

LIONS AND POLAR BEARS AND GENDER ROLES, OH MY!

The Treatment of Women and Femininity in

C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

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I hereby declare that, except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my own original work.

All versions of the submitted thesis (regardless of submission type) are identical.

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## ABSTRACT

From the earliest works of the genre, fantasy fiction has had a complicated relationship with gender and feminism. C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* is seen by many as a prime example of fantasy's patriarchal roots, with its strong adherence to traditional gender roles and controversial treatment of the character Susan. In contrast, Philip Pullman's 'anti-Narnia' *His Dark Materials* is often cited as an instance of pro-feminist fantasy, due to its engaging heroine, compelling female villain, and large cast of secondary female characters. When situated within the workings of the wider fantasy genre, however, the two series' seemingly oppositional stances on women, femininity, and gender roles are called into question. Using close textual analysis, this thesis examines the contrasts and continuities in the portrayal of female characters between Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, in order to demonstrate how authors can unwittingly repeat patriarchal and misogynistic themes and narratives, even when their aim is to refute them.

## INTRODUCTION

Modern fantasy fiction has a complicated relationship with women and femininity, both in the controversial treatment of female writers and readers by the publishing industry and in the portrayal of female characters and experiences. Fantasy fiction using medieval or similar pseudo-historical settings frequently maintains the claustrophobic gender roles associated with the period in the name of realism, excluding female characters from taking active roles in the narrative or from forming relationships with other characters beyond a token heterosexual romance.<sup>1</sup> Other works make efforts to include female characters, but restrict them to stereotypical roles of rebellious princesses, evil seductresses, and doting mother figures.<sup>2</sup> The broader field of fantasy that sets itself beyond the classic medieval setting often invests in the rhetoric of gender equality, but the influence of pre-existing archetypes works to maintain a hierarchy prioritising the masculine over the feminine.<sup>3</sup> The value of examining the fantasy genre is not in that it is a lone culprit, but that these problems appear throughout literature and beyond: as a comparatively young genre, the development of fantasy becomes illustrative of how generations of storytellers can unwittingly repeat patriarchal and misogynistic themes and

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Tolmie, "Medievalism and the Fantasy Heroine," *Journal of Gender Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 145-146.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanne Hoeker LaHaie, "Girls, Mothers, and Others: Female Representation in the Adolescent Fantasy of J. K. Rowling, Philip Pullman, and Terry Pratchett," Dissertation, Western Michigan University, 2012: 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre F. Baker, "What We Found On Our Journey Through Fantasy Land," *Children's Literature in Education* 37, no. 3 (2006): 245-246.

ideals, even when their aim is to refute them. To this end, the subject of this thesis is the influence of C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* series on the portrayal of women and femininity in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

C. S. Lewis is one of the founding figures of modern fantasy, and the *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956) is his most famous contribution to the genre. Just under forty years after the publication of the final *Narnia* book, Philip Pullman published *Northern Lights*, the first book in a trilogy that would become widely known as the "anti-Narnia."<sup>4</sup> Pullman is an outspoken critic of the *Narnia* books, and wrote an article for the centenary of Lewis's birth which described the series as "one of the most ugly and poisonous things I've ever read."<sup>5</sup> As a result, several academic texts have compared *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, though their conclusions on Pullman's criticisms of Lewis and how they are addressed in *His Dark Materials* vary.<sup>6</sup> What the scholarship does largely agree on is how profoundly *Narnia* has influenced *His Dark Materials*, both in reaction and in imitation. Although sexism is one of Pullman's main

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<sup>4</sup> Burton Hatlen, "Pullman's *His Dark Materials* as a Challenge to the Fantasies of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman's Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*," in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, eds Millicent Lenz & Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Pullman, "The Dark Side of Narnia," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), Oct 01, 1998: A6.

<sup>6</sup> Marek Oziewicz and Daniel Hade, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition," *Mythlore* 28, no. 3/4 (2010): 52; Naomi Wood, "Paradise Lost and Found: Obedience, Disobedience, and Storytelling in C. S. Lewis and Philip Pullman," *Children's Literature in Education* 32, no. 4 (2001): 235; William Gray, "Pullman, Lewis, Macdonald, and the Anxiety of Influence," *Mythlore* 25, no. 3/4 (2007): 130; Hatlen, "Challenge to the Fantasies," 82-3.

criticisms of the *Narnia* series, very little has been written about the contrasts and parallels between each author's treatment of female characters.

Despite the comparative youth of the genre, there is substantial academic discussion surrounding gender representation in modern fantasy fiction. "For fantasy," Baker notes, "epic fantasy above all, has been the land of the male hero."<sup>7</sup> The 'swords-and-sorcery' subgenre is noted as a celebration of traditional masculine "virtues" of violence and dominance, sidelining all characters who do not display these characteristics; its little brother, the adventure fantasy, does the same with traits of bravery, leadership, and initiative. Paranormal romance has been criticised for resituating the tenets of rape culture into a supernatural framework,<sup>8</sup> while historical fantasy frequently divorces individual violence from structural violence to reinforce a simplistic view of good and evil.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, fantasy authors such as E. Nesbit, Tamora Pierce, Ursula Le Guin, Diana Wynne Jones, and Terry Pratchett have been praised for their complex subversions of the genre-mandated gender roles, creating heroines who are not merely repackaged versions of the classic fantasy hero but characters for whom femininity has its own positive power.<sup>10</sup> At first

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<sup>7</sup> Baker, "Fantasy Land," 245.

<sup>8</sup> Kristina Deffenbacher, "Rape Myths' Twilight and Women's Paranormal Revenge in Romantic and Urban Fantasy Fiction," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 47, no. 5 (2014): 923.

<sup>9</sup> Lenise Prater, "Monstrous Fantasies: Reinforcing Rape Culture in Fiona McIntosh's Fantasy Novels," *Hecate* 39, no. 1/2 (2013): 148.

<sup>10</sup> Michelle Smith, "E. Nesbit's Psammead Trilogy: Reconfiguring Time, Nation, and Gender," *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 52, no. 3 (2009): 298; Sarah F. Sahn, "Decolonizing Childhood: Coming of Age in Tamora Pierce's Fantastic Empire," *Children's Literature* 44 (2016): 150; Baker, "Fantasy Land," 250. While Baker dismisses Pierce's works as "set in old territory, the territory of a power identifiably male" (247), Sahn's closer reading identifies *Song of the Lioness* protagonist Alanna as engaging with both masculine and

glance, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* would seem to be among these examples of feminist fantasy: it features a female main character, Lyra, whose power lies not in traditionally male spheres but in cunning, impulse, and deception (traditional feminine vices turned to heroic virtues). The trilogy also makes efforts to present a variety of female characters — including a heroic ex-nun turned scientist, an amoral socialite Scholar who performs experiments on children, and an entire race of human-like witches who live for centuries — and rails against the restrictive influence of organised religion. Despite this, the trilogy is so heavily influenced by *Narnia* and the patriarchal and heteronormative values it enshrined, that in many ways it ultimately reflects rather than subverts the limiting gender roles of earlier fantasy works.

Of the early fantasy works, *The Chronicles of Narnia* was one of the first to be explicitly aimed at children. In part due to this influence over young readers, Lewis and his *Narnia* series have been the subject of debate, criticism, and controversy in the decades since its publication. Central among the concerns of *Narnia*'s detractors are the books' didactic Christian overtones, their (hotly debated) racism, and their treatment of female characters.<sup>11</sup> The last of these has received attention from literary scholars and modern fantasy authors alike, such as in Neil Gaiman's short story "The Problem of Susan", which gives voice to a commonly held discomfort about the fate of the elder

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feminine power, with equal respect for each, and a complex discourse of "multiple selves" (167) which echoes throughout Pierce's work.

<sup>11</sup> Examples include Jin Seongeun's "Whiteness and Racism in C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*," Clare Echterling's "Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Classic Children's Literature, and the Imperial-Environmental Imagination in *The Chronicles of Narnia*," and Candice Frederick and Sam McBride's "Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis."

Pevenie sister and how it suggests Lewis's condemnation of female sexuality. Due in part to *Narnia's* place as cherished children's literature, but largely because of Lewis's position as a Christian apologist<sup>12</sup> and a symbol of modern Christianity, many have leapt to the defence of the author's character. These defences cite Lewis's relationships and collaborations with both female fans and fellow writers, as well as his personal theology, to protect him from labels of 'sexist' or 'misogynist'.<sup>13</sup> This thesis's examination of Lewis's treatment of female characters is not intended to be a judgement on the author himself — it has been noted by Lewis scholars that in life, he was often "a better man than his theories"<sup>14</sup> — but an analysis of how *Narnia* contributed to a framework of strict gender roles within the genre. Regardless of the beliefs or feelings of its author, *Narnia* remains a prominent example of the limiting roles imposed on women in fantasy literature.

Defenders of *Narnia's* feminist credentials cite the importance of the central female characters of the series: Lucy, Susan, Aravis, Polly, and Jill. While the prominence of these characters, particularly Lucy, complicates any simplistic view of *Narnia* as a Victorian throwback, Jean E. Graham notes in

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<sup>12</sup> A writer of apologetics for the Christian faith. *Apologetics*: "In theology, the attempt to show that a faith is either provable by reason, or at least consistent with reason. More generally, the attempts to defend a doctrine." Simon Blackburn, ed., "Apologetics," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Oxford Reference.

<sup>13</sup> Michelle Marie Bowden, "The Women of *Narnia*: A Study of C. S. Lewis's Treatment of Female Characters in *The Chronicles of Narnia*." *ProQuest Dissertations Publishing*, 1998: 1-3; Richard C. West, "[Review of] Hilder, Monika B.; Mitchell, Christopher W. (Preface): Surprised by the Feminine: A Rereading of C. S. Lewis and Gender," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26, no. 3 (2015): 621.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, quoted in Sam McBride, "The Company They Didn't Keep: Collaborative Women in the Letters of C. S. Lewis." *Mythlore* 29, no. 1-2 (2010): 71.

her article “Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia” that the variety of female characters is illusory. Graham illustrates how the girl characters of *Narnia* are “tomboys — that is, like boys, only slightly inferior in strength and courage”,<sup>15</sup> while those who grow to become women either fade into the background (mentioned only for producing heirs) or are condemned for their frivolity. This barrier between girlhood and adolescence “threatens to undo the positive representations of gender in the Narnian Chronicles.”<sup>16</sup>

Graham also notes that this serves to divide the female characters, emphasising “[t]he contrast between a vain adolescent girl and a younger, more adventurous girl” and creating a moral dichotomy between them.<sup>17</sup> This reflects

observations made by Brenda Partridge in her examination of homosociality in Tolkien, Lewis, and their contemporaries — martial conflict was established by these early fantasy authors as a field in which to portray “intensely close and supportive” relationships between men “in a context which is socially acceptable”, while women’s relationships were either sidelined or non-existent.

<sup>18</sup> The division between the heroic girl and the passive woman informs this thesis’s use of Jane Tolmie’s theory of female exceptionalism in fantasy, and how it is enforced by the isolation of female characters from constructive homosociality.

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<sup>15</sup> Jean E. Graham, “Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia,” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2004): 41-2.

<sup>16</sup> Graham, “Circe and Lilith,” 41.

<sup>17</sup> Graham, “Circe and Lilith,” 41.

<sup>18</sup> Brenda Partridge, “No Sex Please — We’re Hobbits,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddings (London: Vision Press, 1984): 183-4.

Another common criticism of Lewis's portrayal of women is his use of negative stereotypes in characterising the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle. Graham's article examines the way in which these characters draw on the imagery of Lilith and Circe, both temptresses who use their beauty to lure and manipulate their victims. Graham traces the "pre-Narnian" representations of Lilith and Circe on which Lewis based his witches, highlighting their associations with the material and the corrupt, and their use of deception and seduction as weapons.<sup>19</sup> Most notably, Lewis creates a "peculiar misogynistic theology resulting from combining Circe and Lilith with Satan," gendering God as masculine through Aslan and Satan as feminine through the witches.<sup>20</sup> Like the serpent of Genesis, the witches of Narnia "tempt[] and destroy[]" and are reliant on deceit and manipulation to achieve their ends.<sup>21</sup> Nancy Veglahn, in the article "Images of Evil: Male and Female Monsters in Heroic Fantasy," also notes the centrality of the White Witch as a satanic figure to Aslan's messianic portrayal, observing that while "Lewis's books contain a male devil-figure, Tash, as well as the evil White Witch," the White Witch is the villain who "casts her spell over the early books in Lewis's series [...] an allegorical representation of Eve [...] [who] may also be read as a projection of Lewis's anxieties about the feminine."<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the more abstract representation of evil found in Tash, the White Witch is a manifestation of specifically feminised vice, a corruption of domestic

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<sup>19</sup> Graham, "Circe and Lilith," 37.

<sup>20</sup> Graham, "Circe and Lilith," 41.

<sup>21</sup> Graham, "Circe and Lilith," 35.

<sup>22</sup> Nancy Veglahn, "Images of Evil: Male and Female Monsters in Heroic Fantasy," *Children's Literature* 15 (1987): 109-10.

relationships which become “characterized by strife, manipulation, and a constant struggle for control.”<sup>23</sup> Lewis’s gendered approach to evil highlights a deeply ingrained association between femininity and deception that is drawn on in Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of *Narnia*’s gender representation is its treatment of female sexuality. In the article “No Sex in Narnia? How Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘Snow Queen’ Problematizes C. S. Lewis’ the Chronicles of Narnia,” Jennifer L. Miller compares Lewis’s treatment of sexual activity in his adult works, where it exists largely as a temporary distraction from the pursuit of Heaven, to *Narnia* where mentions of romance are fleeting and sex goes unmentioned.<sup>24</sup> Josh Long’s “Disparaging Narnia” suggests that Lewis’s contemporary J. R. R. Tolkien also took umbrage with Lewis’s outright omission of sexuality, particularly in terms of mythology, one example being that “Lewis failed to maintain the mythical archetype of fauns as lustful” and instead had Mr Tumnus as a gentle, timid character.<sup>25</sup> In spite of the apparent omission of sexual desire, Lewis nonetheless codifies the series’ villainous women as seductive temptresses. Miller believes that this element is an unintentional result of his exclusion of sexuality, comparing the White Witch’s Turkish Delight ploy to the more overt seduction of Kai in Hans Christian Anderson’s *The Snow Queen*:

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<sup>23</sup> Veglahn, “Images of Evil,” 112.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer L. Miller, “No Sex in Narnia? How Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘Snow Queen’ Problematizes C. S. Lewis the Chronicles of Narnia,” *Mythlore* 28, no. 107/108 (2009): 114.

