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First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin’s Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978–1–137–33679–8 hardback

ISBN 978–1–137–33676–7 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.

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Introduction

Tommy Halsdorf and Catherine Butler

From the time its first volume, *Northern Lights*, was published in 1995, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* opened up new territory for children's literature. A trilogy eventually totalling some 1,300 pages, *His Dark Materials* was recognized not only as a superbly entertaining and imaginative story, filled with engaging characters, but as one dealing with events on a truly cosmic scale, with a boldness and intellectual ambition that few literary novels being published at the time could match. If children's literature had been looked on with patronizing disdain by some in the literary establishment, and if advocates of children's books had suffered in turn from something of a 'cultural cringe', Pullman's epic trilogy might have been designed to remedy that situation. Here was a work that was eloquent and sophisticated, displaying a casual breadth of literary reference and taking on controversial and complex issues in theology, politics, philosophy and morality with an assurance that demanded to be taken seriously in return. In the light of Pullman's achievement, many who had hitherto been dismissive or simply ignorant of children's literature began to look at the field with fresh eyes, and to acknowledge that books for children were capable of challenging and engrossing readers of any age. In addition, *His Dark Materials* was controversial. It made headlines in both the tabloid and broadsheet press, and was lauded and denounced from leader columns and pulpits. Its author was sought out as a spokesman for his own brand of secular morality, even debating with the Archbishop of Canterbury on two occasions.¹

For all its revolutionary impact, *His Dark Materials* is in many ways a traditional work—which may be one reason for the breadth of its appeal. Solid storytelling and craftsmanship are its engine. It is not as formally experimental as some earlier novels, such as Aidan Chambers' *Breaktime* (1978), Geraldine McCaughrean's *A Pack of Lies* (1988) or even Pullman's own *Clockwork* (1996), published between the trilogy's first and second volumes. Nor is it the first book to deal directly with theological or philosophical concepts. From Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (1863) to Jostein Gaarder's *Sophie's World* (1991), and indeed C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–56)—a

series with which Pullman's trilogy has a close if antagonistic relationship—earlier children's writers have addressed 'big' subjects. *His Dark Materials* is politically radical, but its radicalism belongs to a recognizable, even venerable, English tradition of dissent, tracing its lineage back to Milton and Blake, and coexists with a positive representation of old-fashioned humanist values. While the trilogy is undoubtedly iconoclastic, it is far from nihilistic: on the contrary, it is freighted with a moral seriousness that arguably threatens to capsize it at times.

Few works of children's literature have established themselves as 'classics' quite as instantaneously as *His Dark Materials*. When *Northern Lights* (or *The Golden Compass*, as it was titled in the United States) was published it met immediate and near-universal acclaim. Within a year, Scholastic was able to release a paperback edition with the imprint of the Carnegie Medal and the words 'Guardian Children's Fiction Award' blazoned on the cover. The prefatory pages boasted not just the customary two or three laudatory quotations from reviews, but 14—drawn from journals as diverse as *Books for Keeps* and the *Detroit Free Press*, and including recommendations by such children's book luminaries as Jan Mark and Nina Bawden (in the United Kingdom) and Lloyd Alexander and Lois Lowry (in the United States). At the last count, the book has been translated into more than 40 languages.²

The second and third volumes of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* (1997) and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), were equally successful, both critically and commercially. In particular, *The Amber Spyglass* became, in 2001, the first children's book ever to win the overall Whitbread Book Award, against competition from books in the four adult categories—an achievement widely seen as signalling a recognition that children's books needed to be regarded with the same literary seriousness as any other form of literature. Nor has the perspective of time notably diminished Pullman's achievement. In 2003 his trilogy came third in the BBC's 'Big Read' poll to find the nation's favourite novel, being beaten only by *The Lord of the Rings* and *Pride and Prejudice*. In 2005 Pullman (along with the Japanese illustrator Ryoji Arai) was awarded the world's most prestigious international children's book prize, the Astrid Lindgren Award, and two years later *Northern Lights* was voted the Carnegie of Carnegies, winning a poll to choose the most popular winner of the award in its 70-year history. In 2008, *The Times* named Pullman one of the '50 greatest British writers since 1945', and in 2013 he was elected President of the Society of Authors, a remarkable honour from his fellow professional writers.³

