

Misogyny is in all forms of media and discourse, children's books being no exception and in fact one of the prime breeding grounds for misogyny. The book series *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, although a beloved classic of children's literature, has many problematic scenes and passages including those dealing with gender and femininity. The series was derided by Philip Pullman for these issues along with what he felt was its overly religious, preaching narrative and with that in mind he wrote the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, in some way a spiritual successor and response to Lewis's *Chronicles*. In this paper, I will examine both series beginning with the final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Last Battle*, and then continuing on to the first book of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, titled *The Golden Compass* (also known as *Northern Lights* in the original English version), analyzing how they end and begin, how Pullman's work operates as a response and counter to Lewis's books, and how the main character of *His Dark Materials*, Lyra, both represents and reinvents the feminine.

In C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* the characters all go on a journey through an alternate magical universe that is an allegory of Christianity and Christian morals. But the ending of the seven book series is, although not at first glance to most children, rather disturbing. All the children who have ever gone to Narnia end up going to Narnia's heaven after that world's version of the apocalypse and the book of Revelations occurs. The children, however, are brought there because they are killed in a train crash in this world (along with their parents). But one of the original children from *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, Susan, is not brought to heaven with them. She is left orphaned in her world because of the changes she has undergone in her life. Towards the end of the final book, *The Last Battle*, Lewis writes:

“My sister Susan,” answered Peter shortly and gravely, “is no longer a friend of Narnia.” “Yes,” said Eustace, “and whenever you've tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says ‘What wonderful

memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children.””

“Oh, Susan!” said Jill. “She’s interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up.” “Grown-up, indeed,” said the Lady Polly. “I wish she *would* grow up. She wasted all her school time wanting to be the age she is now, and she’ll waste all the rest of her life trying to stay that age. Her whole idea is to race on to the silliest time of one’s life as quick as she can and then stop there as long as she can.” (Lewis 741)

Although it is a mixture of things, her newfound materialism and her desire to be an adult and forget childish things like Narnia, as she sees them, there is also another motive for Susan’s punishment. She has recently discovered lipstick and is trying to be a young woman; one of the children comments that she has reached the age she has always wanted to be and will forever try to stay that age. Susan’s materialism and sexuality are in contrast to childish innocence, as exemplified in Susan’s sister Lucy, marking Susan as sinful and rendering sin itself feminine. Susan is growing into a young woman, a sexual creature as implied by the lipstick, and her sexuality and growing femininity are one of the main reasons why her family is taken from her and she is left orphaned. This is a metaphor for her being cast into hell as, in a way, she is since she is not brought to heaven with the rest of her family and is left to try and put her life back together as an orphaned young adult.

The treatment of Susan is an example of the misogyny of the text, where a girl gets sent to hell basically for discovering sex. It is perhaps most disturbing that none of the children seem to have strong opinions against this treatment of Susan, simply accepting it as her fate for becoming what was natural for her to become. C.S. Lewis is drawing from texts and mythology thousands of years old but he still keeps this spirit of misogyny and sexism; this is derived from the tradition of misogyny in the Judeo-Christian world as well. As Jean Graham writes in her essay *Women, Sex and Power: Circe and Lilith in Narnia*:

...he suggests that normal adolescent behavior can result in damnation for girls, whereas the approved adult women who occasionally appear on the periphery are highly domesticated (e.g., Queen Helen with soapsuds up to her elbows, in *The Magician's Nephew*). These disturbing glimpses of what it means for a girl to grow up, along with the peculiarly misogynistic theology resulting from combining Circe and Lilith with Satan, threatens to undo the positive representations of gender in the Narnian Chronicles. (Graham 41)

Circe is the powerful seductress in Homer's *The Odyssey* and Lilith is from a story in the Jewish tradition of a woman created before Eve but cast out for her transgressions; both of these figures inform Lewis's ideas of how to write women in literature. For Lewis, women were sexually sinful creatures in and of themselves. Young girls are only as innocent, pure and free as they are in the Narnia books because they are more like boys at that age. Older women, who were not looked at as devilish like the White Witch, are generally older housewives. They are mature women, past the age of girlhood but not threatening as they fit into the mold made for them by society where they are tame, domestic nurturers and lovers with lessened agency or power (or none at all).