<sup>25</sup> Josh B. Long, “Disparaging Narnia: Reconsidering Tolkien’s View of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*,” *Mythlore* 31, no. 3/4 (2013): 32.

“The Snow Queen kissed Kai once more, and then all memory of Gerda, the Grandmother, and his home disappeared.

“I shant give you any more kisses,” she said, “or I might kiss you to death.””<sup>26</sup>

Miller argues that Lewis’s failure to address sexuality within the series renders it susceptible to the inference of “non-traditional sexual desire”<sup>27</sup> of a boy for an older woman. In the light of Graham’s reading of the White Witch as both Circe and Lilith, however, this parallel seems quite intentional. Without overtly including “what [Lewis] thought [children] would not like or understand,” Lewis introduced the archetypal ‘temptress’ character into Narnia, with all its associated baggage.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, the female protagonists are entirely disassociated from desire. Miller convincingly outlines this dissociation, noting that while Queens Susan and Lucy are portrayed as desirable potential wives to “Kings of the countries beyond the sea” and “all Princes in those parts”, “[t]hese marriages [...] never take place” and the queens themselves never respond to these advances, let alone initiate them.<sup>29</sup> Ramandu’s daughter, who becomes the wife of Caspian, seems to reciprocate, or at least passively accept, his feelings of desire, but is given little attention in this regard, not even being named; she is killed off-screen in the subsequent novel, and the narrative “pays more attention to her as a mother than to her as a

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<sup>26</sup> Andersen, 239-40. Quoted in Miller, “No Sex In Narnia,” 121.

<sup>27</sup> Miller, “No Sex In Narnia,” 123.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, “Fairy Stories,” 528. Quoted in Alison Searle, “Fantastical Fact, Home, or Other? The Imagine ‘Medieval’ in C. S. Lewis,” *Mythlore* 25, no. 97/8 (2007): 10.

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 194-195; Miller, “No Sex In Narnia,” 114.

wife.”<sup>30</sup> While Miller reads this contrast as unintentional, her analysis remains applicable when considering the division between sexual and non-sexual female characters to be an example of a deliberate hierarchy of ‘bad’ and ‘good’ femininity. This moral ranking of feminine expression forms a part of the broader hierarchy in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

The overarching issue that underlies all of these criticisms is that *Narnia* unquestioningly follows a patriarchal hierarchy. Jacobs observes in his chapter on *Narnia* in the *Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis* that when considered through the lens of story, the series is a tale of “disputed sovereignty.”<sup>31</sup> “The story of Narnia concerns an unacknowledged but true King and the efforts of his loyalists to reclaim or protect his throne from would-be usurpers.”<sup>32</sup> This King is in turn Aslan, Peter, Caspian, and Rillian, but any queen who rules alone in Narnia is a false one — Queens Lucy and Susan are subordinate to High King Peter, whereas the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle rule alone and seek to dominate their chosen Princes. *Narnia* also includes subtler references to the prioritising of male virtues and ideals. As Fredrick and McBride note in “Battling the Woman Warrior”, multiple characters in Narnia “identif[y] war as a man’s realm”,<sup>33</sup> sidelining the female protagonists during the battles which occupy a substantial portion of the novels; they note the

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<sup>30</sup> Miller, “No Sex In Narnia,” 115.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Jacobs, “The Chronicles of Narnia,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 274.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Jacobs, “The Chronicles of Narnia,” in *The Cambridge Companion to C.S. Lewis*, eds. Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 274.

<sup>33</sup> Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride, “Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis,” *Mythlore* 25, no. 3/4 (2007): 29.

influence of Lewis’s “medieval worldview” in this context, where “[b]attles are ugly when women fight” but an expression of chivalry when men do, quite in contrast to Lewis’s own experiences in the First World War.<sup>34</sup> The theme of obedience also functions as a division between female and male characters. In Naomi Wood’s examination of Lewis and Pullman’s opposing ideas of authority and obedience, she notes that Lewis supports “a divinely established order with a built-in hierarchy “that consist[s], in descending order, of God, men, women, and animals””,<sup>35</sup> and this is evident in the formation of Narnia. All must submit to Aslan (and by extension his father, the Emperor-beyond-the-Sea), and female characters must submit to male characters, and animal characters to human characters — only ‘sons of Adam and daughters of Eve’ may be crowned rulers of Narnia. A hierarchy based in obedience, birthright, and fate forms the fundamental structure of the Narnia, and no character can rebel against it without punishment.

It is this hierarchy of religion, race, class, and destiny that Pullman highlights in *His Dark Materials*, and which is the focus of most scholarship comparing *His Dark Materials* and *Narnia*. Burton Hatlen’s essay entitled “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, a Challenge to the Fantasies of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman’s Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*” dubbed the trilogy “a kind of ‘anti-Narnia,’ a secular humanist alternative to Lewis’s Christian fantasy,” claiming that Pullman “challenge[s] traditional gender hierarchies by giving women central

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<sup>34</sup> Fredrick & McBride, “Battling the Woman Warrior,” 29.

<sup>35</sup> Wood, “Paradise Lost and Found,” 239. Quote from Bottigheimer, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, 198.

roles in his trilogy.”<sup>36</sup> Hatlen further argues that the battlelines of this opposition are drawn along Lewis and Pullman’s respective “‘orthodox’ and ‘Romantic’ readings of *Paradise Lost*,” Milton’s epic poem from which both *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* draw inspiration; Hatlen explains that while Lewis imagines Narnia as a way back from the Fall of Eve portrayed in Milton’s poem, Pullman’s trilogy celebrates Eve’s rebellion as a humanist victory against a tyrannical God. William Gray’s “Pullman, Lewis, and MacDonald: The Anxiety of Influence” considers Lewis and Pullman in the fantasy tradition alongside George MacDonald, and discusses how each has ‘misread’ the earlier writer and constructed their own writing in relation to it.<sup>37</sup> While Gray’s dismissal of Pullman’s objections to Lewis’s *Narnia* is rather perfunctory, his insight into the connections between the three writers and their literary context is relevant to this thesis’s examination of reactionary influence. Using Harold Bloom’s *Anxiety of Influence* as a guide, Gray traces a series of parallels and reversals between *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* produced through Pullman’s reading and misreading of Lewis’s works and beliefs, as Lewis before him has read and misread the works of George MacDonald. This theory of the multiple ways in which writers form their literary inheritance reflects the complexities and pitfalls in Pullman’s reinterpretation of Narnian archetypes. Gray’s article provides a framework of how reactionary (mis)reading shapes *His Dark Materials* perception of its position in a specific authorial lineage, which I will apply more broadly to the trilogy’s position within the fantasy genre as a whole in order to demonstrate how Pullman’s

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<sup>36</sup> Hatlen, “Challenge to the Fantasies,” 82, 79.

<sup>37</sup> Gray, “Anxiety of Influence,” 117.

conscious focus on the specifics of Lewis and *Narnia* undermine the broader implications of his work. “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition” by Marek Oziewicz and Daniel Hade further explores the relationship between Lewis and Pullman, highlighting that it is not merely one of reactionary antagonism, but a complex mix of admiration and disagreement, which results in “more parallels between HDM and the Chronicles than between HDM, or the Chronicles, and any other fantasy to date.”<sup>38</sup> While Oziewicz and Hade have a largely positive view of these parallels, their thesis is also true for some of the less admirable aspects of Lewis and Pullman’s writing. Wood, as mentioned above, examines the treatment of obedience and disobedience in *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, with particular attention to how each author has responded to the themes of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.<sup>39</sup> *Paradise Lost* is centrally a retelling of how Eve caused the Fall of Man by eating fruit from the Tree of Knowledge; the relevance to this thesis lies in the resultant themes of temptation and self-knowledge, which are used to characterise many of Lewis’s and Pullman’s female characters. With the notable exception of Oziewicz and Hade, most of the criticism comparing *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* treats them as opposites, and portrays Lewis and Pullman as literary antagonists on either end of a wide ideological divide. However, *His Dark Materials* is fundamentally shaped by its engagement with *Narnia*, and through close textual analysis of each series’ treatment of women and femininity, this thesis aims to show the limitations of the adversarial approach of Pullman’s critique. Contrary to the

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<sup>38</sup> Oziewicz and Hade, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,” 45.

<sup>39</sup> Wood, “Paradise Lost and Found,” 237.

perception of Lewis and Pullman's portrayals of women as incompatible with one another, this thesis will demonstrate the continuity between each author's approach to female characters, in order to demonstrate how the same patriarchal and heterocentric narratives are passed down and repeated even in seemingly antithetical works.

The first chapter of this thesis will focus on Jane Tolmie's theory of female exceptionalism and how it is expressed in *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*.<sup>40</sup> 'Female exceptionalism' describes the promotion of one female character as an exception to the rule that women are less worthy, less competent, or less interesting — usually by having said character demonstrate masculine virtues and skills. While superficially inclusive, female exceptionalism relies on the idea that those skills and virtues considered 'feminine' are less valuable and that only those women of proven masculine skill are worthy of attention and respect. As noted by Graham, *Narnia* divides these characters along age lines, with childhood becoming the age where girls may acceptably demonstrate masculine coded prowess before fading into obscurity as adults. Pullman partially subverts this by demonstrating the value of female-coded traits such as manipulation and compassion, yet the protagonist Lyra continues to value masculine traits throughout the majority of the series, and develops very few relationships with other female characters. This chapter will examine the tension between Pullman's rejection of paternalistic sexism and the limited scope of his female characters' relationships.

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<sup>40</sup> Tolmie, "Medievalism and the Fantasy Heroine," 147.

The subject of the second chapter is the characterisation of villainous women and the use of materialism and deception as female vices. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the characterisation of Marisa Coulter borrows from the characterisation of the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle, and how these perpetuate a narrative of the villainous woman in fantasy. The use of materialism as a hallmark of female vice reinforces the stereotype of the shallow, self-interested woman as the ultimate evil, and tars any material expressions of femininity with the same brush as bourgeois consumerism. Deceit and seduction also form a part of the villainous woman's arsenal, harkening back to the Satan-like Lilith described by Graham.

Continuing on the theme of temptation, the final chapter will discuss the moralising of female sexuality. On this subject, Lewis and Pullman seem to be in direct opposition, but their arguments are at the extreme ends of the spectrum and ultimately come to mirror each other. Lewis excises any display of sexuality from his female protagonists and excludes those in whom it might be suspected, while giving his female villains all the hallmarks of the evil seductress; in contrast, Pullman essentialises sexuality, particularly for women, with the result that the vast majority of the female characters in *His Dark Materials* are defined by their past, present, and future heterosexual relationships. While Lewis's characters must resist entering a sexual realm in order to remain in Narnia (and later, enter Aslan's Country), Pullman's are unable to achieve self-knowledge until they engage in some form of sexual activity. As such, sexuality becomes as centralised to the female identity in *His Dark Materials* as it is in *Narnia*.

While these aspects of gender stereotypes and patriarchal hierarchy are extant throughout literature, in genres both young and old, there is a specific value in choosing fantasy texts as my subject. This is not because they are somehow universal, but because they abstract and distil elements of human experience into that which is both strange and familiar. Fantasy is a genre that thrives on the reader's ability to see themselves in the unrecognisable; as Felski describes, our reading is enriched by "moments of recognition across the chasm of different worlds."<sup>41</sup> It is a mode in which our empathy is turned to the most unlikely places, and we see ourselves in the strangest of mirrors. If modern writers in this genre, which so openly provides the tools to find humanity in everything from hobbits to house-elves, struggle to capture the full humanity of women, it is worth examining why.

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<sup>41</sup> Rita Felski, *Literature After Feminism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003): 16.

# I

## NOT LIKE THE OTHER GIRLS

### *Female Exceptionalism & Homosociality*

*The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* both use techniques common to the fantasy genre to develop their female characters; the most prominent of these is female exceptionalism. Female exceptionalism is a problem which is pervasive throughout modern fantasy fiction and fiction as a whole.<sup>42</sup> Writers are encouraged to create ‘strong female characters’, either to broaden their appeal or to escape accusations of sexism, but the strength of these characters often relies on their being the exception that proves the rule. Jane Tolmie notes that this form of representation can be traced back to medieval storytelling, where individual women may be powerful or successful but women as a whole remain subject to stereotypical limitations.<sup>43</sup> Frequently, women must assume a masculine identity in order to be judged as equal to their male comrades or worthy of narrative attention. Sometimes this is literal, in cases of cross-dressing heroines masquerading as men, but a metaphorical variant appears with startling frequency. The girl or woman who has traditionally masculine interests and few displays of ‘feminine’ emotions is accepted by the male characters (and by proxy, the reader) as the exception to the rule that women are unimportant or uninteresting. These characters often join their male compatriots in heaping scorn on traditional feminine traits and

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Tolmie, "Medievalism and the Fantasy Heroine," *Journal of Gender Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 147.

<sup>43</sup> Tolmie, "Medievalism and the Fantasy Heroine," 145-6.

interests, and either implicitly or explicitly eschew the company of other women. This narrative implies that while a female may (if sufficiently extraordinary) be worthy of respect, the feminine is not.<sup>44</sup>

The limitations of this form of representation are many. Not only does it belittle those feminine-coded abilities and tasks that have historically been undervalued, it also counter-intuitively reinforces hierarchical gender relations. The exceptionalist narrative creates a female character who fits within a male-dominated sphere as a subject, but without discarding those physical aspects of femininity that make her appealing as an object: she may be an excellent wrestler, swordswoman, or archer, but she will never have the resulting physique to place her outside an acceptably feminine body type. She may have little to no interest in fashion or makeup, but will be able to appear stunningly attired and impossibly beautiful when called upon. In works of children's and young adult literature such as *Narnia* and *His Dark Materials*, the female characters may be wilful, intelligent, and determined, but never so much as to dominate the male heroes. The potential subversiveness of a female heroine taking on male traits is undermined by the maintenance of a strict gender hierarchy: the heroine's abilities and achievements are always secondary to those of the hero, and her more masculine interests primarily serve to make her more acceptable to an audience who are expected to prioritise the male.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Deirdre F. Baker, "What We Found on Our Journey through Fantasy Land," *Children's Literature in Education* 37, no. 3 (2006): 247.

<sup>45</sup> Jean E. Graham, "Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2004): 41-42.

Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* frequently uses this imbalance of power to characterise its heroines. Polly Plummer of *The Magician's Nephew* is described early in the novel as "as brave as [Digory] about some dangers (wasps, for instance) but she was not so interested in finding out things nobody has ever heard of before"<sup>46</sup> – brave enough to bother including, but lacking the ambition and complexity of her male counterpart. Polly is given comparatively little background and her role is quickly shifted to the periphery in favour of Digory (the titular 'Magician's Nephew') and his quest to save his mother. Lucy, Aravis, and Jill are given more opportunities to display their traditional heroic qualities. Despite Father Christmas's assertion in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* that the weapons he provides Susan and Lucy are only "to defend [themselves] at great need" (and indeed, Lucy is never shown to use the dagger she is given, only the healing cordial), Queen Lucy is described in *The Horse and His Boy* as "a fair haired lady with a very merry face who wore a helmet and a mail shirt and carried a bow across her shoulder and a quiver of arrows at her side."<sup>47</sup> While Lucy's ability is somewhat undermined by "a back-handed compliment on this subject"<sup>48</sup> — "[She's] as good as a man [in battle], or at any rate as good as a boy"<sup>49</sup> — she nonetheless takes an active part in the defense of Narnia and Archenland, while her sister Susan takes the

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<sup>46</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 29.

<sup>47</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* and *The Horse and His Boy*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 160, 287.

<sup>48</sup> Candice Fredrick and Sam McBride, "Battling the Woman Warrior: Females and Combat in Tolkien and Lewis," *Mythlore* 25, no. 3/4 (2007): 37.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 290.

passive role of prize (the war in question being fought over Susan's hand in marriage.) Her ability is not shown in any detail, however, and as an archer she is at a distance from the fighting, unlike her brother Edmund and the various Lords of Narnia who fight in the cavalry. In the same book, Aravis Tarkheena has all the benefits of a noblewoman's education and thus "rid[es] magnificently", and is "interested in bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming."<sup>50</sup> She is presented as an exception in her interests, however, and by the climax of the novel, it is not Aravis but the untrained Shasta/Cor who warns the Archenlanders of the attack and rides in the battle.<sup>51</sup> Cor is described as having become a great swordsman in his adulthood, but any accomplishments of Aravis, martial or otherwise, go unmentioned.<sup>52</sup> These characters must maintain their ambition in girlhood (although never so much as to overshadow their male companions), but to become "an ordinary grown-up lady" is to retire from narrative relevance.<sup>53</sup> It is no coincidence that Susan, the most adult of all *Narnia's* heroines, is excluded from the Friends of Narnia in *The Last Battle*; nor is it without meaning that Lucy dies at seventeen, just on the cusp of adulthood, or that Jill Pole is most active and celebrated throughout *The Last Battle*, in which she is already dead and has no need to suppress her aspirations in preparation for womanhood. Through their maintenance of youth and innocence, Lucy and Jill become exceptions to the destiny of other Narnian

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 216, 251.

<sup>51</sup> In a rare display of realism, Shasta does very little in the battle besides fall off his horse and narrowly avoid being trampled to death.

<sup>52</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 310.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 290.

women: “to marry and bear [an] heir, to give up on dreams and [...] ‘[h]ave children instead.’”<sup>54</sup>

In the context of Pullman’s criticism of *Narnia*’s treatment of women and girls, it is unsurprising that *His Dark Materials*’ protagonist, Lyra Belacqua, is established as a direct contrast to Lewis’s best known heroine, Lucy Pevensie. This comparison is signalled in the first chapter of *Northern Lights*: Lyra is compelled to hide in a wardrobe of fur-lined robes, just as the first chapter of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* sees Lucy enter a wardrobe of fur coats in her first fateful entrance into Narnia. The similarity of the imagery emphasises the contrast in circumstance: Lucy innocently enters a wardrobe to feel the fur coats, while Lyra has deliberately entered a private room from which she is barred and chooses the wardrobe as a hiding place to avoid punishment. In their respective wardrobes, Lucy becomes a naïve visitor to another world who is guided and eventually shown mercy by the fawn Tumnus, and Lyra is temporarily recruited as a spy for her uncle, Lord Asriel. While Lucy is being deceived by Tumnus, Lyra deceives the scholars whose meeting she is secretly observing. The contrast between Lyra and Lucy only becomes clearer throughout *Northern Lights*. Unlike Lucy, who is characterised by her innocence and scrupulous honesty, Lyra is disobedient, cynical, and takes pride in her ability to deceive. She is described early on in the novel as “half-wild, half-civilised”, “[i]n many ways [...] a barbarian” who is happily “engaged in deadly warfare” against the other children in Oxford.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Graham, “Women, Sex, & Power,” 42. Quoting Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 21, 35.

Throughout *Northern Lights*, she travels with the socially outcast ‘gyptians’ (a fictionalised seafaring version of the Romani people) and challenges established authorities — particularly that of the Church — leading a rebellion of the kidnapped children at Bolvangar and eventually choosing to cross into another world in order to protect Dust from her father. Lyra, unlike Lucy, is not given a clear path to choose between good and evil: she misjudges people and their intentions, and in her mind casts herself in a story quite unlike reality, leading to the tragic murder of her friend Roger, whose kidnapping had motivated her for much of the novel. Her story is not one of triumph or trust in fate — in fact, unwavering faith in her interpretation of what is told to her by the alethiometer<sup>56</sup> is what leads her astray. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra’s journey is towards self-determination, where she learns not to be guided by pre-existing ‘sides’ of a conflict and chooses to try to find the right way on her own. In contrast to Lucy’s journey in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, which is primarily concerned with having faith in and obeying Aslan, in *Northern Lights* Lyra’s arc is a championing of choice.

This highlighting of the importance of choice and the arbitrariness of binary divisions is somewhat undermined by Pullman’s overreliance on female exceptionalism in detailing Lyra’s character. In the same chapter that Pullman uses to first establish the contrast between Lyra and Lucy, we are told that the pain in Lyra’s arm “might have been enough to make her cry, if she was the sort of girl who cried.”<sup>57</sup> She goes on to bluntly reject the idea that she might

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<sup>56</sup> An instrument for telling the truth; referred to in the North American title of *Northern Lights* as *The Golden Compass*.

<sup>57</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 19.

want other girls as friends, and has been raised to “regard[] female scholars with a proper Jordan disdain.”<sup>58</sup> As these instances appear early in the narrative, the reader might hazard a guess that these are a result of her male-centric upbringing, and Lyra may come to understand and respect women throughout the narrative. However, the introduction of Mrs Coulter further cements Lyra’s antagonistic relationship with the feminine. Marisa Coulter represents feminine beauty, the importance of social influence, and the possibility of a life outside of the masculine institution of Oxford — and she is also the principal villain of *Northern Lights*. Initially enchanted by her glamour, knowledge, and tales of adventure, Lyra is surrendered to her care by the Master of Jordan, whom Lyra views with some suspicion after having seen him attempt to poison Lord Asriel. Unlike Lyra, the reader is privy to both the Master’s anxiety for her wellbeing and Mrs Coulter’s part in child abductions, so when the “grand and stony and masculine” beauty of Jordan is compared to Mrs Coulter’s “pretty” London flat, attention is drawn to “[c]harming pictures in gilt frames,” “frills”, “flowery valances” and “soap [that is] soft rose-pink and fragrant”<sup>59</sup> — the cloying, superficial feminine that disguises Mrs Coulter’s ruthless intentions. Notably, Lyra’s *dæmon*<sup>60</sup> Pantalaimon is not enthralled by these feminine luxuries as Lyra is, and his misgivings are quickly proved correct.

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<sup>58</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 50, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 69-70.

<sup>60</sup> In *His Dark Materials*, *dæmons* are an external form of the soul, most commonly a different gender to their human.

Lyra's subsequent relationship with femininity is strained, and she continues to be marked out as exceptional among other girls and women. On the gyptian mission to the North to rescue the children taken by the Gobblers, no women aside from Lyra are permitted to join.<sup>61</sup> Later, when she is captured and taken to Bolvangar, Lyra pretends to be a "slow and stupid" girl called Lizzie Brooks, a caricature of Lyra's own perception of other girls;<sup>62</sup> Pullman takes the time to inform the reader that "[Lyra] had never had a doll" in preparation for distinguishing her from the other kidnapped girls.<sup>63</sup> Three girls who share a dormitory with Lyra are given names (the first girl characters named since the mention of Jessie Reynolds' disappearance, 155 pages earlier) but they are treated as an example of how 'ordinary' girls of that age behave: "[They] sat together, an instant gang, excluding everyone else in order to gossip about them" and are at "the age when boys talk to boys and girls to girls,"<sup>64</sup> contrasted with Lyra's friendship with Roger and Billy. This culminates in Serafina Pekkala divulging that Lyra is the subject of a "curious prophecy": she is "Eve, again", "destined to bring about the end of destiny."<sup>65</sup> This exemplifies the central contradiction of the trilogy: the story champions free will, but Lyra's importance is predetermined. This reflects a larger problem with the fantasy motif of the 'chosen one': when a character is 'chosen', through prophecy, inheritance, or some other supernatural force, it allows writers to use characters of unusual or underrepresented backgrounds

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<sup>61</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 130.

<sup>62</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 204.

<sup>63</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 206.

<sup>64</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 213.

<sup>65</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 263, 617.

without challenging the broad assumptions that have led to the underrepresentation of these characters. In the case of Lyra, scorn and stereotypes are heaped on the unchosen many to highlight her exceptional status, while her personal achievements will ultimately be overshadowed by her role in the prophecy. Her isolation from any ‘unchosen’ female characters contributes to an overall tendency in which women, despite their physical presence, continue to be relegated to the margins of the larger narrative.

To understand how the relationships between female characters affect their position in the narrative of rebellion, one must understand the importance of male homosocial relationships in the construction of the fantasy genre. Depictions of homosocial companionship formed part of the appeal of fantasy literature from its inception. In Britain, the culture of male companionship had dramatically changed post-1895 when Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years hard labour for gross indecency: physical affection between men became highly suspect, and close male friendships were scrutinised.<sup>66</sup> As a result, mythology and legends depicting war and combat became one of the few areas where homosocial intimacy was seen as largely above suspicion. Lewis and fellow fantasy author J. R. R. Tolkien were both raised in the post-Wilde era, and both identified with medieval ideal of “the mutual love of warriors who die

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Stephenson, “Precarious Poses: the Problem of Artistic Visibility and its Homosocial Performances in Late-Nineteenth-Century London,” *Visual Culture in Britain* 8, no. 1 (2007): 74.

together” as the peak of human intimacy,<sup>67</sup> this became a central theme of Tolkien’s most famous works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

While *The Chronicles of Narnia* does not exclude women to the extent of *Lord of the Rings*, it does follow a similar path to Tolkien’s work in making martial conflict and the heroic quest central to its narrative. In these spaces, male characters mingle freely, forming homosocial bonds of friendship, fealty, and camaraderie; female characters, however, tend to be isolated and restricted to the periphery of the narrative. The archetypal roles prescribed in these early fantasy texts centralise the relationships between male heroes, sidekicks, brothers, mentors, and allies, while the exceptional heroine has little contact with other female characters that is not triangulated through a male character. Where relationships between female characters do exist within this framework, they are either antagonistic or coded as an underdeveloped mother-child bond rather than a relationship of equals. This framework can and has been altered throughout the history of fantasy fiction to create a more egalitarian vision that includes notions of sisterhood and other female relationships in its construction of ‘found family’, but the influence of the original male-centric blueprint persists. Notably, both Lewis and Pullman modify this blueprint in part and some of their female characters are given the potential for meaningful homosocial relationships, but ultimately the novels invest little time in developing them.

In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, female characters nearly always form “pairings” with male characters, either as romantic couples or more

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<sup>67</sup> Brenda Partridge, “No Sex Please — We’re Hobbits,” in *J. R. R. Tolkien: This Far Land*, ed. Robert Giddings (London: Vision Press, 1984): 181.

prominently as a pair of friends or siblings;<sup>68</sup> the only exceptions to this are the two witches. Although Lewis reportedly found the idea of two children being romantically involved “profoundly uncomfortable”, he nonetheless maintains a heterocentric dynamic in these pairings which focuses primarily on cross-gender relationships.<sup>69</sup> In addition to this heterocentric structure, the male members of these pairings act as though they were chaperones to their female companions in the world of Narnia, which is largely devoid of women who are not married, evil, or anonymous nature spirits. Lucy and Susan are the only female protagonists who share substantial space on the page, and the basis of their relationship is their mutual love of Aslan, an explicitly masculine interpretation of Christ.<sup>70</sup> Although Aravis is briefly harboured by her friend Lasaraleen in *The Horse and His Boy*, their scenes together primarily serve to paint Lasaraleen as a simple-minded socialite obsessed with her own wealth, in contrast to the quick-witted and rebellious Aravis.<sup>71</sup> While Shasta/Cor is shown developing relationships with Prince Corin, King Edmund, King Lune, and the titular horse, Bree, Aravis’s remaining friendships consist of one with her horse, Hwin (with whom she discusses Bree, Shasta, and little else), and a single sentence about her meeting Queen Lucy: “They liked each other at once and soon went away together to talk about Aravis’s bedroom and Aravis’s boudoir and about getting clothes for her, and all the sort of things girls do talk

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<sup>68</sup> Jennifer L. Miller, “No Sex in Narnia? How Hans Christian Andersen’s ‘Snow Queen’ Problematizes C. S. Lewis the Chronicles of Narnia,” *Mythlore* 28, no. 107/108 (2009): 114.

<sup>69</sup> Miller, “No Sex in Narnia,” 115.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, “A Sword between the Sexes: C. S. Lewis’s Long Journey to Gender Equality,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 36, no. 4 (2007): 399.

<sup>71</sup> Graham, “Women, Sex, and Power,” 40-41.

about on such an occasion.”<sup>72</sup> Lewis appears keen to imply harmony between his female protagonists as long as they are all on the ‘Good’ side of *Narnia*’s strict moral divide, but shows comparatively little interest in the development of these friendships. Rather damningly, the next interaction between any of the female protagonists (both in terms of publication order and internal chronology) is in the final book, *The Last Battle*, in which Jill, Polly, and Lucy bemoan the failings of Susan, who is no longer a “friend of Narnia.”<sup>73</sup> Using *Narnia*’s other heroines to reprimand Susan’s conduct cements the trend that there are no real connections between the women of Narnia: one is either with them or against them.

The ‘problem of Susan’ and the limited roles of Narnian women are well-known criticisms of the *Narnia* series of which Pullman was highly aware while writing *His Dark Materials*, and the trilogy makes efforts to complicate the basic fantasy roles described above.<sup>74</sup> The trilogy contains substantially more female characters in central roles than *Narnia*, and the main female characters give depth and complexity to their archetypes: Lyra’s most valuable weapons are her wits, the maternal Ma Costa holds great respect within her community, and the wise witch-queen Serafina Pekkala must deal with inter-clan politics. The witches as a group are an entire species of women who can only have what are to them extremely brief relationships with men. Despite this, many of the female characters are sidelined by the larger plot elements of

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<sup>72</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 305.

