daemon and human live in a co-dependency, "demonstrat[ing] the interdependency of soul and body" (Bird 116). The relationship between humans and daemons undermines "the belief that the human being consists of two opposing and independent 'substances'— while maintaining that the body and soul are completely interrelated" (Bird 115). The equation of soul and body is further realized in the fact that the idea of the immortal soul is not pursued in the story, as daemons simply vanish after their humans die. What survives instead is the human's ghost. This leads to another interesting parallel that can be drawn to Christian tradition, namely Pullman's conception of human beings. In *His Dark Materials*, people consist of a three-part structure that incorporates spirit, soul (daemon) and body, which strongly resembles the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity that constitutes God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Lenz 20).

Mary Malone in *Amber Spyglass* in this context even specifically references the Catholic tradition:

'You know', she said, 'the Church--the Catholic Church that I used to belong to--wouldn't use the word daemon, but St. Paul talks about spirit and soul and body. So the idea of three parts in human nature isn't so strange.' (Pullman 1017)

Subsequently, it could be construed that *His Dark Materials* portrays humankind and God equal to each other in their composition. This equation of mortal humans and God substantially diminishes the need for an external divine figure, since "humans are [already] internally complete" (Hopkins 55).

“If the soul constitutes the person’s drive for self-identity, and the body is how the person experiences the world, then spirit is consciousness, self-awareness, and the ground for all true freedom” (Freitas and King 47).

As Hopkins demonstrates, however, Pullman’s ‘ultimate message,’ though superficially in line with Christian orthodoxy (the trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), actually undercuts it in asserting the trinity of human nature in the absence of an Authority and an ‘elsewhere’. (Lenz 20)

“The triune nature of the human is thus a fundamental part of Pullman’s argument that the only worthwhile enterprise is to build the Republic of Heaven where we are” (Hopkins 55). Ironically, this is supported by the fact that within this three-part structure it is particularly angels that perceive the body as the best part: “Angels wish they had bodies. They told me angels can’t understand why we don’t enjoy the world more. It would be a sort of ecstasy for them to have our flesh and senses” (AS). The particular use of the word “ecstasy” in this context appears to be no coincidence, as in a religious context, ecstasy “is etymologically a standing-outside the body, leaving it to approach God. But in Pullman’s universe, true ecstasy is immanence, being fully part of the sensual physical world,” which only “typifies Pullman’s characteristic inversion of traditional religious categories” further (Oram 423).

Another issue the human-daemon dynamic seems to address is “the value-laden Christian hierarchy of spirit and matter” (Bird 116). Since the human soul is considered the part of humans that is closest to God and divinity, it is rendered as representing the spirit. The body on the other hand constitutes matter. Akin to the attribution of value with body and soul, spirit is considered more desirable than matter, following the principle “[t]he further away from God the emanation, the more corrupt is the matter of which it is composed” (Gurley 3). It could thus be considered that the Church’s endeavor of separating child and daemon, body and soul, represents an attempt to maintain the orthodox religious tradition of “rendering mind and body as separate entities” (Bird 117). “To this end, the text presents a more literal realization of the descent from spirit to matter, through the ‘severed’ child in the first book and the severed adults in the second” (Bird 116).

However, the children and people that have undergone the process of “intercision” are portrayed as merely functional, soulless human shells. “They have no daemons so they have no fear and no imagination and no free will [...]” (Pullman 522). Simultaneously, the separated daemon is described as “reduced to a little trotting pet” (Pullman 241) that “seemed to be sleepwalking” (Pullman 241) In *His Dark Materials*, body and soul can only form a functional human being if both entities are equally unified, which concludes that neither body or matter nor soul or spirit holds a superior position in the dynamic that constitutes a human being, creating a “complex paradox of simultaneous unity and difference” (Bird 118).