Interestingly, the idea of the White Witch and other evil women in the Narnia books draws from Lewis's ideas of Circe and Lilith who were often associated with animals and monsters. Most notably, *The Chronicles of Narnia* has the Emerald Witch in *The Silver Chair*, believed to be a supposed descendant of the White Witch whose main form is that of a serpent, calling up associations between her and Satan but also between women and beasts: "Long before there was time to do anything, the change was complete, and the great serpent which the Witch

had become, green as poison, thick as Jill's waist, had flung two or three coils of its loathsome body round the Prince's legs" (Lewis 633-634).

In some sense, within the patriarchal perspective there is a fear of women as being akin to animals and therefore ready to turn feral and attack at any given moment, perhaps not physically but definitely socially. Thinking of it that way it makes sense that "good" women would be thought of as domesticated as likewise pets are domesticated animals that offer no threat to their masters, the creators and custodians of the social system. This is important because it highlights how Lewis's works operate with women and how those machinations are sexist.

Young girls were free from this dichotomy until they hit puberty and needed to transition to becoming a good woman and eventual wife. This is particularly evident in that the young girls in these books, particularly the ones presented as most likeable and the better girls, are generally tomboyish in some ways. Lucy, Susan's younger sister, is the more boyish and adventurous of the two and is given the less feminine weapon, a knife. Susan is given the bow which has historically been viewed as a more effeminate weapon due to the cheap nature of how it kills instead of having to fight face to face. This clearly highlights Lucy as having, in a sense, a small, almost honorary phallus as her older brother is given the more phallic weapon, the sword of a warrior: "He gave her a little bottle of what looked like glass (but people said afterward that it was made of diamond) and a small dagger. "In this bottle," he said, "there is a cordial made of the juice of one of the fire-flowers that grow in the mountains of the sun. If you or any of your friends is hurt, a few drops of this will restore them. And the dagger is to defend yourself at great need. For you also are not to be in the battle"" (Lewis 160). Healing has also always traditionally and safely been feminine, this scene clearly reinforces and perpetuates that idea while substantiating Lucy's role as a pure, safe female.

In fact *The Chronicles of Narnia* features many young girls as main characters but all of them are tomboys. In previous books in the series before *The Last Battle*, such as *The Horse and His Boy*, other girls appear as protagonists or friends of the main male character; they are active but are so largely due to their “purity”, pre-puberty status, and tomboyish characteristics: “Aravis had always been more interested in bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming” (*Horse* 99). Like Lucy, Aravis is “Amazonian, with her interest in the weapons of hunting and warfare” (Graham 41)

Graham brings up important points about the series as it has dealt with female characters and how it later culminates in the final book. Aravis’s friend Lasaraleen is brought up in stark contrast to Aravis where Aravis is the likeable character, the one approved by the text and although Aravis is imagined as what females should be with positive attributes this does not hide the fact that Aravis is viewed positively in part due to her incorporation of masculinity into herself; “The fuss [Lasaraleen] made about choosing the dresses nearly drove Aravis mad. She remembered now that Lasaraleen had always been like that, interested in clothes and parties and gossip. Aravis had always been more interested in bows and arrows and horses and dogs and swimming.” (*The Horse and His Boy*, 251). Casting off or foregoing femininity, even the standard of femininity set by the patriarchal world itself, is part of how female characters gain a sanctioned status in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Jean Graham also writes:

She [Susan] remembers Narnia only as a childhood game, and is “interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations,” while her younger sister Lucy is the first of her generation to discover a way to Narnia, and she sees Aslan more often than the other children (*Voyage* 111). She learns to distrust female beauty when she discovers a magic spell that will give her beauty “beyond the lot of mortals” and potentially destroy the entire Narnian worlds as its leaders fight over her (153-54). Her love for Aslan gives her the strength to resist the temptation to use this spell-or is it the temptation to enter adolescence? (Graham 40-41)

Here we find a reiteration of the main argument against the plot of the Narnia books and the ways they operate in terms of misogyny. Susan is the vain, beautiful, superficial girl but also an archetypal cliché in the vein of the blonde cheerleader in the high school drama movie. Her main fault is her femininity, or rather her stylized femininity. The patriarchal society around them punishes girls for pursuing such interests while neglecting to look at the causes for the behavior. Also, there is a strong tone of an anti-sex attitude where associating women and girls with makeup, clothes and vanity associates them as well with the implied purpose of those pursuits- sex, assumedly with men. It is not just that Susan is bad for being a girl or liking things that are coded as feminine but she is also condemned for discovering sex and growing up as a normal human being. But patriarchy also requires this kind of behavior from women as it needs and desires feminine women, women who submit to and uphold the society's standards, who perpetuate its ideals and social structure, women and girls to propagate more children and to help continue and maintain the ideas the patriarchy possesses. It is a seemingly counterintuitive system where the behavior that is required from women and young girls is also punished but that is the modus operandi of the patriarchy.