<sup>73</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 741.

<sup>74</sup> Notably describing Susan as “a Cinderella in a story where the Ugly Sisters (*sic*) win.” Philip Pullman, “The Dark Side of Narnia,” *The Guardian* (1959-2003), Oct 01, 1998: A6.

the trilogy: both the martial conflict that is Lord Asriel's war against Metatron and the quest narrative followed by Lyra and Will. Ma Costa disappears from the story partway through *Northern Lights*, as no women save Lyra are allowed to join the gyptian journey north; Xaphania, the leader of the angels rebelling against Metatron, appears only twice, once for a single line of dialogue; even Lyra herself spends the first half of *The Amber Spyglass* in a drug-induced coma.

When the characters are not simply excluded from the narrative, their place within it is defined by their relationship with a male character. Pullman introduces almost all of his female characters by their relationship to a man. The least noticeable of these is Lyra, who is defined as Lord Asriel's niece (later daughter) and Roger's friend; Ma Costa is introduced as Billy Costa's mother; Serafina Pekkala as Farder Coram's lover; Ruta Skadi as Lord Asriel's lover; Jutta Kamainen's main attribute is having been scorned by Stanislaus Grumman; Angelica is primarily concerned with the protection of and revenge for her older brother; Ama is "the herdsman's daughter";<sup>75</sup> the Lady Salmakia is Chevalier Tialys's partner and Lord Asriel's spy. While some of these characters grow beyond their initial designation, the majority of the time their relationships to male characters dominate their conversations and motivations. Serafina's maternal feelings for Lyra are the principal exception to this, although she is also 'paired' with Lee Scoresby to form Lyra's substitute parents. The only other prominent witch characters, Jutta Kamainen and Ruta Skadi, are solely motivated by their relationships to Stanislaus Grumman and

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<sup>75</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman's Library, 2011): 683.

Lord Asriel, respectively; the nature of the witches' attachment to their lovers or potential lovers ultimately functions to make the motivations of an all-female species centre on men. The emphasis on sexuality may be distinctly un-Narnian, but this echoes the way the pairing of all female characters with a male character serves to limit their agency: instead of a physical presence, the male touchstones of each of *His Dark Materials*' female characters occupy mental space, governing their motivations. Compared to these influential male-female relationships, female homosociality is fleeting and of little consequence.

One character who does not follow this tendency is the scientist Mary Malone, who is introduced in *The Subtle Knife* and becomes a central character in the trilogy's final instalment, *The Amber Spyglass*. One of the few female characters who is not introduced in relation to a male character, Mary has her own unique outlook on the central problem of Dust, known to her as dark matter; in her investigation of the phenomenon, she enters other worlds and comes to the universe of the *mulefa*, a species of intelligent wheel-riding elephant-like creatures who hold a similar position in their world as humans do in Mary's. There she befriends a female member of the *mulefa*, Atal, forming the most prominent female friendship in the entire trilogy. Mary and Atal discuss metaphysics, perform grooming rituals, and tell stories to each other;<sup>76</sup> subsequently, Mary accepts the charge to help the *mulefa* save the seed-trees which are essential to their survival.<sup>77</sup> Her relationship with Atal leads her to

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<sup>76</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 833, 835, 839.

<sup>77</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 843.

understand the nature of Dust, a central question of the trilogy.<sup>78</sup> Yet the culmination of Mary's character arc has little to do with Atal, the *mulefa*, or even her understanding of Dust. A ghost fleeing the underworld speaks to Mary before disintegrating: "You must tell them true stories, and everything will be well, everything. Just tell them stories."<sup>79</sup> Mary then performs her prophesied role as 'the serpent', which consists of describing her first experience of romantic attraction to Lyra and Will, in order to catalyse their mutual admissions of love and subsequent sexual awakening. Her relationship with Atal and the other *mulefa*, although in some ways profoundly intimate, never quite loses the peculiar distance of an anthropologist studying an obscure tribe. As such, her farewell to Atal is heartfelt, but quickly overshadowed by the dramatic separation of Lyra and Will; Mary's final role is to be a convenient guardian for Will. Decentralised from the larger narrative, Mary's identity as a scientist and as a friend is partially explored but then discarded in favour of her romantic and sexual history.

Lyra herself begins as the other exception to the rule in *Northern Lights*: while she is frequently referred to as the niece and later daughter of Lord Asriel, and her motivation for finding the Gobblers is to rescue her friend Roger and help her father, they do not overshadow her other interests and motivations. She has little contact with female equals at this stage, but this largely functions to add to the sense of isolation and uncertainty that

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<sup>78</sup> Rebekah Fitzsimmons, "Dialectical "Complexifications": The Centrality of Mary Malone, Dust, and the Mulefa in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 22, no. 2 (2011): 229.

<sup>79</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1012.

characterises Lyra's experience in *Northern Lights*. It is the introduction of Will Parry at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife* that begins to diminish the importance of Lyra's own motivations, as the focus of the trilogy shifts abruptly from Lyra to Will. The alethiometer itself directs Lyra to sideline her own mission: "You must concern yourself with the boy. Your task is to help him find his father. Put your mind to that."<sup>80</sup> When she does not immediately change her priorities to Will's, she is punished with the loss of the alethiometer.<sup>81</sup> Her relationship with Will abruptly becomes the most important part of her life, and allies such as Serafina's witch-clan immediately reorient themselves around him. Lyra's motivations for the rest of the trilogy consist of fulfilling her promise to the dead Roger (who is trapped in the underworld) and helping Will: Will and Lyra's mutual declaration of love forms the climax of the book. Lyra attributes her character development to Will's influence — "Once, she would have revelled in showing [her ability to separate from her dæmon] off to all her urchin friends [...] but Will had taught her the value of silence and discretion," and all of her other relationships are depicted as less important than her love for Will.<sup>82</sup>

Pullman does seem to be aware of some of the limitations with Lyra's character arc, indicated by the inclusion of a scene near the end of *The Amber Spyglass* where Lyra changes her opinion of the female scholar Dame Hannah and decides to accept a placement at a girls' boarding school after being told,

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<sup>80</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman's Library, 2011): 421.

<sup>81</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 487.

<sup>82</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1085, 1087.

“‘You see, one thing you’ll need soon, Lyra, is the friendship of other girls your age.’”<sup>83</sup> But, like the one sentence given to the friendship of Lucy and Aravis, this is a footnote rather than the result of any particular character development. Lyra’s need for friendships with other girls is not alluded to at any point prior to this scene, nor has there been any clear path of thought which has led Lyra to reconsider her thoughts on her peers. Instead, like Susan’s interest in invitations and nylons, it is merely a symptom of ‘becoming a woman.’

While Pullman makes efforts to subvert the ideals of femininity set out by Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, he ultimately replicates the use of female exceptionalism in his characterisation of Lyra. The female characters of *His Dark Materials* are fascinating in conception, but their development is consistently shaped by their identities as mother or lovers, and in a conflict centred around ideals of free will and the nature of evil, their decisions are more often than not determined by the male character to whom they are connected. In adopting wholesale the masculine-centric narratives of early fantasy fiction, Pullman decentralises the majority of his female characters and relegates female homosociality to an afterthought. The limits Pullman places on women’s positions and motivations in *His Dark Materials* also shape the way he characterises vice and virtue, which is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>83</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1085.

## II

### MATERIAL SEDUCTION

#### *Gendering Vice and Virtue*

The nature of evil is a common subject in fantasy fiction, and one on which Lewis and Pullman appear to differ drastically. Lewis constructs evil as disloyalty and hubris: those who seek to usurp Aslan are evil, while his followers are good. Pullman portrays evil as the quashing of independent thought, particularly in the name of top-down hierarchies like that of the *Narnia* series. Despite these opposing viewpoints on the large-scale definition of evil, on the smaller scale Lewis and Pullman actually characterise vice in very similar — and gendered — ways.

Negative attributes, like positive ones, have been highly gendered throughout history, and the perceived divide between male and female evil has become the source of some of the most pervasive archetypes in literary expression. With the development of feminist literary theory, the villainesses of yesteryear whose motivations are sympathetic to the modern reader have become obvious candidates for literary rehabilitation, yet there remains a substantial difference in the portrayal of male and female evil. In her examination of how male and female monsters are treated by male and female authors, Nancy Veglahn observes that while male villains are usually seen as solitary, inhuman emissaries of a monolithic greater evil, female villains are warped versions of traditional female roles: “domineering wives, domestic tyrants”, warring sisters, and bad mothers, all “destructively entwined with

others.”<sup>84</sup> While Veglahn argues that this is a manifestation of gender difference in human moral development, and that these depictions of evil reflect what each gender fears in the other, this theme of female evil as a warped version of wife or mother is confined neither to male authors nor to modern fantasy. Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* famously portrays the descent into madness of Lady Macbeth, whose ambition overcomes her husband’s misgivings and leads him to commit murder; her dominance in the relationship, as well as her desire to forsake normal gender roles (“Unsex me here!”), creates a twisted mirror of the modest self-sacrificing wife.<sup>85</sup> In Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s 1862 sensation novel *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the evils of the titular Lady Audley begin with abandoning her son with his grandfather after her (first) husband leaves them; this unmaternal behaviour joined with her proclivity for deception and personal greed together make a mockery of the Victorian ideal wife and mother.<sup>86</sup> While modern works are less likely to portray women as being evil simply for being ambitious or dominating their husbands, contemporary portrayals of evil women borrow heavily from these earlier examples. Of particular relevance to current anxieties over consumerism, characterisations revolving around shallowness, materialism, and deception have become common. Not only are these traits

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<sup>84</sup> Nancy Veglahn, “Images of Evil: Male and Female Monsters in Heroic Fantasy,” *Children’s Literature* 15 (1987): 111-2.

<sup>85</sup> Catherine E. Thomas, “(Un)Sexing Lady Macbeth: Gender, Power, And Visual Rhetoric In Her Graphic Afterlives,” *The Upstart Crow* 31 (2012): 81-82.

<sup>86</sup> Elisabetta Marino, “‘The Devil In The House’: The Character Of Lucy In *Lady Audley’s Secret* By Mary Elizabeth Braddon,” *British and American Studies* 20 (2014): 15-6.

disproportionately given to female or effeminate male characters, they are treated in such a way as to become almost synonymous with femininity itself.

Such a portrayal of female villainy can be seen in Lewis's characterisation of Jadis, also known as the White Witch, and the Lady of the Green Kirtle. They initially present themselves as beautiful and kind fantasy mother figures who will give aid and power to their favoured child; but this is quickly revealed to be a charade. Rather than being supportive mothers, Jadis and the Lady represent the danger of tyrannical wives. Both have usurped power from a rightful King and seek a substitute whom they may control. Jadis tells Digory that they can rule Narnia together if he eats the silver apple that will grant him immortality; the Lady of the Green Kirtle kidnaps Prince Rilian in order to magically brainwash him into becoming her ever-obedient Knight.

<sup>87</sup> Their unsuitability as wives is symbolised by their age (Jadis is an adult while Digory is a child, and the Lady is noted to be thousands of years old compared to the thirty-year-old Rilian) and their attempts to control their potential suitors: after hearing the Knight's description of his relationship with the Lady, Jill comments, "Where I come from [...] they don't think much of men who are bossed about by their wives."<sup>88</sup> The witches' controlling natures and positions as potential co-rulers to Digory and Rilian function as a reflection of anxieties surrounding women's influence in the political sphere. Jill suggests in the same scene that the Knight will be "a wicked tyrant,"

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<sup>87</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 93.

<sup>88</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 622.

calling to mind historical leaders who were portrayed as being controlled by vain and materialistic wives, such as Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.<sup>89</sup> Jadis and the Lady represent two variants of the ‘bad wife’ archetype. Jadis is vain, cold, and controlling, surrounded by luxury to the point of excess while taking out any displeasure on her subjects; even Digory’s Uncle Andrew, who admires her as a “dem fine woman,” cowers before her.<sup>90</sup> She is openly aggressive and makes no secret of her tyrannical nature, but appeals to others with promises of riches and status. The Lady of the Green Kirtle is far subtler and more persuasive, easily deceiving Jill and Eustace on their first encounter and almost succeeding in convincing them that their memories of Narnia, England, and Aslan are mere fantasies; however, once her true nature has been revealed, she transforms into a deadly serpent, revealing the monster within. While Digory and Rilian both manage to escape their respective witch’s influence, Narnia’s female villains demonstrate the dangers of women seeking power, whose material beauty allows them to temporarily masquerade as ideals of femininity.

In *His Dark Materials*, Pullman draws heavily on the depiction of Narnia’s witches in his characterisation of Mrs Coulter. Much like the parallels between the introduction of Lucy and Lyra, Mrs Coulter’s first scene is highly reminiscent of the introduction of the White Witch in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. *Northern Lights* introduces the reader to a young boy, Tony Makarios, who is approached by “[a] lady in a yellow-red fox-fur coat” whose

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<sup>89</sup> Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 622. Other examples span from Byzantine Emperor Justinian I and his wife Theodora to Zimbabwe’s Robert and Grace Mugabe.

<sup>90</sup> Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 106.

beauty and sympathetic demeanour quickly enchant him; she offers him chocolatl, as she has “more than [she] can drink [her]self”, if he comes with her.<sup>91</sup> The chocolatl, an expensive foreign beverage, is an obvious parallel to the White Witch’s enchanted Turkish Delight; more subtly, Mrs Coulter’s fox-fur coat references the Witch’s fur mantle, the use of fur implying softness and wealth alongside the necessary death of the skinned animal. While Pullman portrays Tony Makarios with more sympathy than Lewis grants Edmund, both scenes use the same contrast of the boys’ childlike greed with the easy manipulation by beautiful, wealthy women. The subsequent scene of Mrs Coulter leading Tony back to the house where the other children are kept takes on a similar quality to the Lady of the Green Kirtle’s attempts to keep the heroes of *The Silver Chair* in Underland: the “sweet and drowsy smell” of the enchanted fire is echoed in the “warm and steamy cellar”, and the beautiful Queen of Underland’s “kind, soft, musical laugh” and “soothing voice” are recalled by “the beautiful lady” who appears “so gracious and sweet and kind” that she easily persuades the children to help her.<sup>92</sup> The rumours about where the abducted children are taken to — “to Hell, under the ground, to Fairyland”<sup>93</sup> — also reference the Underland scene. While this scene draws a clear distinction between the nature of evil in *Northern Lights* and in *Narnia* — *Narnia*’s witches are outcasts and aberrations who cast magical enchantments, while Mrs Coulter and the General Oblation Board prey on existing

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<sup>91</sup> Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 40-1.