Assuming that the daemon as the human soul actually represents a religious concept, the relationship between humans and their daemons could also be perceived as a way to metaphorically illustrate people’s ties to predefined religious doctrines, such as for instance the soul in Christianity is considered to be the person’s closest link to God. People in Lyra’s world visibly carry their souls with them in the form of daemons, and are highly dependent on them. The setting might remind the reader of the past, as it bears several resemblances to Victorian England, and scientific endeavors are still commonly referred to as “experimental theology” (Pullman 35). It might be no coincidence that the world where humans possess daemons resembles the past, as in this day and age, religion had a completely different significance in society, which is why the visible representations of the soul as daemons might serve as a metaphor for the then still stronger relationship between humanity and religions, or man and God, as compared to our contemporary society. The fact that in Will’s world, the soul is neither tangible nor visible might be construed as a comment on our secularized society, in which people seem to have diverged from religious beliefs, and thus also have lost their connection to God.

Hopkins suggests that this might be further evidence for how inhabitants of this world “have no need to look outside of themselves for a deity” anymore (55). Interestingly, Will even mentions that in his world, the phonetically similar word “demon” refers to “something evil” (Pullman 21). And still, when Lyra explains her relationship with her daemon to Will, “he is overwhelmed by a sense of isolation and the realization that he has no daemon” (Bobby ch. 1). “Will looked at the two of them, the skinny pale-eyed girl and her black rat daemon [...] and felt profoundly alone” (SK 25).

This might address the crucial aspect of why “[r]eligion is important to many people across the globe because it forms a lens through which they see and relate to the world and provides a sense of identity and belonging” (Bradley ch. 1). This aspect is addressed on various occasions in the story. The former nun Mary Malone for instance delineates, “I used to feel I was connected to God like that, and because he was there, I was connected to the whole of his creation” (Pullman 1024).

Nonetheless, the highly limiting effects of this bond are illustrated as well, especially in the characters’ inability to detach themselves from their souls in the form of daemons. For instance, on various occasions in the story, people are hindered by their connection to their daemon, for they can neither be touched nor detached without hurting their human. Therefore, their special bond is holding them back and weakens them. Moreover, overcoming a separation from ones daemon is portrayed as a positive and almost revolutionary process that allows the relationship between the two parties to further evolve, as “they are still one whole being; but now they can roam free, and go to far places and see strange things and bring back knowledge” (Pullman 1048). The message this might convey is that a separation from religious ties does not necessarily mean a loss of purpose or belonging, but rather a chance to “reinterpret the ontology of humankind’s moral and ethical universe, and to redefine humankind’s quest for a meaningful purpose in life [...]” (Scott 95).

This was the very thing she’d told Will about when he asked if she missed God: it was the sense that the whole universe was alive, and that everything was connected to everything else by threads of meaning. When she’d been a Christian, she had felt connected too; but when she left the Church, she felt loose and free and light, in a universe without purpose. [...] [But] it was plain that everything was throbbing with purpose and meaning, but she was cut off from it. And it was impossible to find a connection, because there was no God. (Pullman 1027)

In Blakean tradition, Mary Malone explains that all these things that people look for in God, answers, guidance, comfort, purpose, they can find within themselves and in the world that surrounds them.

What further supports this argument is the fact that several particularly powerful characters are given the ability to be separated from or even live without their daemons/souls without any harm.

For instance, witches can be separated from their daemons allowing them to master certain tasks that humans in their dependency on their souls would not be able to accomplish. That this ability is particularly given to witches, creatures that have a long history of being prosecuted and tortured by the Catholic Church, appears to be no coincidence. The empowering depiction of witches itself further contributes to the story's general critique of religious institutions, as historically witches have been well-known enemies of the Catholic Church. Similarly, the armored bears, the panserbjørne in Svalbard, do not possess souls in the form of daemons at all and are though still considered one of the mightiest creatures of the North. This adds up with another common belief of Christianity, which is that only human beings have souls (Zuersher 44).

However, in Christianity this is used as a way to establish a dominance of the human race over animals. In *His Dark Materials*, however, this is what makes the bears strong: "By not being human [...] That's why you could never trick a bear. We can see in a way humans have forgotten [...]" (Pullman 194). It is also explained that these bears carry their own version of a soul in their armors, as lorek Byrnison specifies: "A bear's armour is his soul, just as your daemon is your soul" (Pullman 168). Later in the book it is further specified that bears are able to craft their armor themselves, hence, create their own souls (Pullman 192). Bears are thereby given the ability that in a religious context is only granted to God, namely to create souls. Nevertheless, their king, Iofur Raknison, is obsessed with acquiring a daemon of his own, which eventually leads to his defeat. This appears to have significant meaning.