By the time of the trilogy's completion, children's literature was beginning to be dominated by the *Harry Potter* series. With Pullman and J. K. Rowling being by some distance the two most famous contemporary children's fantasy writers in the world, comparisons were inevitable. If Rowling's fans tended to view Pullman as their heroine's John the Baptist, preparing the ground for Harry Potter's coming by raising the profile of children's literature among adult readers, Pullman's admirers used Rowling's hyper-popularity as a means to bring into relief the literary qualities they admired in their author. The originality of his imagination, his books' stylistic variety and accomplishment, the range of his literary references and the intellectual ambition of his engagement with theological and philosophical questions, were all set off by what some saw as Rowling's derivative use of fantasy and school-story tropes, increasing tendency to under-editing, and petit-bourgeois sensibility. Many of these comparisons were undoubtedly unfair, but given the coincidence of the cultural moment at which the two authors' fame and popularity reached its apogee, they were to be expected. Fourteen years later, we hope in this volume to provide a measured re-assessment and evaluation of Pullman's achievement.

Pullman's career before *His Dark Materials*

His Dark Materials was far from being a debut novel for Philip Pullman, and in many ways constitutes the culmination of his previous work. Certainly many features of his earlier books anticipate his magnum opus and, without denying them validity in their own right, these earlier books can also be said to have served as an apprenticeship to the trilogy. In addition, aspects of Pullman's background, his literary inspirations and his personal ambitions as a writer contributed to its creation.

The seeds of *His Dark Materials* can be traced back to Pullman's upbringing and formative years. His vocation began at an early age, when he used to tell bedtime stories to his younger brother. After his father, an RAF fighter pilot, was killed in action in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia), Pullman lived with his grandparents in England. This was an influential period in his life because his grandfather, a clergyman, introduced him to the narratives of the Bible.⁴ The grandeur and awe-inspiring imagery of these stories profoundly marked the boy and contribute to some of the atmosphere of *His Dark Materials*.⁵ Furthermore, his interest in illustration was awakened by US comics and graphic novels such as *Batman* and *Superman*.⁶ He has

since illustrated some of his own works, including the little pictures beside the chapter headings in *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife*.

At secondary school, in beautiful Harlech, North Wales, Pullman experimented with writing poetry, which he considers to have had a major impact on his prose style as it made him aware of poetic rhythm and structure.⁷ Apart from poetry and the stunning countryside,⁸ a further crucial influence marked Pullman's school experience. He was introduced to *Paradise Lost* by Enid Jones, his teacher, whom he acknowledges at the end of the trilogy. The plot of John Milton's epic poem forms the backdrop to *His Dark Materials*. Part of Pullman's ambition in writing it was to tell '*Paradise Lost* in 1,200 pages'⁹ for teenagers, and Milton is one of the main sources for much of his religious imagery and especially his portrayal of Lord Asriel as a Satan figure. In 1965 Pullman enrolled at the University of Oxford to study English. While the course was not really to his liking, his college, Exeter, and the city of Oxford inspired him greatly, and would be converted (and expanded) into the Jordan College and Lyra's Oxford of *Northern Lights*.¹⁰