<sup>92</sup> Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 629; Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 43.

weaknesses in society and operate with the authority of the Church — the agent of evil takes the same shape: a beautiful woman who feigns motherly feeling, but is only acting in her own interest.

The parallels between Mrs Coulter and the witches of *Narnia* do not end with these instances of deliberate mirroring. Pullman, like Lewis, uses the tradition associating femininity with materiality and deception to characterise Marisa Coulter's villainy. In early scenes, Mrs Coulter employs promises of material pleasure to exert her influence: chocolate, good food and warm clothes, offered to children who see such luxuries as so distant from their ordinary lives as to be almost magical. When she is introduced to Lyra, she continues to enthrall: she has "an air of glamour" and reveals herself to have exotic experiences beyond the realm of ordinary Scholars.<sup>94</sup> As a result of Mrs Coulter's influence, Lyra becomes absorbed in a world of material femininity, particularly in the realm of cosmetics. Under the subtle guidance of her new guardian, Lyra learns "[h]ow to wash one's own hair; how to judge which colours suited one; [...] how to put on lipstick, powder, scent."<sup>95</sup> Lyra's foray into the matter of personal appearance is in part a result of her natural curiosity, but it also forms a part of a larger theme surrounding Mrs Coulter's London persona. Since the Victorian era, cosmetics have carried an association with deception: as Jennifer Halloran observes in her examination of the serial *The Sorceress of the Strand*, "young women are suspect merely for knowing someone who deals in the 'black arts' of making women beautiful through

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<sup>94</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 63.

<sup>95</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 76.

artifice.”<sup>96</sup> Similarly, the above-mentioned *Lady Audley’s Secret* “signals the reproducibility of the feminine ideal through commodity culture”, making “a motif of Gothic horror” of the eponymous Lady Audley’s ability to manipulate her own image.<sup>97</sup> In the same vein, cosmetics and fashion become a symbol of Mrs Coulter’s deceptive nature, playing on the same fears regarding “the capacity for external beauty to hide internal deviance.”<sup>98</sup> Like the Lady of the Green Kirtle, Mrs Coulter has a monstrous other side in the form of her *dæmon*, a golden monkey. The golden monkey is not named and, unlike regular *dæmons*, never speaks; while his appearance fits with Mrs Coulter’s aesthetic — an attractively exotic creature with fur that is “long and silky and the most lustrous gold”<sup>99</sup> — he is shown to be violent and cruel: “[W]ith one fierce black paw around his throat and his back paws gripping the polecat’s lower limbs, he took one of Pantalaimon’s ears in his other paw and pulled as if he intended to tear it off.”<sup>100</sup> He performs these violent acts while Mrs Coulter is seemingly occupying herself with the *décor*: as Lyra “sob[s] in terror” at the pain, Mrs Coulter examines the flower arrangements.<sup>101</sup> The juxtaposition of performative domesticity with strikingly brutal violence emphasises the deceptive nature of material femininity, and the unmaternal nature it disguises.

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<sup>96</sup> Jennifer A. Halloran, “The Ideology Behind The Sorceress of the Strand : Gender, Race, and Criminal Witchcraft,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 45, no. 2 (2002): 183.

<sup>97</sup> Rebecca Kling, ““It is only colour that you want”: Lady Audley’s Secret and Cosmetics as Discursive Fantasy,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 50, no. 3 (2017): 560-561.

<sup>98</sup> Halloran, “Sorceress,” 178.

<sup>99</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 78.

<sup>101</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 78.

Mrs Coulter's artifice serves not only to disguise her true nature, but is also revealed to be the motivation of the other villain of *Northern Lights*, Iofur Raknison. Raknison is introduced as the king of the *panserbjørne* (armoured bears), "a usurper, of sorts [who] tricked his way onto the throne;" he is a "powerful figure" but susceptible to flattery.<sup>102</sup> Unlike the majority of the armoured bears, who are direct in words and in action, Iofur excels in the feminine-coded spheres of diplomacy and deception. He is described as being "clever in a human way," preferring to imitate human culture and institutions rather than maintain the bears' traditional way of life<sup>103</sup> — in contrast to Iorek, the original heir to the throne, who is one of the "bears [who] act like bears."<sup>104</sup> The comparisons between Iofur and Iorek are heavily focused on Iofur's obsession with appearances, compared to Iorek's reality as a warrior: "[Iorek's] armour was real armour, rust-coloured, blood-stained, dented with combat, not elegant, enamelled and decorative like most of what [Lyra] saw around her now."<sup>105</sup> In his speech before he and Iofur fight for the throne, Iorek announces to the watching bears: "My first order to you will be to tear down that palace, that perfumed house of mockery and tinsel, and hurl the gold and marble into the sea. Iron is bear-metal. Gold is not."<sup>106</sup> The *panserbjørne* are wholly masculine-coded, associated with violence, war, and crafting weapons; Iofur's love of material beauty is presented as inimical to this.

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<sup>102</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 269.

<sup>104</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 270.

<sup>105</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 277.

<sup>106</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 296.

Like *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the Svalbard section of *Northern Lights* concerns itself with disputed sovereignty, a feminised pretender to the throne and the return of the true king. Iofur's rule is described in similar terms to the magically enforced reign of the White Witch, with Mrs Coulter as the supplier of enchantments: "Iofur Raknison's dominance over them had been like a spell. Some of them put it down to the influence of Mrs Coulter, who had visited him before Iorek's exile".<sup>107</sup> Mrs Coulter is revealed to have conspired to have Iorek exiled, replacing him with a puppet king through whom she could rule: "Little by little she was going to increase her power over Iofur Raknison, and his over [the bears], until [they] were only creatures running back and forth at her bidding."<sup>108</sup> Much like Edmund and Rilian, Iofur is dangerous because of his susceptibility to an ambitious woman's deception.

While Pullman relies heavily on manipulation and deception to characterise his female villain, he also uses these traits to characterise his heroine, Lyra. Lyra's ability to deceive and manipulate others is her main weapon when facing enemies with more power and authority than her; combined with her ability to read the alethiometer, she is associated with both the ability to perceive truth and to disguise it. Unlike Mrs Coulter's lies, which are typically portrayed as evidence of her villainy, Lyra's lies are a source of power and even comfort: "[N]ow that she was doing something difficult and familiar and never quite predictable, namely lying, she felt a sort of mastery again, the same sense of complexity and control that the alethiometer gave

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<sup>107</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 303.

<sup>108</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 303.

her.”<sup>109</sup> When she manages to manipulate Iofur into facing him in single combat, Iorek proudly dubs her ‘Lyra Silvertongue’, a name she adopts as her own. Lying for good becomes so emblematic of Lyra that when, in *The Amber Spyglass*, Mrs Coulter chooses to turn against the Church entirely and begins to use her skills of deception to undermine them, the chapter begins with the epigraph “*As is the mother, so is her daughter.*”<sup>110</sup> Through Lyra, Pullman begins to undermine the assumed connection between deception and evil, showing that lying can be both a moral act and a powerful form of agency.

Pullman’s portrayal of lies, however, is brought into conflict with a larger theme of the importance of truth. In Lyra’s case, the limitations of her lies are brought to the fore in the second and third books, and her ability to deceive becomes more vulnerable: she is tricked into saying too much, and later decides only to use her ability to lie for Will’s benefit:

“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. When she thought of that she felt warm and virtuous, because she did it for Will, never for herself.”<sup>111</sup>

In this context, lying becomes less Lyra’s weapon in the fight against the Church and the Authority, and more a convenient technicality for Will to maintain his association with honesty and truth without suffering any of the resultant inconvenience. Similarly, when Mrs Coulter joins Lord Asriel’s

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<sup>109</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 239.

<sup>110</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 918.

<sup>111</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 482; Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 790.

forces, her deception is used in the service of his plan, and her character's ability to lie is celebrated only when her motivation is her maternal protection of Lyra, particularly in conjunction with Asriel: for example, in her theft of the intention craft; her "superb piece of acting" to Father MacPhail; her attempt to disarm the bomb meant for Lyra, with her own life "a secondary matter"; and her final act of deception, tricking the angel Metatron to protect Lyra.<sup>112</sup> Her deceptive nature is accepted, but only when she is in the position of a bad parent seeking redemption and ultimately filling the role of sacrificial mother. Lyra, who is not pursuing a redemptive arc, follows a different path of losing this power altogether when she enters the underworld: "I can't do it any more — I can't do it! I can't tell lies! I thought it was so easy — but it didn't work — it's all I can do, and it doesn't work!"<sup>113</sup> The key to appeasing the harpies of the underworld, who attacked Lyra for lying, is revealed to be telling true stories; this is so powerful and nourishing for them that, when Lyra and Will establish a path out of the underworld, telling true stories is the price the harpies set for each spirit to pay to be led to the surface.<sup>114</sup> Thematically, this emphasises the importance of experiencing life over preparing for what may lie beyond it, but also re-establishes the moral binary between truth and lies which Lyra's earlier experiences had seemed to deconstruct. In returning to the idea of truth as a basis for judgement, Pullman both undermines the power of his heroine and creates a symbolic hierarchy between the deceptive Lyra and the

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<sup>112</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 830-1, 929, 936, 982.

<sup>113</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 894.

<sup>114</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 914.

honest Will, which plays into the broader imbalance at work in their relationship.

As Miller notes, the only prominent example of romance in the *Chronicles of Narnia* is formed between Shasta/Cor and Aravis in *The Horse and His Boy*.<sup>115</sup> This relationship is built around a dynamic which appears frequently in modern fantasy, which can be loosely described as an Uptown Girl/Downtown Boy arrangement: a beautiful but arrogant girl from a wealthy or aristocratic background is brought down to earth by the efforts of a practical, lower-class boy who is frequently some form of ‘Chosen One’ or secret nobility. In the case of *The Horse and His Boy*, Aravis Tarkheena is a member of the wealthy Calormene ruling class who (alongside talking horse Hwin) is fleeing an arranged marriage with a man four times her age, and in doing so encounters Shasta, who ran away to escape a life of slavery with the help of talking horse Bree. Though initially brash and arrogant, Aravis is eventually humbled by Shasta’s actions when he goes back to help her after she is clawed by a lion: “Shasta was marvellous. [...] I’ve been snubbing him and looking down on him ever since you met us and now he turns out to be the best of us all.”<sup>116</sup> Shasta also discovers that he is actually the long lost Prince Cor of Archenland, while Archenland’s different class system means Aravis is no longer automatically considered an aristocrat as she was in Carlomene, reversing their former class positions. As a result of her improved relationship

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<sup>115</sup> Jennifer L. Miller, “No Sex in Narnia? How Hans Christian Andersen's 'Snow Queen' Problematizes C. S. Lewis the Chronicles of Narnia,” *Mythlore* 28, no. 107/108 (2009): 115.

<sup>116</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 275.

with Shasta/Cor, however, Aravis is invited to live with the royal family and eventually marries Cor and becomes Queen of Archenland.<sup>117</sup>

Like the demonisation of materialistic feminine frippery, the Uptown Girl narrative presented here initially appears to be a tool of empowerment for the lower classes. A member of the ruling class discovers that they are mistaken in assuming their own superiority, and the member of a lower class is shown to have more useful and adaptable abilities. However, like the association between materialism and femininity, this narrative makes little commentary on class theory and ultimately serves only to reinforce a gendered hierarchy in the guise of ‘sticking it to the man.’ Any elements of social disruption tend to be smoothed over by the discovery that the lower-class character is either a member of the upper class or in some way distinguished as an exception to the rule that the working classes are inferior. (“I’ll warrant there’s noble blood in him,” says one of the King’s courtiers, seeing that Shasta can ride well.)<sup>118</sup> This also acts as a correction to the ‘imbalance’ of the woman having more power and influence than her love interest, typically raising his station to equal or higher than hers. The position of the naïve, sheltered aristocrat also serves to infantilise female characters and make them reliant on male characters to navigate their new surroundings. In the greater scope of works which use this narrative, Lewis’s *The Horse and His Boy* seems comparatively subtle: Aravis does have some opportunity to showcase her own skill in a familiar environment, and her character develops alongside Bree, a proud warhorse whose conceit tends to lead the group astray and who belittles

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<sup>117</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 302, 309.

<sup>118</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 277.

the quiet and gentle mare, Hwin. Due to the parallel between Bree and Aravis's character arcs, the association between femininity and vanity is somewhat disrupted and the reversal of Shasta and Aravis's fortunes is not heavily emphasised. The main illustration of their altered relationship is in the switching of their roles as listener and storyteller: near the beginning of the novel, Aravis tells the story of how she and Hwin came to run away "in the grand Calormene manner", an indicator of her aristocratic education;<sup>119</sup> by the end of the novel, Shasta is the storyteller, narrating his discovery of his true parentage, with Aravis as an enthusiastic audience. These mirror scenes illustrate the change of power in their relationship.

*The Subtle Knife*, the second novel in the *His Dark Materials Trilogy*, makes substantial use of the Uptown Girl narrative in establishing the relationship between Lyra and Will. The problems of this formula are made increasingly noticeable in this case due to the contrast between Lyra's characterisation in *Northern Lights* and *The Subtle Knife*. As described in the previous chapter, Lyra is introduced as a "half-wild, half-civilised" child whose main use for her aristocratic lineage is to position herself as leader of the children of Jordan College.<sup>120</sup> Her sense of identity is tied to the College and to Lord Asriel, a man she has been raised to call 'Uncle' who she discovers is actually her father. Throughout *Northern Lights*, Lyra becomes more independent and practical, putting her "natural leader[ship]" to use when commanding the children of Bolvangar to escape, and showcasing her

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<sup>119</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 222.

<sup>120</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 21.

adaptability in unexpected situations.<sup>121</sup> Her arc is also one of disillusionment: first, she discovers that the entrancing Mrs Coulter is in fact the leader of the “Gobblers” who have been kidnapping children; after this, Lyra attaches great meaning to her task of bringing Lord Asriel the alethiometer, only to learn that not only was this not asked of her, but in doing so she has led her best friend to the doom she spent the entire novel attempting to save him from. *Northern Lights* ends on a note of self-determination, with Lyra deciding: “I reckon we’ve got to do it, Pan. We’ll go up there and we’ll search for Dust, and when we’ve found it we’ll know what to do.”<sup>122</sup> While she began the novel as a variant on the spoilt aristocratic girl, her experiences with Mrs Coulter, the gyptians, at Bolvangar and at Svalbard appear to have changed her into a more self-reliant, sceptical, and perceptive character.