Even though the bears can create their own version of a soul, and are thus portrayed as strong and independent creatures, their leader still chases after daemons. Since Iofur is the bear king, this could be just another critique of an authority seeking more power, but considering the possibility of daemons serving as religiously related metaphor in the story, the king might statute an example of how clinging to religious concepts is not to be favored over self-dependence. This longing makes him vulnerable and open to manipulation, as Lord Asriel explains: "Indeed I do. Do you know what he wants above all else? Even more than an honorary degree? He wants a daemon! Find a way to give him a daemon, and he'd do anything for you" (Pullman 14).

Lyra eventually exploits this weakness and manages to deceit Iofur by lying. Ironically, Lyra hence eventually defeats the bear king by abiding the religious doctrines Iofur seems to be so desperately longing for.

On another note, the fact that daemons irrevocably settle at a certain point in life raises some questions. It appears strange that a rather revolutionary story would underpin that “growth ceases with pubescence and identity is established by one’s first sexual experience” (Butler and Halsdorf ch. 1). Moreover, it seems that the stagnation of daemons’ development at such an early age strongly reinforces problematic structures of social hierarchy. Considering the fact that the settlement of the daemons is finite and irrevocable leaves much space for speculation, for at this stage of life, people are somewhat bound to the role their parents inherited them in society as they did not have the chance to choose a life for their own yet. Hence, the settling of the daemons appears to bind them to their role in society they are currently occupying at this stage in life, which seems highly restrictive:

‘And when your daemon settles, you’ll know the sort of person you are.’
 ‘But suppose your daemon settles in a shape you don’t like?’
 ‘Well, then, you’re discontented, en’t you? There’s plenty of folk as’d like to have a lion as a daemon and they end up with a poodle. And till they learn to be satisfied with what they are, they’re going to be fretful about it. Waste of feeling, that is.’ (Pullman 144-145)

According to the utterance of the seaman, people are, apparently, supposed to simply accept and live with the fact that they are in a way forced into a less fortunate role from the beginning.

This actually reinforces the religious concept of the “divine right” that “constituted people could and should assert their inherent rights, as endowed by their Creator”, which was used by religious institutions to justify the structures of feudalism that, in turn, aided in maintaining their political power (Chilton ch. 5.2). Hence, while “Pullman’s plot [generally] discredits religion” it seems that in terms of culturally shaped power structures, “his method ironically revitalizes the very myths the series overtly works to discredit” (Butler, Halsdorf ch. 1).

Yet, this additional restrictive element of daemons, along with the fact that people cannot be separated from them, might actually be further proof for the previously addressed argument that the relationship between humans and daemons serves as a metaphor for how people are restricted by religious beliefs.

Only humans with daemons appear to have these problems. People from Will's world carry their soul inside, which is presented as a state more advantageous to having a visible soul in the form of a daemon on various occasions. While it is explained that humans also cannot choose their nature, they are still free to choose what to do with their lives: "I can't choose my nature, but I can choose what I do" (Pullman 999). The already solicited settling issue of daemons restricts their humans in their choice of what life they want to be living, up to the point where they can almost be considered prisoners of their own body:

'There was one old sailorman on my first vessel who could never go ashore at all, because his daemon had settled as a dolphin, and he could never leave the water. He was a wonderful sailor, best navigator you ever knew; could have made a fortune at the fishing, but he wasn't happy at it. He was never quite happy till he died and he could be buried at sea.' (Pullman 144)

Furthermore, in the scene where Lyra, Will and the Gallivespians leave the shore in limbo, it is specifically mentioned that it is particularly difficult for Lyra to be separated from her soul, as she is able to see it and talk to it.