Susan's demise in *The Last Battle* is perhaps foreshadowed in *The Horse and His Boy* as in this book readers get a glimpse of a Narnia ruled by the adult versions of Susan and her siblings. As an adult woman and queen, Susan is depicted as being feminine to the extreme with implications of being superficial as well:

“What think you? We have been in this city full three weeks. Have you yet settled in your mind whether you will marry this dark-faced lover of yours, this Prince Rabadash, or no?”

[Susan] shook her head. “No, brother,” she said, “not for all the jewels in Tashbaan.” (“Hullo!” though Shasta. “Although they’re king and queen, they’re brother and sister, not married to one another.”)

“Truly, sister,” said the King. “I should have loved you the less if you had taken him. And I tell you that at the first coming of the Tisroc’s ambassadors into Narnia to treat of this marriage, and later when the Prince was our guest at Cair Paravel, it was a wonder to me that ever you could find it in your heart to show him so much favour.”

“That was my folly, Edmund,” said Queen Susan, “of which I cry you mercy. Yet when he was with us in Narnia, truly this Prince bore himself in another fashion than he does now in Tashbaan. For I take you all to witness what marvelous feats he did in that great tournament and hastilude which our brother the High King made for him, and how meekly and courteously he consorted with us the space of seven days. But here, in his own city, he has shown another face.” (Lewis 234)

Susan is clearly not thought of with much respect as queen and although she has what are clearly bad traits for a person to have, this is problematic in how it is associated with her being a woman. Later on in *The Last Battle* we hear talk of a Susan similar to this one except somehow worse and therefore deserving of retribution in the eyes of Aslan/God.

Lucy, in contrast, is the beloved daughter of *The Chronicles of Narnia* appearing as the purest model of virtue for young girls reading the books. She is definitely feminine but also boyish. She is given the more masculine weapon as a gift from Father Christmas in the story, is a more active agent than Susan is and takes part in more male coded activities. She is not the wild tomboy that we sometimes get and is not as tomboyish as Aravis but her sweet, innocent young girl image is still mixed with a sense of androgynous gendering.

Here the text draws upon Lewis’s own knowledge of female literary and cultural figures although now it moves on to other women in the series:

Lewis wrote to Arthur Greeves that Lilith “is not primarily a sex symbol, but includes the characteristic female abuse of sex, which is love of Power” (Blasdel 4). The witches know they are beautiful, and use their beauty not to bring pleasure to men, but to put others under their control. (Graham 40)

Many of the villains in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are women. The White Witch is the most famous but Jadis and the Emerald Witch are her predecessor and successor in *The*

Magician's Nephew and *The Silver Chair* respectively. Each of them relates back to the demonic women of ancient stories, both Greek and Biblical in origin. Sex is related to power and here as well sex, or rather beauty, is a dangerous weapon in how it can be used to control or usurp power. When in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* Lucy sees what she can become, a woman so beautiful she causes men to wage wars to win her, (harkening back to the story of Helen of Troy) it draws upon Lewis' idea that women use their beauty as a means to gain power and appropriate male authority. The adult women in *The Chronicles of Narnia* are vilified for this, for their sexuality, femininity, beauty and ability to manipulate or even control men. Only young girls like Lucy are given a positive status in the society where they have agency and respect but only so long as they avoid growing up past innocence and purity into the adult world of womanhood and sexuality.

Years after Lewis's books, Philip Pullman wrote the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, a series of books where a young girl named Lyra lives in an alternate universe that parallels our own and is destined to go on an adventure to defeat the forces of evil (although "evil" is not the correct term to use here as these books have a complicated relationship with the idea of good and evil). In this story, however, the "forces of evil" as it were, are represented as the Catholic Church and God himself.