It strikes a discordant chord, therefore, when Lyra reappears in *The Subtle Knife* as proud and naïve as she was at the beginning of *Northern Lights*, if not more so. Will Parry, the protagonist of *The Subtle Knife*, comes from ‘our’ world, but meets Lyra in Cittàgazze, a third world which borders many different universes from which they have stolen technology. Despite this, the circumstances of their encounter give Will the superior knowledge, having him explain refrigerators, ring-pulls, omelettes, baked beans, can-openers, cooking (“In my world servants do the cooking,” says Lyra, who has spent the majority of *Northern Lights* travelling to the North with no servants to speak of), and the necessity of washing dishes (“I’m not a servant,” Lyra protests) in the space of

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<sup>121</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 216.

<sup>122</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 337.

five pages.<sup>123</sup> Unlike Lyra, Will has clear knowledge of how to re-enter his home world and uses this to establish his authority. The frequent references to Lyra having had servants combined with the technology of Cittàgazze disproportionately resembling that of Will's world serves to place Lyra in the role of unworldly student to Will's lessons of experience. Throughout the novel, Will continues to dominate their relationship, to the point where Lyra's attempts to pursue her own investigations rather than help him lose her the alethiometer. Traveling to Will's world reduces Lyra to "a lost little girl in a strange world, belonging nowhere"<sup>124</sup> — a position from which she does not seem to wholly return, as Will overtakes her position as protagonist and prophetic 'Chosen One'. Not only does he become the wielder of the subtle knife, which can cut portals between worlds, he is constantly identified as special, frightening centuries-old witches and being compared to Iorek Byrnison, king of the armoured bears.<sup>125</sup> Will eventually comes to see Lyra as a friend, but they never establish an equal balance of power in their relationship.

Pullman's use of this narrative highlights a wider problem with gender roles throughout the series: while traditional femininity is routinely disrupted, Pullman seems reluctant to challenge traditional masculine archetypes. Danielle Bray suggests in her article "Sissy Boy Mothering: Male Child Mother Figures in Middle-Grade Fantasy Literature" that Will is an example of a 'mothering' boy figure due to his association with food sharing, but fails to

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<sup>123</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 373, 376.

<sup>124</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 413.

<sup>125</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 377, 488, 543, 577, 584, 624.

note that this is used to establish him as the authority in his relationships, both with his mother and with Lyra. Bray argues that “Mrs. Cooper’s clear perception [...] that Will is the adult in their family [...] while his mother, allowing her son to guide her by the hand, is the trusting child in their relationship” places Will in a position of mother-like responsibility;<sup>126</sup> however, the parental implication appears ultimately more paternal, as Will makes the authoritative decision to leave his mother in Mrs Cooper’s care and provides for her from a distance, in the “traditionally masculine” role of the breadwinner.<sup>127</sup> When cooking for himself and Lyra, he “order[s] her around the kitchen like his child and mak[es] her wash the dishes after supper,” again playing an authoritative role;<sup>128</sup> whenever Lyra attempts to assert her authority in her own areas of speciality, as when she approaches two police officers and effectively diverts their suspicion, he reacts with anger: “His heart was thumping with rage.”<sup>129</sup> Even after the loss of his fingers to the subtle knife, which is earmarked as a turning point in his character arc, Will maintains a masculine-coded authority both in his relationship with Lyra and in the larger narrative. His destiny as the bearer of the subtle knife, as well as the rescue narrative in the first chapters of *The Amber Spyglass*, further establishes Will in the tradition of classic fantasy heroes. Because Will’s own flaws, unlike Lyra’s, are never challenged, and his influence on her character development is given greater importance than hers on his, the eventual progression of their

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<sup>126</sup> Danielle Bienvenue Bray, “Sissy Boy Mothering: Male Child Mother Figures in Middle-Grade Fantasy Literature,” *Children’s Literature in Education* 46, no. 2 (2015): 169.

<sup>127</sup> Bray, “Sissy Boy Mothering,” 167.

<sup>128</sup> Bray, “Sissy Boy Mothering,” 171.

<sup>129</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 440.

friendship into a romantic relationship does not lose the hierarchical nature of their earliest encounters. Will's traditional masculine virtues are ultimately portrayed as superior to Lyra's adaptive use of feminine vice.

Pullman's use of gendered class narratives to portray villainy and redemption in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy undermines his efforts to counter the sexism of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. His use of deception as a tool used by both heroine and villainess hints at a subversive narrative, but ultimately falls into the formula of women's flaws being redeemed when used in line with traditional gender roles of mother or lover. The unconventional Lyra is ultimately supplanted by Will's more traditional masculine heroism, and their relationship becomes the most important part of Lyra's narrative. The following chapter will examine how this relationship frames sexual desires as moral choices.

## III

## EVE &amp; THE SERPENT

*Moralising Female Sexuality*

*The Chronicles of Narnia* and *His Dark Materials* frame their interpretations of the nature of good and evil around the Biblical tale of the fall of Eve and particularly its 17<sup>th</sup> century retelling in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In *Paradise Lost*, Eve's desire for an existence separate from Adam's leads her to explore the Garden of Eden alone and encounter Satan in the form of a serpent, who persuades her to eat an apple from the forbidden tree in order to gain the knowledge of good and evil. Like many versions of the Eve story, Milton ties the Fall to sexual awakening: although Adam and Eve have an established romantic and physical relationship prior to the Fall, upon eating the fruit they both experience lust for the first time. This sexual aspect forms a central theme in both Lewis and Pullman's contrasting interpretations of the myth, with particular focus on female sexuality. Both Lewis and Pullman introduce variations on Eve as seductress and Eve as the seduced, but while Lewis promotes an 'unfallen' Adam and Eve who can now re-enter Paradise,<sup>130</sup> Pullman interprets the Fall as the birth of independent thought, and the 'second Fall' becomes the final liberation of the universe from the tyranny of a false creator. Despite its revolutionary ambitions, however, *His Dark Materials*

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<sup>130</sup> Digory, in *The Magician's Nephew*, who refuses to take the apple for himself and instead returns it to Aslan, and Lucy, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, who upon seeing Aslan's face in the Magician's Book resists the urge to make herself beautiful through a spell. C.S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 100, 495.

creates a similarly restrictive image of female sexuality and ultimately returns to heterocentric ideals of love, maturity, and magic.

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate gender inequality in *Paradise Lost*, it is worth noting the position that Eve holds in Milton's version of the Fall. As argued by Shannon Miller in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, "*Paradise Lost* is Milton's most sustained attempt to represent in poetry gender roles, relations, and hierarchy."<sup>131</sup> Like Lewis and many of their respective contemporaries, Milton seeks to present a clear picture of the God>Man>Woman hierarchy: God in *Paradise Lost*, as in *Narnia*, is an exclusively masculine force, with the depiction of creation excluding active feminine-coded imagery in favour of a passive "abyss" that God makes "pregnant."<sup>132</sup> Eve's creation is a commission from Adam to God; the language used makes clear that her purpose is to please Adam, and through pleasing him please God, rather than having a direct relationship with her creator. Her purpose is to provide Adam with company, with pleasure, and with descendants; when she attempts to turn back to the waters in which she saw her own reflection, Adam pulls her back, symbolically preventing her from approaching self-recognition and thus autonomy.<sup>133</sup> Despite this clearly

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<sup>131</sup> Shannon Miller, "Gender," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost*, ed. Louis Schwartz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 152.

<sup>132</sup> Alison L. Bare, "Feminism Regained: Examining the Objectification of Eve in *Paradise Lost*," *English Studies* 99, no. 2 (2018): 102. Quoting Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 1.16, 21–2.

<sup>133</sup> In "Eve's Reflection and the Passion of Wonder in *Paradise Lost*," N.K. Sugimura notes that although frequently interpreted as a sign of vanity, the wording Milton uses suggests that Eve's experience of her own reflection is "an innocent activity: in her state of inexperience, Eve naturally – and spontaneously – loves what God has created." Adam also loves what God has created in Eve, but only he, and not Eve herself, is allowed to appreciate it. N.K. Sugimura,

established hierarchy of creation, *Paradise Lost* scholars have noted that “the poem raises, rather than always answers, questions about matters like Adam’s primacy, Eve’s sufficiency, and the role of gender hierarchy within the household.”<sup>134</sup> Through giving Eve her own perspective and story within the poem, Milton attempts to engage with proto-feminist interpretations of Genesis while making his case for the authority of men.<sup>135</sup> Eve, struggling against her prescribed role as Adam’s subordinate, is susceptible to Satan’s insinuations that taking the forbidden fruit “would lift her out of that second order” and is punished for her act by the enactment of even stricter gender roles: “husbands ‘shall rule’ over their wives while men will labor on the land and women will suffer pain in childbirth.”<sup>136</sup> For women, the overarching message is one of warning: do not rebel against the circumstances of your sex, or even further oppression will result. For men: control the desires of your wives.

Throughout history, many societies have paid particular attention to the control and judgement of female sexual conduct. What was seen to require control varied with cultural norms: in Europe, medieval doctrine saw women as lustful creatures who needed to be controlled by their husbands, which by seventeenth century England had evolved into a structure which metaphorically echoed that of king and country, and country and empire: “Husbands were considered the rulers of the household, while the household provided an analog

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“Eve’s Reflection and the Passion of Wonder in *Paradise Lost*,” *Essays in Criticism* 64, no. 1 (2014): 6-8, 17. Bare, “Feminism Regained,” 105.

<sup>134</sup> Miller, “Gender,” 152 & 156.

<sup>135</sup> Miller, “Gender,” 153, quoting Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>136</sup> Bare, “Feminism Regained,” 109; Miller, “Gender,” 152, quoting Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

for the commonwealth.”<sup>137</sup> Women’s place in the familial sphere often gives an indication of a larger political structure: during the Victorian era, the ideal of the genteel woman became the Angel in the House, a kind of hearth-maiden who cared for domestic matters while her husband dealt with the outside world — although originally coined by poet Coventry Patmore as a tribute to his wife, the idea came to reflect an image of Queen Victoria as caring for the domestic matters of Britain while generals and politicians managed the empire.<sup>138</sup> In Medieval thought, women’s sexuality had to be controlled by their husbands within the confines of marriage.<sup>139</sup> Victorian ideals robbed women of any sexual agency whatsoever: the Angel was a desexualised inhuman creature who lived to serve the role of wife and mother.<sup>140</sup> Modern Western culture has inherited a variety of restrictive expectations of women’s sexuality: Freudian theories of ‘penis envy’ led to narratives where women’s sexual desires are explicitly tied to the desire for motherhood and the nuclear family;<sup>141</sup> the Victorian ‘Angel’ ideology evolved into the assumption that sexual desire is exclusively masculine, while romantic attraction is

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<sup>137</sup> Miller, “Gender,” 152.

<sup>138</sup> Aihong Ren, “A Fantasy Subverting the Woman’s Image as ‘The Angel in the House,’” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4, no. 10 (2014): 2061.

<sup>139</sup> Yolanda Beteta Martín, “The Servants Of The Devil. The Demonization Of Female Sexuality In The Medieval Patristic Discourse,” *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 48.

<sup>140</sup> M. Jeanne Peterson, “No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 677-8.

<sup>141</sup> Rey Chow, “Sexuality,” in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory*, ed. Mary Eagleton (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 97.

predominantly feminine;<sup>142</sup> variants of Milton's gender hierarchy draws on a tradition whereby men are shamed if they do not dominate their sexual and romantic relationships, and women are called on to suppress their authority for the sake of the male ego.<sup>143</sup> These assorted and contradictory sexual attitudes dominate literature aimed at an adolescent audience, from the instructional *bildungsroman* to contemporary young adult fiction.

In the realm of young adult literature, the representation of female sexuality often creates a false equivalence between maturity and sexual activity, and young adult fantasy reinforces this by connecting sexuality to supernatural forces. Where the early female *bildungsroman* used marriage as a hallmark of adulthood, in contrast to the more complex plots associated with male development, later works transitioned to a less institutional depiction of a young woman's first romantic and sexual relationship. Despite the seemingly liberal shift from marriage to first love, the girl-to-woman tale continued to rely on a very limiting framework where a girl's self-exploration invariably stems from a central heterosexual relationship. While heteronormativity and amatonormativity affect people of all genders, women and the feminine-aligned are disproportionately targeted in fiction: while a romance might be a subplot or an afterthought in a male character's arc, and can be excluded entirely, few female characters are allowed to claim the title of 'woman'

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<sup>142</sup> Peggy C. Giordano, Monica A. Longmore, and Wendy D. Manning, "Gender and the Meanings of Adolescent Romantic Relationships: A Focus on Boys," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 2 (2006): 260; Louisa Allen, "Girls Want Sex, Boys Want Love: Resisting Dominant Discourses of (Hetero) Sexuality," *Sexualities* 6, no. 2 (2003): 217-218.

<sup>143</sup> Allen, "Girls Want Sex," 226.

without a romantic or sexual awakening.<sup>144</sup> In drawing on mythology and fairy tales, fantasy literature has used plots that revolve around the importance of women's sexual and romantic choices, either in the form of mystical virginity or the supernatural results of sexual encounters,<sup>145</sup> or in a metaphorical situation where choosing between two lovers represents choosing between two fates — not only for the heroine but for the society she lives in, and in some cases the world.<sup>146</sup> In these situations, a woman's sexual choices are given additional weight but also responsibility: her body is not wholly her own, because the consequences of her private behaviour are her public responsibility. Both Lewis and Pullman create a world in which the fate of mankind rests in part or in whole on the romantic and sexual choices of a young girl, and in both cases there is an objectively 'right' choice that extends well beyond her personal interest.

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<sup>144</sup> Amatonormativity, as described by the originator of the term, Elizabeth Brake, is “the assumption that a central, exclusive, amorous relationship is normal for humans, in that it is a universally shared goal, and that such a relationship is normative, in that it should be aimed at in preference to other relationship types.” Elizabeth Brake, *Minimizing Marriage: Marriage, Morality, and the Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 89; Laura M. Carpenter, “Gender and the Meaning and Experience of Virginity Loss in the Contemporary United States,” *Gender and Society* 16, no. 3 (2002): 345. Carpenter notes that for young men, virginity was and is something to be quickly discarded, while young women are encouraged to view it as something precious that cannot be regained. Both, in different ways, viewed it as a rite of passage.

<sup>145</sup> Vampire fiction such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and various reimaginings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* tend to use both literal sexual encounters and the sexually-coded images of blood-drinking.