It seems that with regards to the daemon's possible religious meaning, one could speculate endlessly. Nonetheless, the concept of the human soul has also been explored in the field of psychology and philosophy. Since humans and daemons are almost always paired with their opposite sex, it seems that specifically Jung's theory of how the human psyche is constructed fits the depiction of the relationship between humans and daemons very well. Jung argues that the human psyche consists of the mind and the spirit, both of which operate consciously and unconsciously (Snowden 31). What is of particular importance if growth and health of the psyche wants to be maintained is balance, as "[c]onscious attitudes are always balanced by unconscious attitudes: if a conscious attitude grows too strong then the unconscious will always seek to restore equilibrium" (Snowden 31).

The unconscious part will make itself heard by “dreams, spontaneous imagery, slips of the tongue and so on” (Snowden 31). Suppression of the unconscious will result in “neurosis or even physical disease” (Snowden 31). With regards to balance, Jung also introduces the idea that every male and female inhabits elements of the opposite gender to balance their personality.

The anima is the female archetype that “represents a man’s feeling nature” (Snowden 37-38),

(s)he contains all the ancestral impressions of what it means to be female. Her form will depend on a man’s individual knowledge of women. Passionate attractions occur when the anima is projected onto an actual woman, so that the man falls in love. If, on the other hand, the man over-identifies with the anima, he may become moody, resentful or effeminate. If a man’s anima is very weak then he will find relationships with women difficult. (Snowden 38)

The animus, in turn, represents the male archetype that balances the women’s psyche. It occupies the logical part of the psyche and “can lead [...] towards knowledge and true meaning”, while at the same time being responsible for “spontaneous, unpremeditated opinions, which can affect a woman’s emotional life” (Snowden 38). Ideally, animus and anima function as mediating forces “between the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious” (Snowden 39).

Pullman’s depiction of daemons highly resembles Jung’s concept of the human psyche. First, animus and anima seem to be manifested in daemons that are almost always of the opposite sex than their human counterparts. Second, daemons seem to aid in balancing their human’s personalities, since they appear to be acting as mediating forces between consciousness and unconsciousness. This is evident in the fact that daemons, who are able to verbalize their opinions, often disagree with their humans. For instance, Lyra and Pan are illustrated as differing strongly in character. While Lyra is brave and careless, Pan often acts as the voice of reason. Another example would be Mrs. Coulter, who is always highly composed, while her golden monkey daemon is portrayed as aggressive and belligerent. These contradictions in character resonate with Jung’s theory that “[e]verything that should normally be in the outer attitude, but is conspicuously absent, will invariably be found in the inner attitude” (qtd. in Huskinson 46).

Interestingly, however, Jung commonly compared his psychological findings on the human psyche to some concepts of different world religions. Particularly interesting is his comparison of Christ to “an archetypal image of the Self, to which [people] can aspire” (Snowden 79). This may be applied to all religions that have similar divine figures. In this theory, God sending Jesus to Earth can be compared to how “each of us sends our ego into the outer world on a quest for individuation” (Snowden 79).

Jung refers to this split from the ego as “archetypal death and rebirth process” in which the ego “ceases to occupy centre stage in our consciousness” (Snowden 79). This should in fact be considered a “very painful process” that is comparable to “difficult initiation tests often undergone by members of shamanic tribes” in which the contestants purposefully try to encounter near-death experiences (Snowden 79). Yet, if managed properly, this leads to the possibility of “emerg[ing] with new spiritual awareness” (Snowden 79). The split from the ego that manifests itself outside of the body may very well be compared to the birth of Will’s daemon Kirjava, after he is separated from his soul in limbo, “I didn’t know I was born until I was torn away from his heart” (Pullman 1049). This, in turn, sheds a different light on the relationship between humans and daemons in *His Dark Materials*. The daemon might thereby function as people’s ego that manifests itself outside of their bodies. Jung’s description of the split from the ego also resembles the agonizing pain people endure when being separated from their daemons. Moreover, the witches undergo a process similar to the rituals mentioned in Jung’s theory in order to be separable from their daemons. The fact that in *Amber Spyglass*, Serafina Pekkala explains that besides witches, shamans also have the ability to be separated from their daemons draws further parallels to Jung’s theory.