Pullman says of himself that he has stolen ideas from every book he has ever read, and his philosophy is to 'read like a butterfly and write like a bee',¹¹ but he acknowledges three main authors who stand out as inspiration for *His Dark Materials*. Next to Milton, whom we mentioned above, there is William Blake, whose poetry feeds Pullman's ideas about innocence and experience, his picture of the Authority and his interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. The third influence is Heinrich von Kleist, particularly his essay 'On the Marionette Theatre', which explores a metaphor for the Fall of man.¹² These works are structurally embedded in Pullman's trilogy and permeate the entire story, its plot and mythology. The Bible is obviously another such influence, even though the scenes that Pullman forms his story around are inspired by dissident interpretations rather than by the Bible itself. Apart from these three sources, which Pullman himself has identified, many other texts have contributed to the formation of *His Dark Materials*, a deeply intertextual work. It includes elements of folk and fairy tale, magic, realism, Romantic poetry, Greek mythology (the harpies and the Land of the Dead feature in the trilogy), references taken from Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, traditional tropes of children's literature, the *Bildungsroman*, comics and any other source Pullman could get his hands on (the surname of the witch queen Serafina Pekkala is taken from a Finnish telephone directory). He also borrows ideas from contemporary quantum physics to create his alternative worlds and multiple universes, as well as for one

of his main concepts, Dust, which constitutes the ‘Dark Materials’ of the title.¹³

Pullman started out as an adult novelist, but even his early works contain features and themes which found their way into *His Dark Materials*. His first published book was *The Haunted Storm* (1972), a strange tale of (im)morality, murder, perversion, and religion—although the treatment of the latter is influenced by Gnosticism, an approach he rejects in *His Dark Materials*. His next novel, *Galatea* (1978), is a fantasy or magic realist quest featuring many different non-human characters including electric whores, a werewolf, zombies, ghosts and the robot angel Galatea, which the protagonist, Mark Browning, falls in love with. This work contains numerous elements that reappear in the trilogy, such as the sublime imagery, a plot revolving around ideas of sexuality, science and religion, and above all the unity of matter and spirit. The Electric Whores echo the angels of *His Dark Materials* as they inform Browning that they are ‘Spirits [...] produced by matter’ and that ‘Matter loves itself’,¹⁴ leading Browning to wonder whether ‘spirit and matter are the same thing’.¹⁵ Furthermore, *Galatea’s* angels, messengers who ‘have elements of both sexes in them’ and copulate with humans, are described as ‘finer than us’ with ‘purer’ flesh,¹⁶ again very similar to their description by Joachim Lorenz in *The Subtle Knife*.

Pullman subsequently concentrated chiefly on children’s literature, and in practically all of his work we can find hints of what was to come. Numerous books, such as the Sally Lockhart novels (*The Ruby in the Smoke*, *The Shadow in the North*, *The Tiger in the Well* and *The Tin Princess* (1985–94)), the New Cut Gang stories (*Thunderbolt’s Waxwork* (1994) and *The Gas-Fitters’ Ball* (1995)) and *Spring-Heeled Jack* (1989), have a Victorian setting that is echoed in Lyra’s world. *Count Karlstein* (1982) shows an interest in German Romanticism and the Gothic, as does *Clockwork or All Wound Up*, a sinister ghostly tale where belief in the power of self-determination, finding one’s own path and facing the consequences of choices and actions are central.

We can also find prototypes of Pullman’s most famous invention, the dæmon, in previous novels. In *Spring-Heeled Jack*, the villain Filthy has ‘an odd bedraggled little creature like a mournful moth, or like a second-hand angel’,¹⁷ which sits on his shoulder and acts as his conscience. Ah Ling, Sally Lockhart’s nemesis, owns a malevolent monkey-servant in *The Tiger in the Well* described as ‘an evil spirit. A demon’,¹⁸ which is a precursor of Mrs Coulter’s monkey dæmon.

A panoply of strong, courageous, independent and often teenage female characters figure as predecessors to Lyra, confronting their society, fighting evil and helping the disempowered. These range

from Sally Lockhart to Ginny from *The Broken Bridge* (1990) and Lila in *The Firework-maker's Daughter* (1995). In addition, *The Butterfly Tattoo* (1998) and the first novel of the Lockhart quartet, *The Ruby in the Smoke*, feature romances that are intense but short-lived and tragic, anticipating Lyra and Will's heart-breaking separation in *The Amber Spyglass*. Other common features in Pullman's pre-*His Dark Materials* work that are present in the trilogy include broken families and orphans—possibly a reflection of Pullman's own childhood—complex characters, mystery and protagonists who grow and mature. Loss of innocence is generally accompanied by the beginning of wisdom, and the stories are full of hope and optimism, as well as a fierce enjoyment of the here and now.