<sup>146</sup> This is also very common in recent young adult dystopian fiction, most prominently *The Hunger Games*.

Although *Narnia* avoids any explicit references to sexuality, C. S. Lewis's adult works contained plentiful discussions of the role of sexuality, and the associated imagery and theory are used throughout the *Chronicles* to allude to sexual politics. As discussed in the previous chapter, his favoured archetype of female evil is the temptress; although sexuality is largely relegated to subtext in *Narnia*, the temptress archetype clearly alludes to the dangers of female sexual agency. As Graham explains, the witches are based on well-known myths about the danger of women seeking sexual dominance: Lilith — “[The White Witch] comes of [...] your father Adam's first wife, her they called Lilith. And she was one of the Jinn.”<sup>147</sup> — and Circe, a goddess or nymph from *The Odyssey* who ‘unmanned’ sailors until Odysseus managed to bed her unharmed.<sup>148</sup> Positively portrayed adult women in Lewis's fiction are exclusively maternal figures, either married women such as Mrs Beaver and Mabel Kirke or matronly spinsters like Letitia Ketterly and the elderly Polly Plumber. The young heroines are completely isolated from the possibility of sexual desire, to the extent that Susan, having reached an age where romance and sexuality form the dominant social discourse, is excluded from the narrative entirely. While Lucy resists the temptation of becoming an

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<sup>147</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 147.

<sup>148</sup> Jean E. Graham, "Women, Sex, and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2004): 32. Whether the dual-meaning of *unmanned* (Circe both transformed sailors into animals and made them subject to her will) is extant in the original Greek is debated; however, by the twentieth century Circe and her “phallic wand” (Graham, 33) had entered the public consciousness as a symbol of “luxury and wantonness” reflecting the need for male dominance. Richard L. Hunter, “Circe,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, eds. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Oxford Reference.

unparalleled beauty, the already beautiful Susan is too much of a potential danger to the characters' re-entry into Paradise.

The aforementioned 'Problem of Susan' is a focal point for criticism of Lewis's attitude towards female sexuality and agency. In *The Last Battle*, Susan is described as being at "the silliest time of [her] life", preoccupied with "nylons and lipstick and invitations" and convinced that Narnia is merely the memory of a game she used to play with her siblings.<sup>149</sup> In addition to the association of materialism and femininity, these three objects clearly represent the accoutrements of burgeoning female sexuality — nylons, suggesting short skirts; lipstick, a form of makeup and (as previously mentioned) associated with deception and salaciousness; and invitations, indicating social ambition. The portrait painted of Susan in this short description is one of a young woman actively engaging with the concept of sex and romance, quite unlike the Narnian approach of waiting for an appropriate offer. At the end of *The Last Battle*, the Friends of Narnia discovered that they and the Pevensie parents have died in a train crash and are now in the true Narnia: Heaven. A common misconception surrounding Susan's fate is that she did not 'make it' to Heaven because of her implied sexual-romantic activity, whereas according to the text she is not among the victims of the train accident. Susan is thus a loose end in the conclusion of the *Chronicles*, her fate unknown, and while there is room for interpretation that she may redeem herself and join her family in Heaven later in life, it is telling that the only *Narnia* heroine who is not shown in Heaven in

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<sup>149</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 741.

the final scenes of the series is at an age between virginal innocence and maternal monogamy — “the silliest time of one’s life.”<sup>150</sup>

Lewis’s avoidance of sexuality is something Pullman actively resists in his construction of *His Dark Materials*. Puberty, as a border between childhood and adulthood, forms a central part of the plot of *Northern Lights*: dæmons settle when their human begins puberty, and the General Oblation Board perform experiments in ‘intercision’ between children and dæmons who are on the cusp of puberty, with the aim of rendering them permanently obedient and docile.<sup>151</sup> These experiments are explicitly compared with the “precedent” of castration<sup>152</sup> — the prevention of sexual feeling is aligned with the eradication of independent thought. The principal adult female characters of *His Dark Materials* are all depicted as sexually active: Mrs Coulter seduces her way through the ranks of the Church’s bureaucrats; the witches are known for taking lovers; Serafina Pekkala has a history with Farder Coram which resulted in a son; Mary Malone renounced both her vows as a nun and her Catholic faith to pursue a romantic-sexual relationship. In *His Dark Materials*, sexual expression is emblematic of personal freedom and a form of counter-culture, a sign of being beyond the influence of the Church.

Despite its symbolic association with the rebellious and the marginalised, the overall image of sex and romance in *His Dark Materials* is well within the bounds of contemporary social expectations. Heroic women in the trilogy

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<sup>150</sup> Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 741.

<sup>151</sup> Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 42, 240-241.

<sup>152</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 317.

experience sex within monogamous heterosexual relationships and are motivated by romantic attachment; when shown, these relationships are dominated by the male partner. While the portrayal of these relationships largely excludes institutional unions such as marriage, they predominantly replicate a marital dynamic and rely heavily on heteronormative ideals. This is particularly notable in the case of the witches where, despite being a female-only race that live for centuries, their most important relationships are with human men.

“[M]en pass in front of our eyes like butterflies, creatures of a brief season. We love them; they are brave, proud, beautiful, clever; and they die almost at once. We bear their children, who are witches if they are female, human if not; and then in a blink of an eye they are gone, felled, slain, lost. Our sons, too. [...] Each time becomes more painful, until finally your heart is broken.”<sup>153</sup>

The witches’ long lives are dominated by these heterosexual relationships, and Serafina implies that their inability to have a partner or son with a similar lifespan eventually leads to witches dying of grief. Their propensity to take ‘lovers’ is framed as a means of forming an amatonormative attachment, however futile and self-destructive this becomes in the long term. Non-sexual relationships between witches are given little weight in the narrative beyond a general species kinship; the possibility of romantic or sexual relationships between witches is omitted entirely.<sup>154</sup> In contrast, the ambitious and amoral

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<sup>153</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 267.

<sup>154</sup> The only non-heterosexual relationship is between male angels Balthamos and Baruch, introduced in *The Amber Spyglass*. Like most angels, Balthamos and Baruch are without “true

Mrs Coulter is a widow who married in order to pursue her social and political goals, and in the present engages in sexual relationships for the same reason. Her relationships are deliberately fleeting and have no connection to romance or family — even her daughter is a result of an extramarital affair.<sup>155</sup> In the *Lantern Slides* post-script, her approach to sex is described thus: “Mrs Coulter selected her lovers for their power and influence, but it did no harm if they were good-looking. Did she ever become fond of a lover? Not once. She could not keep her servants either.”<sup>156</sup> While Mrs Coulter’s targeting of largely unsympathetic Church officials and influencers gives her something of an anti-hero status, her sexuality is a weapon first and foremost, her own pleasure secondary. Her implied promiscuity and lack of genuine connection to her lovers is associated with her changing loyalties and overall self-interest; the reference to her inability to keep servants is in contrast with her former lover, Lord Asriel, who despite similar promiscuity is not associated with inconstancy and whose most notable companion in *Northern Lights* is his manservant Thorold, who knows him “better than any wife could know him, better than any mother.”<sup>157</sup> Inversely, when Mrs Coulter is shown alongside her lover and the father of her child at the climax of *Northern Lights*, the danger she presents is immediately diminished: “The woman clung to Lord Asriel as if she were

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flesh” and while they are described as “lov[ing] each other with a passion” their relationship is like those of Milton’s angels, “non-material.” Both Balthamos and Baruch die over the course of *The Amber Spyglass*. Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 654, 666; Miller, “Gender,” 158.

<sup>155</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 107-8.

<sup>156</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 355.

<sup>157</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 392.

dizzy, and shook her head, distressed.”<sup>158</sup> Like the ideal of Milton’s Eden, women are both less endangered and less dangerous within heteronormative partnerships, and it is within these that they find their clearest moral compass. While his approach to including female sexuality is more open than Lewis’s, Pullman confines the depiction of sex for pleasure to marriage-like romantic pairings, while female sexual desire without love is portrayed as inherently manipulative and dangerous. Pullman’s equation of love and sex and his portrayal of the moral influence of heteronormative relationships feed directly into *His Dark Materials*’ endorsement of compulsory sexuality and the valorising of the nuclear family.

In *Narnia*, the role of the nuclear family is subordinate to the connection between mortals and Aslan, but it appears as part of the architecture of a stable and pious life. Parents (particularly mothers) may be dead, but they are never separated or divorced: the Pevensie parents do not appear on-page but are described in positive terms, and they appear in Heaven at the end of *The Last Battle*, having died in the same train accident as three of their children. The elder siblings, Peter and Susan, become de facto parents to their siblings during their adventures in Narnia, and are themselves parented by the kindly Mr and Mrs Beaver. Digory’s father in *The Magician’s Nephew* is “away in India”, but still provides for the family.<sup>159</sup> With the exception of the Pevensies, good Narnian royals always form a nuclear family of King, Queen, and Prince(s), and unlike the Carlomene royal family are never in conflict with one

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<sup>158</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 334.

<sup>159</sup> Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew*, 12.

another.<sup>160</sup> Conflict between brothers must be resolved, as between Edmund and Peter in *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*; sisters are more expendable, but their position in the family must be agreed upon. Digory and Polly are both unmarried, but they occupy a parental space within the Friends of Narnia, although their age means that the authority falls to Peter.<sup>161</sup> In an echo of the husband-empire equivalence of the Victorian era, Aslan appears as a paternal figure: distant but providing and loving; and while there are men who stand alone, only villainous women exist outside of the nuclear family: the heroines are daughters, sisters, and wives.

Despite his outspoken opposition to the conservative values of *Narnia*, Pullman nonetheless positions the nuclear family in *His Dark Materials* as the ideal, although it is often unattainable. The witches frequently attempt to create such families with their lovers and are hindered by their incompatible lifespans; their long-lived daughters appear to be no consolation. Serafina declares, of her relationship with Farder Coram:

“I loved him at once. I would have changed my nature, I would have forsaken the star-tingle and the music of the Aurora; I would have never flown again — I would have given all that up in a moment, without a thought, to be a gyptian boat-wife and cook for him and share his bed and bear his children.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001): 257.

<sup>161</sup> Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 691.

<sup>162</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 267.

She explains that their relationship ended when their son died in an epidemic, shattering the idea of the nuclear family, and Serafina was called to take up her mother's place as clan-queen. Despite the problems with these relationships, they are widespread and appear to be almost instinctual to the witches, to the extent that being denied a lover renders them murderous.<sup>163</sup> “A witch offers you her love, you should take it. If you don't, it's your own fault if bad things happen to you.”<sup>164</sup> John Parry is the only character known to have turned down a witch's advances, out of loyalty to his wife, which is referred to as one of the only possible reasons such a rejection.<sup>165</sup> Like Digory's father, Parry is separated from his son and his ailing wife, but still provides for them financially: Will and his mother live on money that “comes from a family trust” set up by John Parry.<sup>166</sup> Will's parents are “incapable [...] of fulfilling a parent's role” due to physical and mental absence, but the idea of their reunited presence is seen by Will as idyllic.<sup>167</sup> Likewise, Lyra and her parents never form a family unit, but this is positioned as an idea that they ought to have aimed for, or might have had their circumstances been different: ““We should have married,’ [Mrs Coulter] said [to Lord Asriel], ‘and brought [Lyra] up ourselves.””<sup>168</sup> Their subsequent redemption, with particular emphasis on that of Mrs Coulter, comes in the form of sacrifice for their daughter. In

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<sup>163</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 398.

<sup>164</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 454.

<sup>165</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 454.

<sup>166</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 415.

<sup>167</sup> Amelia A. Rutledge, “Reconfiguring Nurture in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*,” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2008): 123; Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 362-3.

<sup>168</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 967.

“Reconfiguring Nurture in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” Amelia Rutledge argues that “in the absence of stable nuclear families, the surrogates in *His Dark Materials* enact a subtle argument for disseminated responsibility”;<sup>169</sup> this argument is not unfounded, as Pullman provides a series of parental substitutes for Lyra and, to a lesser extent, Will, and for much of the trilogy the heterosexual pairings of parents and pseudo-parents are cast asunder, often permanently. At its conclusion, however, Lyra’s estranged parents are united in their sacrifice, Will meets John Faa (another impressive but impermanent father figure) and Mary Malone (who accompanies him to act as a substitute parent while they find medical treatment for his mother), and Lyra returns to Jordan College to yet another pair of male-female parental substitutes, this time Dame Hannah and the Master of Jordan College. Most importantly, at their final parting Lyra suggests a future role for herself and Will in the nuclear family, this time as members of a married couple: “[I]f we meet someone we like, and if we marry them, then we must be good to them, and not make comparisons all the time and wish we were married to each other instead.”<sup>170</sup> In *His Dark Materials*, the nuclear family structure represents something oppressed rather than part of a larger structural limitation, fleeting but consistently desired, and through it the importance of traditional heterosexual relationships is presented as more important and powerful than other forms of love.

In the article “The Good Liberal and the Scoundrel Author: Fantasy, Dissent, and Neoliberal Subjectivity in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,”

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<sup>169</sup> Rutledge, “Reconfiguring Nurture,” 119.

<sup>170</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1079.

Stephen Maddison suggests that Pullman “exemplifies Raymond Williams’s concept of ‘bourgeois dissent’ in which political critique and a continuing investment in traditional institutions and class hierarchy can be mutually reinforcing.”<sup>171</sup> This can be seen in the aforementioned emphasis on hetero-patriarchal relationships, but is, as Maddison notes, most prominent in Pullman’s development of the fantastical elements of the trilogy. Dæmons are the most notable fantastic aspect of the series from its beginning, and form a complicated and somewhat problematic metaphor around sexuality and adulthood. Dæmons are established as an external soul, reflecting part of a person’s nature and position in life. Children’s dæmons can change shape, as their identities are still malleable and unformed; those raised to be servants have dæmons that tend to settle as dogs, while the aristocratic class have more exotic animals such as leopards, monkeys, and serpents; witches all have bird dæmons.<sup>172</sup> The vast majority of dæmons, Maddison notes, “are cross-sexed, with only a very few humans having daemons of their own sex [...] which reinforces the naturalness of the hetero-patriarchal cross-sex grid.”<sup>173</sup> The true nature of dæmons and why they settle into a permanent shape is established in *Northern Lights* as a matter of mystery and contention, related to the Fall of Man; Asriel quotes a passage from his world’s version of Genesis, wherein the serpent tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit:

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<sup>171</sup> Stephen Maddison, “The Good Liberal and the Scoundrel Author: Fantasy, Dissent, and Neoliberal Subjectivity in Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*,” *Extrapolation* 55, no. 2 (2014): 199.