Pullman's book works to counter *The Chronicles of Narnia* and operate as a response to them. They both follow a similar idea, alternate worlds filled with magic and fantastical, epic stories populated with child protagonists. But they diverge most notably in their spirit; where *The Chronicles of Narnia* works as a Christian allegory of the Bible in order to impart Christian beliefs and morals to its young readers, *His Dark Materials* is a counter to Lewis's books and

works to expose the darker side of the Church and religion since, as the author put it, “My books are about killing God” (Watkins, 21).

His Dark Materials, particularly in the first book *The Golden Compass*, deals with femininity, almost and quite probably purposefully in reaction to the ending of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The main character of the series is a young girl named Lyra who embodies many aspects of femininity that have been historically viewed in a negative light. Her very name is Lyra which sounds very close to the word “liar” as women have always been thought of as deceitful or manipulative; this is a world where women are valued the same way the medieval Catholics did. Lyra is a unique character with positive traits and flaws but is also presented in an interesting way as the text works to cast a more progressive and positive light on her femininity while highlighting her growing up process as she struggles with her own femininity. As Stephen G. Nichols writes:

In the opinion of the Latin Fathers, Creation was an event in real (historical) time which viewed gender differentiation and hierarchy as part of the divine model for humans. In this view, sexual differentiation at the time of creation showed God’s wisdom in creating a weak, inferior being, woman, as the instrument of the Fall which, although not preordained, was anticipated. Woman’s sexual differentiation emphasized the body, the seat of sensuality and irrationality, which qualities were said to characterize feminine discourse. For the Latin Fathers, this “historical” view amply justified the subordination of women in marriage. (Nichols 72)

Lyra is a liar and manipulative, two of the traits associated with women and the first woman Eve. “A central symbolism within *His Dark Materials* is the role of Lyra as ‘Eve! Mother of all! Eve, again! Mother Eve!’ who will be life, and who will disobey: a designation stammered out by the unfortunate tortured witch Lena Feldt” (Jobling 153). She is a tomboy, gets into fights, is rude and generally just gets into trouble. As a young girl this brings her up in an interesting light. First, this could be seen as possibly playing into the type of misogyny that Lewis was prone to, where girls could be seen positively and just as good as the boys but only so

far as they were like boys. But Lyra is not what can be called a good girl and doesn't really hold any standards of femininity the way that Lewis's girls do. Lyra journeys mainly on her own without someone to be her counterpart child, excluding her male daemon Pantalaimon. This is important since being on her own and receiving only aid from others helps to align her with the mythic heroes, men who did things on their own although they were nearly always aided as well, as Odysseus was aided by Athena.

Lyra also possesses internalized misogyny due to the nature of the world she has been raised in although she herself is a non-gender conforming female. Being brought up at Oxford, the very same university where C.S. Lewis lived and worked in, (inevitably calling up interpretations of this world as a representation of him and a critique of his work) has caused Lyra to absorb ideas about gender and society that are antiquated and hurtful to say the least.

In the two later books, Lyra will grow up and meet other women who are powerful and good people. This will help her to grow up and accept herself as a female and to embrace a more progressive and true idea about femininity, where it is not something that restrains her or characterizes an entire group of people so as to cast them as sinful and lesser than men with their masculinity. Rather, Lyra slowly becomes a young woman with her own agency, power, dreams, ideas and personhood as an equal to any other man or woman.

If Lyra is the "new Eve" as she will later be called in her story, there is a strong reason for saying Lyra herself is meant to be a figurehead for a new kind of femininity, one that counters Lewis's ideas in the Narnia books but one that also works to deconstruct and recreate gender dichotomies. Lyra is the hero of the story, a direct and obvious counterpoint to many of the heroes who have come before her, mostly due to her sex. In the book *Innocence, Heterosexuality, and the Queerness of Children's Literature*, Tison Pugh writes:

The ominous circumstances surrounding Lyra's birth and her early escape from extinction quickly connect her to the mythic hero tradition in the trilogy's narrative trajectory, but the sexist milieu of Jordan College inhibits her from recognizing her heroic potential. For Lyra, a significant task embedded in her epic journey entails freeing herself of her bias against her sex and its gendered construction. The primarily male environs of Jordan College, both tacitly and blatantly, establish women as inferior to men, and Lyra accepts these gendered prohibitions as natural and just. (Pugh 64)

The world in *His Dark Materials* begins in Jordan College which is located in Oxford.