Pullman has always been a self-conscious artist, deeply interested in the art of storytelling from the point of view of a craftsman. Commenting on the genesis of his metafictional novel *Clockwork*, for example, he has written:

I was looking at one of the old clocks in the Science Museum in London one day, and I thought it would be fun to try and write a story in which one part turning this way connected to another part and made it turn that way, like the cogwheels of a clock. And when it was all fitted closely together, I could wind it up and set it going.¹⁹

Clockwork was thus conceived at least in part as a technical challenge. We may think of that book, an intricately crafted novel about intricate craftsmanship, as a masterpiece in one old sense of the word—an object designed to display its maker's skill and ingenuity and to justify his right to be considered a master of his trade. *His Dark Materials*, which has been widely seen as Pullman's masterpiece in the more usual sense, exploits the skills developed in his earlier work to full effect. Its engagement with philosophical and scientific ideas has rightly attracted a good deal of critical attention, but this is also a rare piece of storytelling: in its control of pace and suspense, its ability to conjure innumerable vivid locations, its cast of memorable characters and creatures, and its linguistic versatility, the trilogy is (in the words of Christina Hardyment) a 'rich casket of wonders'.²⁰ Pullman's text provides us with a traditional omniscient narrator, but his is far from being a monotone voice: he adopts a wide variety of styles, ranging from the Homeric similes that add a brutal grandeur to the epic combat of Iorek Byrnison and Iofur Raknison (*NL*, pp. 349–54), to the invocation of classic Western writers such as Zane Grey in the affecting death of Lee Scoresby (*SK*, pp. 304–19), as well as more obvious literary exemplars such as Blake, Milton and the Brothers Grimm.

***His Dark Materials* and polemic**

His Dark Materials must also be considered as a religious or philosophical novel. It inverts the morality of the Fall and justifies Satan's rebellion and Eve's actions while 'redeeming' sexuality and the emancipatory passage from innocence to experience. However, its exact stance concerning religion is more complicated and delicate than appears at a first glance, as Pat Pinsent and Naomi Wood (among others) argue in this volume. The attack on the Church should be scrutinized carefully: the corrupt Authority is not the creator-God but an impostor like Blake's Urizen, and although Christianity seems to be Pullman's primary target, according to Nicholas Tucker this is only because 'he knows the Christian religion best'.²¹ Pullman's quarrel, as he told Robert Butler, lies with any 'way of organising society which refer[s] to absolutes for its justification rather than to ordinary human experience',²² so we have an explicit condemnation of *all* organized monotheistic religions, not just Christianity, and beyond that any other authoritarian system of thought.

Pullman is above all a humanist: he advocates life in the here and now. *His Dark Materials* is a text celebrating humanism and the power of important stories: they, not religion, renew our human faith.²³ The trilogy proposes a concise idea of faith in a near-religious sense, although it does not have any organized rituals or a specific system of belief in the traditional sense of religion. It includes elements of Christianity and Pullman's own mythology and spiritual philosophy, founded on the union of spirit and matter, of body and mind and of humanity and nature, and points to a higher order of a collective human consciousness, love and imagination. Though it remains mysterious and cannot be fully captured, which is part of its numinous appeal and intended purpose, it is nevertheless a fully-formed, new and modernized suggestion of spiritual and physical fulfilment offering the human as a spiritual symbol, an alternative to Christianity and its obsolete idea of God, and it cannot therefore be characterized as atheistic. This is the central idea about which *His Dark Materials* revolves, with the crucial factor being that this approach, whilst spiritual, does not neglect the material world but sees a symbiosis that can be defined as spiritual materialism.²⁴ Somewhat pantheistic in character, spiritual materialism is epitomized in *Dust*, which is material and visible as well as being a metaphor for human consciousness. It is both physical and indicative of a mystical sacred reverence for the entire universe. *Dust* works on the well-being and development of conscious life, and thrives on love

and wisdom, all the positive things in human existence—forming the unity of the human and the divine.