As can clearly be seen, Dust as well as daemons constitute two of the richest metaphors in Pullman’s trilogy, and, hence, allow for a wide range of interpretations, especially with regards to their role in the representation of religious content. It appears obvious though that both, on some level, work to discredit old-established religious doctrines, in this case particularly those of Christian origins. It has to be admitted, however, that both concepts also clearly carry psychoanalytical value. What seems striking though is that Pullman draws so heavily on specifically Carl Jung.

The reasons for this may be that Jung, as previously discussed, is interested in how the human mind can be balanced, akin to how Pullman is eager to combine and synthesize religious dualisms. More importantly, however, Jung commonly applied his psychoanalytical theory to religious issues, which also resembles Pullman's extensive examination of this topic. Furthermore, since Jung "found the more dogmatic, fundamentalist religions unhelpful because they lead to disagreement and spiritual stagnation [and] that religions need to grow and evolve in order to answer our deep spiritual needs," it seems that Jung and Pullman even share a similar opinion on the concept of organized religion as well (Snowden 77).

9 Conclusion

Concluding, it can be said that the fantasy genre seemingly contains endless capacities of literary possibilities. There appear to be few, if any, limitations to the creation of fantastic secondary worlds that are full of wonders, and inhabit all sorts of magical and supernatural characters and creatures. In fantasy, the reader's imagination appears to be the only limitation. However, the density of transcendence that is featured in fantasy naturally triggers the occurrence of a variety of possible metaphors and symbolisms that, in turn, readily invite allegoric readings of the stories. Hence, these worlds of wonder seem to supply an ideal platform for addressing issues from the real world in disguised form, which is why fantasy works are often discussed to be dealing with reality more intensely than they might let on. It thus does not seem surprising that also the subversive nature of fantasy is highly debated among literary critics.

Even though fantasy literature has dealt with different kinds of social, historical, political and ideological issues over the years, one theme that is repeatedly featured and seems to spark more controversies than other topics is that of religion. The dominant status religion occupies in fantasy is attributable to their mutual heritage that is rooted in mythology, which is also why religious and fantastic narratives resemble each other in terms of structure and content. Considering these commonalities, it should not be surprising that religious content is commonly found in fantasy. What seems to be the problem though is that fantasy combines these religious aspects with common elements of the fantastic, such as magic.

This has led to some religious institutions expressing their concern at how fantasy, especially children's fantasy, might promote heretical values. However, what most certainly furthers their critical stance towards fantasy literature is the fact that in contemporary society, it seems that the genre of fantasy is in the process of becoming a religious space of its own, and, therefore, presents a threat to traditional religious institutions that already face extinction in a primarily secularized society.

One of the most controversial works constitutes Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials*. In common fantasy tradition, Pullman creates a story that revitalizes a variety of elements from mythology. Hence, it is not surprising that religion constitutes one of the most dominant themes in the series. In the story, different people with different belief systems are presented, along with traditional clerical institutions and their executives that on some level seem to bear strong resemblance to religious institutions of our primary world.

As has been clarified, critique towards religion that is employed in the trilogy is primarily aimed at dogmatic religion and their repressive and predefined doctrines. While on the surface it may seem that this is predominantly evident in the highly dismissive representation of the Church and its representatives, a closer reading reveals that the story also works on deeper levels, which is especially observable in the careful and detailed subversion of orthodox religious doctrines. Nevertheless, Pullman's story does not simply attack orthodox dogmas, but rather offers new perspectives and approaches to these traditional concepts, whereby "[i]n a work of remarkable ingenuity and power, he melds this wide continuum of philosophies and perspectives, old and new, into a unique world picture, creates a panoply of extraordinary new images and events" (Scott 95). What makes Pullman's approach unique, however, is "the way this is all used [that] is almost pure Feuerbach, [one of the most influential critics of the concept of religion, especially Christianity]: the elements of religion are themselves recycled into a myth teaching people to throw off religion" (Simpson 9).

Generally, the motif of unity, openness and inclusiveness is what threads its way through the story, as opposed to absolute distinctions, limitations and prohibitions that are often conveyed and promoted by hierarchical religions. What appears to be Pullman's major concern is that people focus on the events and their lives in the real world, and that everything we are looking for outside of this realm, we can already find in our own universe and in ourselves, "because where we are is always the most important place" (Pullman 1087).