There Lyra is raised by the scholars and is taught a fair amount about the world but also absorbs many negative stereotypes, assumptions and ideas both about gender and the world in general.

As a rising hero in the narrative that is about defying the traditions and ideas of the past for the eventual creation of a new world with a new, more inclusive and progressive state of mind

Lyra's background and mindset are one of the many obstacles she must overcome in growing up.

Lyra's world is depicted as misogynistic from the beginning: "Lyra had lived most of her life in the College, but had never seen the Retiring Room before: only Scholars and their guests were allowed in here, and never females. Even the maidservants didn't clean in here. That was the Butler's job alone" (Pullman 4). In quick but not unnecessary descriptions, Lyra's world is detailed in important ways, giving information about how she must have been raised. As a child she knows she is a lesser being in the hierarchy; knowing the lesser status of women and girls within this society has a major effect on how she thinks and looks at the world.

Lyra absorbs these kinds of ideas and attitudes towards women which means she has an inherent problem with herself and her status as a young girl and an eventual woman: "From Jordan College, an all-male institution to the Jordan River, the site of Jesus' baptism at the hands of John the Baptist), Lyra learns to treat women as second-class citizens. In these novels, childhood innocence is imbued with adult prejudices" (Pugh 65). Lyra as child represents the ways in which children learn from the adults and culture they live in and gain their foundational

mindsets. But children are also capable of learning new things and changing their views and ideas and that is one of the major themes of *His Dark Materials*.

In a later book Lyra performs a sort of misogynistic tomboy routine: “She refused to wear jeans, refused even to believe Will when he told her that most girls did. ‘They’re trousers,’ she said. ‘I’m a girl. Don’t be stupid.’” (*The Subtle Knife*, 63) Even though Lyra operates as an active character who makes her own choices and is not treated as less of a person by the narrative for being female there is that sense in her of something being wrong with women and girls, something being wrong with herself. This problem, however, is almost brushed aside inside her head as she knows herself to be a person and a human being but does not seem to fully recognize this in other human beings if they fall under the category “Female”. Or at least she connects the notion of femininity with the idea of being sub-human although she doesn’t necessarily realize that. “The word *female* only suggested female Scholars to Lyra, and she involuntarily made a face” (Pullman 70).

Lyra cannot shake her own status as a girl though and so keeps it while at the same time remaining uneasy with it or rejecting parts of it in herself and in others. By choosing to keep the ideas she has learned about how clothing is gendered, Lyra perpetuates the idea of the patriarchy that has oppressed her in her own life and in so doing prevents her from coming into a new understanding of what it means to be a girl or a boy or even something else. Pugh illuminates how this tomboy nature of Lyra affects her as a character in the narrative overall:

For Lyra, gender is an obstacle on her path to heroism, but neither rejecting tomboyism and its enactment of masculinity nor embracing femininity would alleviate her narrative struggles. As much as Lyra’s tomboyism dominates her depiction throughout much of the trilogy, alternate models of femininity arise to divert her from her quest, and such enactments of femininity sabotage her nascent heroism. (Pugh 66)

The problems Lyra faces are many but the one that is perhaps most immediate in her own person is her gender where she cannot be said to really overcome the issue within the scope of the first book in the trilogy. Her journey towards dealing with it begins there and the seeds of coming into a new understanding of gender and herself are planted in the narrative of *The Golden Compass*. As the rare female hero in a children's book she is put under much harder scrutiny than her male counterparts but interestingly the book works to deal with Lyra learning about femininity and her own relation to it.