In addition, *His Dark Materials* is strongly imbued with alternative systems of belief to Christianity (Gnosticism, Buddhist and Eastern philosophy, as well as pre-Christian faiths such as Pantheism, among others). Values such as altruism, determination and bravery, and above all love, which are of course celebrated by religion too, are here presented as intrinsically human. Pullman thus borrows from many traditions and views, and mingles these elements with his own vision to form an original outlook.

Pullman's mythopoeia uses Christianity in order to undermine it and in doing so reveals something of his own creed. This marks him out as a religious writer despite his claims to the contrary, but one valorizing love, feeling, sexuality and humanity more than the intolerance he considers the established Churches to be propagating. He denies the Christian God and heaven but still addresses fundamental human questions about the soul, destiny and free will, the purpose of life and the afterlife. Nicholas Wright sees the trilogy as strongly anti-clerical, but it celebrates the numinous and is not anti-religious at the core, recognizing and respecting people's need for symbols in life.²⁵ On his personal website Pullman writes:

[t]he 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 a 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.²⁶

The word 'atheist' denotes a person who rejects the existence of God, and this cannot be said with certitude about Philip Pullman. He does question God's existence, but his overall attitude to the issue seems to be rather equivocal:

I've got no evidence whatever for believing in a God. But I know that all the things I do know are very small compared with the things that I don't know. So maybe there is a God out there.²⁷

In his trilogy a false God holds mankind in subjection. A true God is not mentioned, although the possibility is not excluded, but if such a being exists it dwells far beyond the realms of human comprehension. In other words he fails to be an atheist but fits the definition of agnosticism. Another appropriate epithet for Pullman might be Bernard Schweitzer's, that of misotheist or god-hater.²⁸ This, however, conflicts with Pullman's attraction to a different type of divinity in the

concept of Dust, so it is not an absolute misotheism but one aimed at a specific image of God.

Dust and the republic of heaven offer us alternatives to the false promises of the Church and God and his Kingdom, but they are religious too, or at least spiritual. The idea of heaven representing the ultimate bliss for mankind is not questioned. However, this perfect future will be in the here and now as well as in the afterlife, immediately accessible to all who live their lives accordingly (although it is only hinted at what this future will actually look like). Love remains the ultimate value, the ‘divine’ value, but now it comes from within the human. Although the return to Dust after death is described as an enraptured reunion with the dæmon and the collective cosmic consciousness (*AS*, pp. 335, 382 & 440), it is by no means better than the physical life and existence itself.

The idea of the prophecy of the child redeemer heralding a new beginning in Pullman’s story can also be found in the Norse Ragnarök, where all will perish except two human children, Lif and Lifthrasil, male and female but equals, who emerge from hiding to find a new, empty and lush world at their beck and call,²⁹ an outcome that bears parallels to Will and Lyra starting a new world order. Although their world is neither empty nor idyllic, here too there is hope of a new dawn, and a new kind of life. Humanity is redeemed, original sin wiped out, and salvation is accomplished by the love of a new Adam and Eve, which also re-establishes the balance in the male–female relationship that was destroyed when Eve received most of the blame for the Fall.