<sup>172</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 10, 16, 41, 47, 81, 256.

<sup>173</sup> Maddison, “The Good Liberal,” 208.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to reveal the true form of one’s dæmon, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.”<sup>174</sup>

This quote, coupled with Pullman’s thematic reference to *Paradise Lost*, suggests that settling is a complex reflection of both self-knowledge and moral understanding. However, the final instalment of the trilogy retreats to a simplistic equivalence of adulthood with sexual awakening, connecting dæmons to “a conservative morality of sexuality and the boundary between childhood and adulthood.”<sup>175</sup> The mysterious ‘settling’ which determines the shape of one’s external soul is casually bound up in the socially constructed idea of virginity, repeating the border between girl and women in the same mode as Lewis, although favouring the ‘after’ rather than the ‘before’.

In conjunction with the settling of dæmons is Lyra’s prophetic destiny as “Eve, again.”<sup>176</sup> The witches’ prophecy says that, as the second coming of Eve, “she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not her destiny to do it.”<sup>177</sup> Having overheard mention of this prophecy, Lyra mistakenly believes that it refers to her freeing the ghosts from the land of the dead, which she does with the aid of Will and the spirits of Roger, John Parry and Lee Scoresby;<sup>178</sup> after doing this, she and Will go in search of their dæmons, who were painfully

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<sup>174</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 315.

<sup>175</sup> Maddison, “The Good Liberal,” 206.

<sup>176</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 617.

<sup>177</sup> Pullman, *Northern Lights*, 263.

<sup>178</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 906-7.

separated from them when they entered the underworld, and find themselves in the crossfire of Lord Asriel's war against Metatron and the Authority. By accident, they find the Authority trapped in his crystal litter, and Lyra, not knowing who or what he is, is moved to help the now fragile, child-like being from his prison: "He must be so old — I've never seen anyone suffering like that — oh, Will, can't we let him out?"<sup>179</sup> In this act of "simple kindness," Lyra and Will release the Authority from his suffering; he is immediately torn apart by the elements, but his last expression is "wonder, and [...] the most profound and exhausted relief."<sup>180</sup> Both technically and thematically, this act seems to fulfil the witches' prophecy, and reflects the value of Lyra's compassion that is first demonstrated in *Northern Lights* in her encounter with the dæmon-less Tony Makarios. However, it is neither her act of deliberate rebellion nor one of honest compassion that serves as the true realisation of the prophecy: her 'Fall' is in entering a romantic-sexual relationship with Will, which restores the flow of Dust into the universes.<sup>181</sup> The imagery of the scene suggests the fruit of knowledge, making clear that this is her true role as Eve: "Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits. With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, 'Will...' And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth."<sup>182</sup> As a result, Dust, which had previously been flooding out of the universes into nothingness, is said to have "found a living home again, and these children-no-longer-children, saturated with love, were the cause of it

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<sup>179</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 993.

<sup>180</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 993.

<sup>181</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1042, 1046.

<sup>182</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1042.

all.”<sup>183</sup> Dust has previously been associated with creativity and innovation: Dust is attracted to man-made artefacts and described as “a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself.”<sup>184</sup> Yet it is neither Lyra’s creativity nor her rebellion, nor her capacity for compassion and empathy, which recalls Dust to the world of matter, but a sexual choice with unnaturally far-reaching consequences. Although resistant to the institutional aspects of traditional courtship, such as abstinence and formal marriage, Pullman nonetheless defines his main character’s growth around her first sexual encounter rather than her personal achievements and experiences. By centring the Second Fall around Lyra’s love for Will, Pullman reinforces the narrative that the journey from girl to woman is and must be determined by a heterosexual relationship. Lyra is completely changed, her dæmon settled, having lost her ability to read the alethiometer. Will, meanwhile, can still use the subtle knife and — according to the Lantern Slides — maintains his associated skills throughout his life.<sup>185</sup> Rather than something to be avoided by women, sexuality in *His Dark Materials* is portrayed as disproportionately formative and a fundamental building block of free will, ironically removing the aspect of choice from the matter in favour of essentialising sexual experience.

Although Pullman and Lewis present fundamentally opposed variations of the Fall of Eve, and therein present opposing views of female sexuality, Pullman’s mirroring of Lewis results in *His Dark Materials* presenting an

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<sup>183</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1046.

<sup>184</sup> Pullman, *The Subtle Knife*, 429; Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 671.

<sup>185</sup> Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, 1063, 1094.

endorsement of compulsory sexuality that is as limiting as *Narnia*'s own repressions. By removing sexual decisions from the realm of the personal and placing them into moral hierarchies, these narratives ensure that their characters' choices are, ultimately, no choice at all.

## CONCLUSION

From the publication of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe* in 1950 to the release of *The Amber Spyglass* in 2000, there have been fifty years of development in fantasy fiction, most of which have been spent trying to reconcile a growing female audience and increasingly mainstream feminist values with the misogynistic and masculinist origins of the genre. With its demonisation of female sexuality and adherence to strict gender roles, *The Chronicles of Narnia* is often cited as an example of the problems with fantasy narratives; in establishing itself as the “anti-Narnia,” *His Dark Materials* is positioned as an answer to these problems.<sup>186</sup> Yet this thesis’s examination of female characters in *His Dark Materials* demonstrates the continuity between Lewis and Pullman’s construction of female heroism and villainy. Through these unexpected parallels, we can observe the manner in which retrograde representations of women and femininity found in early fantasy works are reproduced in modern guise, applying a veneer of feminism to reductive ideas of female value. Pullman presents his heroine as isolated from and scornful of other girls, but easily cowed by masculine aggression; his gendering of deception and truth falls closely in line with Lewis’s own, emphasising the use of manipulation as feminine while idealising the honesty of male characters

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<sup>186</sup> Burton Hatlen, “Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* as a Challenge to the Fantasies of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, with an Epilogue on Pullman’s Neo-Romantic Reading of *Paradise Lost*,” in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, eds. Millicent Lenz & Carole Scott (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 82.

such as Will and the *panserbjørne*; and his overemphasis on heterosexual relationships proves as confining as Lewis's avoidance of sexuality. Notably, many of these replications seem to be unconscious on Pullman's part; this demonstrates not only the strong influence of Lewis identified by Gray, Oziewicz and Hade, but also the breadth of influence wielded by patriarchal narratives, both in the fantasy genre and the broader literary sphere. Pullman's narrow focus on addressing the problems of *Narnia*, his failure to engage with the ongoing complication of fantasy staples by others working within the genre, and contemporary society's continued investment in gender essentialist narratives contribute to the portrayal of a rebellion that has more in common with traditional patriarchal authority than with actual marginalised identities.

The most prominent element discussed in this thesis is the way in which Pullman defines the characters of *His Dark Materials* in reaction to those of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. A prime example is the character of Lyra, whose characterisation can be read as a response to the innocence and sweetness of Lewis's Lucy Pevensie. It is because of Lucy, who "doesn't tell lies" and therefore must be telling the truth about Narnia,<sup>187</sup> that Lyra is a chronic liar prone to boasting and exaggeration; subverting Narnian expectations, *Northern Lights* does not see Lyra punished for her deception, which she instead learns to wield as a powerful weapon of survival. Lucy's eternal faith in Aslan, which causes her to follow an unknown lion in *Prince Caspian* because she believes it may be him, is reflected in Lyra's naïve perception of her father Lord Asriel as a great hero, leading to a heartbreaking betrayal at the climax of *Northern*

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<sup>187</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001 edition): 131.

*Lights*. It is Lucy's death at the conclusion of the series that Pullman contrasts with Lyra's choice to carry on in her world and build "the republic of heaven" on Earth.<sup>188</sup> However, Lyra also develops several less revolutionary traits as a result of her status as the 'anti-Lucy': she is given a prominent male love interest and a romance that comes to dominate her character arc, in response to Lucy's eternal girlhood; Lyra's scorn for the feminine also seems to spring from Pullman's aim to separate her from the Narnian ideal. Likewise, Pullman attempts to subvert the 'dangerous temptress' stereotype perpetuated by *Narnia*'s two witches by drawing close parallels between them and Mrs Coulter, only to eventually give Coulter a path to redemption; however, he constructs this moral transformation as a shift from the femme fatale to the sacrificial mother. This serves to highlight the redemptive powers of motherhood rather than undermine the demonisation of attractive, sexually active women that the 'temptress' character perpetuates. Most conspicuously, Pullman's interpretation of *Narnia* as betraying Lewis's "paralysing fear of sexuality"<sup>189</sup> results in *His Dark Materials* putting forward a constant reiteration of the importance of (hetero)sexual relationships, to the extent that former, current, and rejected lovers come to dominate the motivations of most of the female characters, and the choice to engage in a romantic and sexual relationship is portrayed as the most defining moment in Lyra's existence. Because of this 'tunnel vision' in responding to *Narnia*, Pullman creates an

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<sup>188</sup> Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman's Library, 2011), 1088.

<sup>189</sup> Philip Pullman, "The Dark Side of Narnia," *The Guardian* (1959-2003), Oct 01, 1998: A6.

image of female heroism and villainy that mirrors rather than challenges Lewis's portrayal.

Pullman's close focus on *Narnia* might account for his apparent unwillingness to engage with more recent developments in the fantasy genre. Interviews from the period in which Pullman was writing *His Dark Materials* reference his denial of and unease with the labelling of the trilogy as 'fantasy.'<sup>190</sup> While he is far from the only genre writer to deny the categorisation of their work, Pullman's reluctance to situate himself within fantasy beyond his opposition to early fantasists such as Lewis and Tolkien manifests itself in his uncritical use of the genre staples already being problematised by his contemporaries. The limitations of the exceptional heroine and their romance-centric character arcs formed the subject of the *Song of the Lioness* quartet by Tamora Pierce, which was completed in 1988;<sup>191</sup> many other authors, including Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones, also challenged the 'tomboy' protagonist's exclusionary foundations in the years before *Northern Lights* was first published.<sup>192</sup> The politics of 'the Chosen One' narrative and its inability to challenge existing power structures was also the subject of scrutiny by these and other fantasy authors, who responded by either avoiding the device or actively demonstrating its limited use. Despite this, Pullman's work demonstrates no signs of engaging with or even being aware

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<sup>190</sup> Marek Oziewicz and Daniel Hade, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell? Philip Pullman, C. S. Lewis, and the Fantasy Tradition," *Mythlore* 28, no. 3/4 (2010): 39-40.

<sup>191</sup> Sarah Sahn, "Decolonizing Childhood: Coming of Age in Tamora Pierce's Fantastic Empire," *Children's Literature* 44 (2016): 167.

<sup>192</sup> Deirdre F. Baker, "What We Found On Our Journey Through Fantasy Land," *Children's Literature in Education* 37, no. 3 (2006): 245-246.

of this conversation. Lyra is constantly characterised by both her tomboyishness and her predetermined importance to the plot; in fact, the prophecy about her further removes her agency by establishing that her world-saving actions cannot be performed deliberately but must be carried out “in ignorance of what she is doing.”<sup>193</sup> Pullman appears to become aware of the implications of Lyra’s exceptionalism at the very end of the trilogy, and includes a few nods towards Lyra’s newfound respect for female scholars, yet by that point the value of femininity is merely a cursory footnote in the adventures of an exceptional heroine.

This examination of the influence of *Narnia* on *His Dark Materials*’ treatment of female characters has exposed many of the ways in which Pullman’s focus on Lewis has inadvertently resulting in the replication of the latter’s restrictive image of femininity. However, perhaps the most striking feature is the many stereotypes and ideologies that continue to shape our perceptions of women and power. Despite being inextricably linked with images of destructive femininity which play on expectations of women as emotional, Mrs Coulter remains a chilling presence in the trilogy. Coulter is a mother who harms children, a wife whose infidelity resulted in her husband’s death, and a glamorous socialite whose money is made by experiments in how to remove souls; her appearance on numerous lists of great literary villains highlights how effective the juxtaposition of soft feminine exterior and cold,

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<sup>193</sup> Philip Pullman, *Northern Lights*, in *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011): 151.

manipulative interior remains.<sup>194</sup> The romantic relationships in the trilogy, beyond being almost exclusively heterosexual, also reproduce hierarchical gender roles in which the male partner must dominate; even the commanding Mrs Coulter is rendered submissive in the presence of her ex-lover Lord Asriel. Pullman's reliance on amatonormative values is far from unusual in both popular and literary fiction, and the boundary he draws between the non-sexual child and the sexual adult is still widely accepted as an accurate indication of maturity, despite both evidence suggesting mental maturity takes place long after sexual attraction develops, and the wide variety of sexual orientations beyond heterosexuality, some of which do not involve sexual attraction at all. The myth also persists that loss of virginity is a life-altering experience, particularly for girls, which Pullman reinforces by having Lyra lose the ability to read the alethiometer after her *dæmon* settles. Despite their superficially 'feminist-friendly' variants, patriarchal values continue to define popular perceptions of love, attraction, and gender.

This thesis has raised important questions relating to both literary inheritance and the workings of genre. In examining the strong influence of *Narnia* on Pullman's representation of women in *His Dark Materials*, it has demonstrated the limitations of creating a work of literature as the antithesis of another. Pullman, through shaping his female characters as opposites to

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<sup>194</sup> Imogen Russell Williams, "Baddies in Books: Mrs Coulter, the mother of all evil," in *The Guardian*, last modified December 16, 2014, [www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/dec/16/baddies-in-books-mrs-coulter-the-mother-of-all-evil](http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2014/dec/16/baddies-in-books-mrs-coulter-the-mother-of-all-evil); The Telegraph, "The Greatest Villains in Literature: Mrs Coulter," last modified September 8, 2017, [www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/greatest-villains-literature/mrs-coulter/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/what-to-read/greatest-villains-literature/mrs-coulter/).

*Narnia*'s, allows them to be defined by Lewis rather than himself. His deliberate rejection of *Narnia* also limits the scope of the trilogy's ambition, restricting its span to themes that most directly oppose those of *Narnia*, abandoning institutional religion from his critique in order to focus on a direct relationship with Dust and the war against the Authority. The common acceptance of *His Dark Materials* as an example of progressive fantasy demonstrates the need for a more comprehensive approach to the relationship between feminism and fantasy literature. Pullman's lack of engagement with more recent adaptations of the fantasy formula results in a trilogy that, while aesthetically sophisticated, sets itself back forty-five years in literary history. In his reluctance to join a genre originated by Lewis, Pullman rejects the more complex, diverse, and engaging potential of the fantasy genre.

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