Lyra's journey in *The Golden Compass* causes her to mature in many ways including with regard to her femininity, as for the first time in her young life she meets another woman who she truly thinks of as a person worthy of respect and admiration. Mrs. Coulter introduces Lyra to the world of femininity and womanhood in a way, although she exposes her to only one aspect of it. Mrs. Coulter shows her the world of being beautiful and manipulative and using one's femininity to obtain power. Lyra is sucked in by this at first and quite nearly seduced by it:

And finally, there were other kinds of lessons so gently and subtly given that they didn't feel like lessons at all. How to wash one's own hair; how to judge which colors suited one, how to say no in such a charming way that no offense was given, how to put on lipstick, powder, scent. To be sure, Mrs. Coulter didn't teach Lyra the latter arts directly, but she knew Lyra was watching when she made herself up, and she took care to let Lyra see where kept the cosmetics, and to allow her time on her own to explore and try them out for herself. (Pullman 83)

Eventually Lyra realizes that Mrs. Coulter is her enemy and her mother as well. Mrs. Coulter as a mother is always manipulative, attempting to overpower and mold Lyra into what she wants her to be. She is like any other parent in a way but the fact that she cares enough for Lyra to protect Lyra from the Magisterium's intercision project shows there is some sort of the motherly love in Mrs. Coulter that we usually expect from mothers in stories. Mrs. Coulter claims or rather lies that the process is for the good of the children and those who have

undergone it but her actions to protect Lyra from this operation that is basically spiritual castration shows the true nature of her intentions and the intentions of the larger enemies Lyra must face. In some sense, though, Mrs. Coulter is a product of the patriarchy and an example of what kind of woman misogyny is capable of creating. Mrs. Coulter has internalized the Church's view of women and she is evil, in part, due to that background although it is still clearly her own character that drives her motives in the end. In the end, Mrs. Coulter is partially redeemed or at least fleshed out as a character when she shows love for Lyra or protects her.

Reaching back to Susan, there are parallels between her and Lyra as they both deal with this aspect of femininity. Susan chooses to embrace it and become a woman and is vilified for it. Lyra chooses to deny it and follow her original path but with Lyra it does not feel so much as a rejection of moving from childhood to adulthood as it does a rejection of Mrs. Coulter and her facades. It does come up as problematic as there are connections to Lewis's girls way of rejecting femininity and adulthood to be good and Lyra does seem to do something similar except it is more complicated than that.

Lyra rejects Mrs. Coulter's form of femininity and womanhood and continues on with her own personal way of life where she is basically a tomboy. She still has not really accepted and dealt with the fact that she is a girl and a feminine creature and, partly due to her upbringing and this event with her mother, seems to view all women who attempt to take on power as lesser or perhaps even worthless. This air of misogyny relates back to C.S. Lewis and Lyra's Oxford college upbringing where women's power is only ever imagined as their attempt to usurp male power for themselves instead of being accepting and submissive in the pre-designed societal role for them.

This story takes place in an alternate universe based on our own and although women and men are in basically the same sort of social structure as the one in our world, there is the issue of daemons which must be addressed. Pantalaimon is Lyra's daemon and also male; everyone has a daemon who is usually the opposite sex of their human. The daemon is both separate and the same being as his or her counterpart. But does this have any effect on how Lyra is gendered or is it saying something else about gender?

This transition from having a daemon that can change to having a settled daemon says something about "the business of being human"-in particular about the business of growing up. For Pullman, this is the central theme of *His Dark Materials*: "I suddenly realized that of course what the whole story is about is growing up. It's about the difference between innocence and experience, between childhood and adulthood." (Watkins 115)

The issue of opposite sex daemons brings up points about how gender is fluid and the main purpose of the daemons is to express other things about human nature, like growing up, as Watkins writes above. All people have another side to themselves, such as one's "feminine side" but even if that is the case in the text, there is also the fact that having opposite sex daemons or even same sex daemons for a few characters helps highlight the pointlessness of how this society thinks of gender and sex as on a spiritual or mental level: there is no solid binary. Even when men are masculine their feminine side is clearly there as well but even so their female counterpart can act just as "masculine" as their humans. Gender is a fluid entity that expresses itself in myriads of ways which can be perceived by others as they wish but their own self is separate, albeit connected, to their body and physical sex.

This gender trouble with the daemons is best exemplified in a scene at the end of *The Golden Compass* where Lyra's father and mother meet each other again after a long time and their daemons interact again as well. "The monkey's tail was erect, the snow leopard's swept

powerfully from side to side. Then the monkey reached out a tentative paw, the leopard lowered her head with a graceful sensual acknowledgment, they touched-” (Pullman 393-394). In that one scene we see the sexuality of the two characters being expressed in a metaphorical but still deeply physical way. The erect tail of the monkey, calling up images of an erect phallus, expresses sexuality but in a way almost counter to gender as although the monkey itself is male its partner, Mrs. Coulter, is female. And in contrast, the female snow leopard, Lord Asriel’s daemon, lowers her head in a feminine, submissive way. They express their partner’s sexualities but do so in a way that expresses their gender and sexuality as counter to their sex and perceived gender roles.