Pullman’s position as an atheist with an instinctively ‘religious’ outlook and a deep aesthetic and moral appreciation of religious faith makes his work particularly vulnerable to misreading by those who look to him for a simple and univocal ‘message’. His intellectual and emotional loyalties are subject to complex tensions, many of which play themselves out in his fiction without necessarily finding resolution there. Although he writes against Christian indoctrination, he is insistent that Bible stories are an essential part of children’s education.³⁰ Pullman’s are in many ways traditional liberal humanist values, but as Richard Gooding has argued with regard to *Clockwork* (in terms that have implications too for *His Dark Materials*), his analysis of consciousness as an emergent quality of matter tends to efface the differences between human and non-human, animate and inanimate, on which humanist values partly rest.³¹ Pullman mocks the naïve Rousseauian view of childhood (‘Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?’),³² but he retains from

both Rousseau and the Church the sense that growing up, and the onset of puberty in particular, is *the* life-defining event. In doing so he not only seems to limit the possibilities for self-development in adults, whose nature is ‘fixed’ by the settling of their dæmons, but entrenches the Romantic image of childhood as a time reserved from the rest of life, a time moreover in which the child is (like Lyra) blessed with a unique redemptive potential.

Sequels, prequels and adaptations

His Dark Materials has grown beyond the initial trilogy. Three years after the publication of *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman produced a short book, *Lyra’s Oxford* (2003), which constitutes the beginning of a new adventure set two years after the conclusion of *His Dark Materials*. Pullman has described it as a ‘stepping-stone between the trilogy and the book that’s coming next’,³³ referring to *The Book of Dust*. This did not quite happen though, as in 2008 another novella appeared, entitled *Once Upon a Time in the North*. It forms a prequel to *His Dark Materials*, focusing on the first meeting and ensuing friendship of the aëronaut Lee Scoresby and the armoured bear Iorek Byrnison. Pullman has even hinted at a third such work: ‘*Lyra’s Oxford* was a dark red book. *Once Upon a Time in the North* [is] a dark blue book. There still remains a green book. And that will be Will’s book. Eventually...’³⁴

Both these little companion books are beautifully crafted and artistic works, with engravings and cloth-bound covers and memorabilia from the world of *His Dark Materials* (*Once Upon a Time* contains a board game mentioned in the novella, for example). A cynical observer might suspect a ploy to cash in on the previous success. Nonetheless, the two short works certainly fulfil their task of whetting the reader’s appetite for more, and forming a bridge to the eagerly anticipated but, to the frustration of fans, ever-receding *Book of Dust*. Pullman announced the creation of this sequel as early as 2003, before *Lyra’s Oxford* was on the market.³⁵ Four years later, he confirmed that he was working on it and suggested that it might be released in 2009. However, that year Pullman addressed the question by stating: ‘The appropriate adverb would be “eventually”. It’s growing, but I’m encountering complexities that seem to be making it longer than I thought it would be.’³⁶

In 2011, Pullman announced that he was thinking about dividing *The Book of Dust* into two volumes, one forming a prequel, and the other a sequel to *His Dark Materials*.³⁷ This comment raises questions as to how advanced the work really was at that point, or how far

Pullman had actually decided on exactly what shape it would assume. His initial intention was to explore the lives of various characters who appear in the previous novels in a series of short stories, rather than write a continuation of Lyra and Will's adventures, as well as to supply additional information about Dust, dæmons, the subtle knife, the alethiometer and some of the unresolved theological issues raised in the trilogy.³⁸ In response to critics who argued that he focused only on the evil side of religion in *His Dark Materials* and ignored all the good, he answered that '[t]his is a big subject and I'm writing a big, big book in order to deal precisely with that question'.³⁹ Pullman claimed recently that 'it will be a while yet but it is growing', and that it was now his main focus after having released a retelling of Grimm's fairy tales in 2012.⁴⁰

In the meantime, *The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ* (2010), which does not deal with Lyra's world, can be said to fill 'a Christ-shaped hole' (18) in *His Dark Materials*, as Pat Pinsent puts it in her essay in this collection. The book is a kind of fictional biography offering a retelling of Jesus's life, with Jesus and Christ being twins, one idealistic and honest, the other shrewd and pragmatic.