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Abstract (English)

This thesis explores the vast possibilities of the fantasy genre. Due to its sheer limitless literary potential, the fantasy genre can be considered more free and flexible in its construction of secondary worlds than other literary genres. Especially helpful in this respect is also the author's possibility to incorporate transcendental and supernatural elements into his/her creation of new worlds as well as the many different characters that inhabit these magical realms. Particularly these elements, however, readily invite allegorical readings of fantasy literature, which is why the question to what extent fantasy literature represents reality is highly debated. Relatedly, the genre's possible subversive nature is discussed, specifically with regards to its representation of social, historical, ideological and/or political issues. One theme that appears to receive much attention since it has and is repeatedly featured in fantasy literature is that of religion. Several contemporary works, among them a variety of children's fantasies, have been accused of a subversive representation of religious themes and motifs up to the point where some stories have even been accused of promoting heresy. The relationship between religion and fantasy, however, is a much more complex one. Since both concepts, at least partially, originated from mythology, religious as well as fantastic narratives share a mutual heritage, and, therefore, highly resemble each other, especially in terms of structure and themes that are explored. Hence, finding religious content in fantasy literature seems logical and does not necessarily point to a certain agenda the story might pursue. Yet, there are certainly literary works that quite obviously employ criticism in this respect. The trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman probably constitutes one of the best examples. Philip Pullman's personal reluctance of the concept of dogmatic religion is no secret and seems to be mirrored and realized in a variety of different approaches within the story. The subversive representation of religion will be further explored and analyzed using examples of intertextuality, metaphor and symbolism, transgression of religious dualisms as well as the general highly negative depiction of religious institutions.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den weitreichenden Möglichkeiten des Fantasy Genres. Aufgrund seines scheinbar unlimitierten literarischen Potentials, können der Fantasy Literatur, im Vergleich zu anderen literarischen Gattungen, größere Flexibilität und mehr Freiheiten zugesprochen werden. In dieser Hinsicht ist vor allem hilfreich, dass sich Autoren dieses Genres allen möglichen Elementen des Übernatürlichen und Transzendenten bedienen können, die sie in die Kreierung sekundärer Welten und ihrer Bewohner, die ebenfalls verschiedenste Formen annehmen können, miteinfließen lassen. Diese Eigenschaften führen allerdings auch sehr leicht dazu, dass man Geschichten aus der Rubrik des Fantastischen leicht voreilig allegorisch interpretiert. Aufgrund dessen wird auch ausführlich darüber diskutiert, inwiefern Fantasy politische, ideologische, soziale oder historische Elemente der primären Welt in seinen Geschichten behandelt. In diesem Zusammenhang werden ebenfalls die subversiven Möglichkeiten und Tendenzen des Genres besprochen. Eines der Themen, das vermehrt Einzug in fantastische Geschichten findet, ist die Religion. Angesichts des gemeinsamen Ursprungs von religiösen und fantastischen Erzählungen in der Mythologie erscheint dies nicht überraschend. Interessanter ist eher, dass Religion im heutigen primär säkularisierten 21. Jahrhundert immer noch stetig in der Fantasy Literatur thematisiert wird. Religiöse Institutionen äußern immer wieder Bedenken bezüglich der spezifischen Repräsentation religiöser Inhalte, vor allem jener, die in Fantasy Literatur für Kinder vermittelt werden. Dies betrifft besonders Werke, die eine große Bandbreite an Leserinnen und Lesern erreichen, wie etwa *Harry Potter*, *Der Herr Der Ringe* oder eben auch *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman's Trilogie, die im Rahmen dieser Arbeit bezüglich seiner subversiven Repräsentation von religiösen Inhalten analysiert wird. Anders als bei manch anderen Werken, ist in dieser Buchreihe eine klare abwertende und beinahe schon feindselige Darstellung religiöser Institutionen und deren Dogmas zu erkennen. Diese Darstellung kann vor allem im Rahmen sorgsam ausgewählter Intertextualität, der Anwendung metaphorischer sowie symbolischer Mittel als auch dem Aufbrechen traditioneller religiöser Dualismen erkannt werden, die allesamt besprochen und analysiert werden.