They still do behave in way that supports their gender roles as well though. As the two lovers embrace, the daemons continue to express their partner’s other, deeper feelings: “His hands, still clasping her head, tenses suddenly and drew her toward him in a passionate kiss. Lyra thought it seemed more like cruelty than love, and looked at their daemons, to see a strange sight: the snow leopard tense, crouching with her claws just pressing in the golden monkey’s flesh, and the monkey relaxed, blissful, swooning on the snow” (Pullman 395). And almost immediately after that the daemons reverse roles again as Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter continue to kiss: “And their mouths were fastened together with a powerful greed. Their daemons were playing fiercely; the snow leopard rolled over on her back, and the monkey raked his claws in the soft fur of her neck, and she growled a deep rumble of pleasure” (Pullman 396).

The two daemons express gender and sexuality in this scene but switch back and forth between dominant and submissive roles regardless of their sex and gender or that of their partners. The daemons in this scene serve to highlight the dual or rather multilayered nature of human beings, not only in terms of personality but also in terms of gender and sexuality. Images

like this illuminate one of the key points of the novel, something that Lyra slowly learns over the course of the trilogy, where things like gender and sex do not carry meaning the way the world has taught them and exposes human beings as being much more complex beings who do not necessarily subscribe to binary standards.

Another vital theme of Pullman's books, that the daemons are also meant to express with their "settling" they do when a child reached adolescence, is that they are about the difference between childhood and adulthood, innocence and experience, and what all that really means. For starters, it means that the world is not as black and white as it is set up to be. The books deal with moral grey areas and differ from other children's books by making the children the ones who have to fight through nearly every obstacle on their own without adults saving them deus ex machina style. In *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science & Daemonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, Glenn Yeffeth writes:

Will and Lyra are not adventuring in a kiddie-safe, magical play land, but nor does the success of their adventures hinge on timely adult intervention. Lyra and Will evade and challenge adult attempts to keep them passive, and end up not only controlling their own destinies but influencing the destinies of all the interlinked universes including Heaven and the world of the dead. (Yeffeth 145)

The world is dark and destructive, where adults will abuse and even kill children, in effect, a more realistic world than children's books usually like to depict. But more importantly it is a world in which the children have to face the truth about the world and themselves without censorship from adult editors. *His Dark Materials* negates what *The Chronicles of Narnia* sets up, a world of child protagonists who can do some amazing things but are always trumped by adults or a benevolent higher power that can represent the adults that children are expected to submit to. Those children can even grow up into adulthood but only in the magical world of Narnia and without ever giving much detail into how their lives went and with the condition that they return

to being normal children upon their exit of Narnia. This is difficult just on a level of characterization as there would clearly be many problems with growing up only to return to childhood but keeping all one's memories of being an adult. Also, none of the children marry and only Susan has any kind of romantic or sexual encounters in the other world which, although befitting the type of censorship that occurs in children's books by their own authors, renders most of them asexual and childlike even in adulthood (casting an even more obvious light of anti-adulthood/sexuality/women glare upon Susan within the text).

Female power sees a reversal in its representation in Pullman's book in comparison to Lewis's. In *The Golden Compass*, one of the groups of people inhabiting this alternate universe of ours that are introduced are the witches. The witches in this world are interesting, they are their own society that is the exact opposite of the patriarchal world they live in. They are all women, female led and use human males as lovers they take for a season, leaving their male children with their fathers and keeping the daughters for themselves, and men can never become witches or take major positions of powers within the society of witches and their clans. As Pullman writes in *The Golden Compass*:

“Are there men witches? Or only women?” “There are men who serve us, like the consul at Trollesund. And there are men we take for lovers or husbands. You are so young, Lyra, too young to understand this, but I shall tell you anyway and you'll understand it later: men 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. They die so soon that our hearts are continually racked with pain. We bear their children, who are witches if they are female, human if not; and then in the blink of an eye they are gone, felled, slain, lost.” (Pullman 314)