The success of *His Dark Materials* has inevitably led to a number of adaptations and spin-off productions. The BBC aired a radio play of the trilogy in January 2003, consisting of three two-and-a-half hour programmes. Adapted by Lavinia Murray and with music by Bill Cowies, it featured a number of changes to the books' plots. The angel Balthamos became the general narrator of the story, and Mrs Coulter's golden monkey dæmon, unnamed in the trilogy, was called Ozymandias, alluding to Shelley's poem.⁴¹ A year later, the BBC produced audiobooks, unabridged and narrated by the author, with a full cast to play the characters.

Probably the most successful adaptation to date was the National Theatre's stage version, despite fears that the story might be unstageable. The original production ran from December 2003 to April 2004. It consisted of two plays because a single performance would have been too long, and adopting the trilogy form of the books would have demanded too great a commitment from theatre goers.⁴² Other major stage productions of *His Dark Materials* include those by the Playbox Theatre Company in April 2006 at The Dream Factory, Warwick, which used a more 'abstract, almost futuristic stage installation' and divided the stage into different levels to compensate for the lack of a revolving drum as at the National's Olivier theatre.⁴³ In 2007 productions were mounted by the Scottish Youth theatre at the Scottish Summer Festival, and by the Belvedere College Dramatic Society at Dublin's O'Reilly

theatre, using the National's music and some of the original costumes; while in April 2008 the Young People's theatre of Bath performed it at the Bath Theatre Royal, creating their own puppets.

All these productions used Wright's script,⁴⁴ which made some significant changes to the story. Mary Malone and the mulefa episodes are cut, for example (her temptress role being assumed by Serafina Pekkala), and there is only one lovemaking scene in the play, compared to two in the novels (the 'red fruit' and 'dæmon caress' scenes); however, it is more explicit, with Serafina Pekkala commenting: 'two children are making love in an unknown world'.⁴⁵ The visual performance and narrative, as well as the setting and props, had to make up for the lack of description and the obvious constraints of space and time, so cuts, and textual and scenic rearrangements were numerous. The play solved these difficulties well and maintained the life force of the story, whilst being a valid interpretation in its own right rather than simply a pale copy of the novels.⁴⁶ Reviews and reactions were as a result overwhelmingly positive, with Nicholas de Jongh from the *Evening Standard* calling it an 'astonishing epic of narrative and theatrical invention',⁴⁷ and Philip Pullman declaring himself 'thrilled with what they've done'.⁴⁸

In 2007, a hungrily awaited film based on *Northern Lights* and entitled *The Golden Compass*, was released by New Line Cinema. Directed by Chris Weitz and starring such Hollywood luminaries as Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig, as well as boasting a huge 180 million dollar budget,⁴⁹ it flattered to deceive. Although it made \$372 million at the box office,⁵⁰ was a big international hit and won a BAFTA and an Oscar for its Visual Effects,⁵¹ it was considered only a moderate success, since its figures disappointed in North America.⁵² This put paid to the plans to realize the remaining two books of the trilogy.

The production itself encountered a number of difficulties. Amid fears that an anti-Christian stance would harm the film's prospects in the United States, religion and God were not directly referenced, in contrast to the books,⁵³ although various Catholic organizations still denounced it and called for a boycott.⁵⁴ The actor Sam Elliott, who played Lee Scoresby, even suspects this is the reason for the abandonment of parts two and three.⁵⁵ In addition, significant changes were made to the plot, with the chronology altered and scenes cut, presumably in order to shorten the film.⁵⁶ From the outset problems arose with the script and screenplay, as well as technical difficulties, which led to Weitz temporarily resigning from the project.⁵⁷ After being coaxed back, he faced considerable changes in postproduction, which he describes as a 'terrible experience'.⁵⁸

Tom Stoppard's script was rejected by New Line for being too dark; however, Weitz's end product was severely criticized by fans and anti-censorship groups as a diluted 'Disney' version, notably because the religious nature of the story had been seriously downplayed.⁵⁹ Reviews were mixed at best, and further appraisals deplored the poor character development, one of the novels' fortes, and complained about the rushed and therefore somewhat confusing plot, meaning that the viewers lost out on the magic of the books.⁶⁰ In an interview with Rosa Silverman from the *Times* in March 2008, Pullman's response to the film was seen as 'guarded' and 'ambivalent.' He stated that 'A lot of things about it were good ... Nothing's perfect. Nothing can bring out all that's in the book. There are always compromises'.⁶¹

In parallel with the film, Sega and Shiny Entertainment released an action-adventure video game based on both *The Golden Compass* and *Northern Lights*. Players assume Lyra's role and, accompanied by Pan and Iorek, have to travel through Svalbard to rescue Roger from the Gobblers and bring Lord Asriel the alethiometer. The plot actually seems closer to the novel than the film manages at times, and Lyra's voice is that of Dakota Blue Richards, the same as in the film.⁶²

The essays in this casebook

This book aims to provide a multifaceted, though not exhaustive, discussion of many of the issues raised in this introduction. Pat Pinsent's consideration of Pullman as an anti-religious writer (Chapter 1) whose imagination and morality is nevertheless deeply imbued with a religious—and specifically Anglican—sensibility picks up the discussion here and extends it into a more detailed investigation of the extent to which *His Dark Materials* can be viewed as offering an alternative 'mythology' to that of Christianity. This theme is explored from a different angle by Rosemary Ross Johnston (Chapter 2), who examines the imagery of *Northern Lights* and (by contrast) the film *The Golden Compass* in order to illuminate the contours of Pullman's imagination and his ability to conjure a mental landscape through which his readers can journey, arguing that the book is suffused with a Christian sensibility. Alison Waller's consideration of science and scientists in the trilogy (Chapter 3) traces Pullman's relationship with a different kind of belief system and a different approach to knowledge, one informed by the scientific method and by the rational beliefs of the Enlightenment. The grand narratives of the Enlightenment and of science offer an alternative mode of understanding the world and our place in it to that of religion, but are themselves not immune to

critique. Naomi Wood, in her analysis of the controversies surrounding the book (Chapter 4), places Pullman's rationalist humanism in complex tension not just with religion but also with postmodern approaches to the nature of human knowledge and experience. By contrast, in Chapter 5, Andrew M. Butler uses a Derridean reading of Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' as a means of deconstructing Pullman's model of the human-dæmon dyad, and the borderlines between the human, animal and divine.

Kleist's essay constitutes a key point of reference for Keith O'Sullivan's discussion of innocence and experience in Pullman (Chapter 6), standing alongside the poems of Blake as part of the complex Romantic inheritance that O'Sullivan argues Pullman has sought to secularize in *His Dark Materials*. Tommy Halsdorf's and Susan Redington Bobby's contributions (Chapters 7 and 8 respectively) complement each other in their treatment of another key factor within the trilogy—that of gender. Pullman's dæmons are almost always the opposite sex of the person to whom they 'belong', suggesting that within Lyra's universe binary concepts of gender are fundamental, even while acknowledging that people participate in both genders. Halsdorf looks at the ways in which this state of affairs interacts with socially-constructed notions of gender, and indeed with the conventions of children's narrative, as evinced particularly in Pullman's two protagonists, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry. Bobby explores gender from a different perspective, viewing Lyra and the other major female characters as archetypal figures of female heroism and divinity in a way that offers a corrective to the male-centred 'hero's journey' described by Joseph Campbell. Finally, in Chapter 9 we are fortunate to have had the opportunity to put some of the issues raised in this volume (and elsewhere) to Philip Pullman himself, and this interview brings the substantive part of the volume to a close.

As the variety of responses represented in this book attests, *His Dark Materials* is a complex and challenging work. But while its challenge is partly intellectual (for readers who wish to follow its implications in those terms), we should not forget that the trilogy is also a hugely popular set of books, a monumental feat of storytelling that makes its readers feel as well as think, and a tale that is set to keep innocent and experienced readers alike enthralled for many years to come.

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