Witches are described here as the witch queen, Serafina Pekkala, answers Lyra's questions. Here we find an interesting power dynamic between men and women, where men are not thought of as dominant in their relationships but rather as incredibly inferior. It is not that the

witches look down upon their male lovers but wish instead for an equal relationship between the two of them. The problem is that the witches are much more powerful than the men they love, their power and lifespans being far too different for a relationship to work out between them. But even pregnancy and childbirth are not considered obstacles to equality which, with the witches society's reversed power dynamics, stands out in sharp contrast to the usual male-female power dynamic that is seen in the rest of the patriarchal world. Here issues like this, such as pregnancy, are painted more of as an effect of the relationship and not as something that changes the witch and her lover or their relationship to each other.

Gender has an inverse effect on male-female relationships with witches but more importantly this witch, Serafina Pekkala, is important because she and her kind are vectors of female power in this world particularly in relation to Lyra. For Lyra there is a lack of strong, good female role models in her life and for her the witches, particularly the queen of this clan of witches, help give her a new kind of role model. This is the beginning of Lyra's journey to get rid of and move past her internalized misogyny.

Lyra begins to see some women in a positive light although it clearly has a shaky start. While conversing with Serafina, Lyra hears from her the story of how another character named Iorek came to lose his right to being king while justifying his good character: "She admired Iorek almost without limit, and she was glad to find confirmation of his nobility. "That's clever of you," she said. "I wouldn't have known that if you hadn't told me. I think you're probably cleverer than Mrs. Coulter" (Pullman 318). Here there is a complicated interplay of gender dynamics as in one way Lyra is seeing through the witches another avenue of femininity, something different from Mrs. Coulter, and admires that. But she is still observing that and admiring that in relation to a male character and her admiration for him. It can be argued that the fact that she doesn't

want to lose her respect for a male character and that she compliments Serafina for her cleverness in relation to Mrs. Coulter (as being lesser) does not really interfere with the burgeoning sense of positive femininity and appreciation for female people. It should still be brought up, however, that although this is a step forward for Lyra it is a problematic step forward.

Moving back to Lyra now, we must consider that her journey as the hero of her books is similar to that of the mythic hero as Tison Pugh has described it. She is a rewriting of the mythic hero tale, a reworking of all the stories that have come before her that have been populated with male heroes along with being an attempted rewrite, or at least response to, Lewis's works. In *Fantasy, Myth and the Measure of Truth*, William Gray writes:

HDM literally begins and ends with Lyra, who like Harry Potter, her rival in the best seller lists (and not only for children's books), seems almost ostentatiously ordinary, but is also 'the chosen one'... She is a wilfully wayward intertextual relative of Lucy Pevensie, with a penchant for hiding in wardrobes and a special relationship with a menacingly large regal carnivore. Lyra is also a kind of Alice with attitude and the common touch, actually giving her name at one point as 'Alice' (NL 101); Alice is the prototype of the 'deconstructed' hero, according to Hourihan, who subverts hero conventions and gender dualisms. And Lyra is a shocking liar. This arguably goes beyond the customary resourcefulness of heroes in fairy-tales and Greek myths. Lyra is a borderline case of compulsive lying or mythomania; Pullman is arguably creating a new mythology round a mythomaniac. (Gray 181)

The essential point of this is that Lyra is like a new Odysseus in that she is the hero of her tale and the one the reader is meant to sympathize with but also a complex character with her cunning and talent for lying. Lyra is a character who does both good and bad things, who makes both good and bad choices. One of Lyra's main flaws is that she is a liar but it is also one of her main powers. In the patriarchal view, women with power lie because of their beauty and ability to manipulate, to lie and to control with subtlety. Lyra's talent for lying is one of her best skills but in these books she is not admonished for that being an essential part of her identity. Rather, lying is considered a tool and a useful one, one that should not be abused but not bad in and of

itself. This rewrites ideas about women as deceivers as although she is a female liar this isn't a negative moralistic story about her but rather a championing of femininity in relation to aspects that are not inherently feminine, flying in the face of the views of the past.

Lyra is a hero not in spite of her femininity and negative qualities but because of them. The things that appear to be obstacles to her becoming a mythic hero are instead important pieces of herself that make her what she is. Lyra is a liar but in the end that saves her life and helps her countless time in the story. She is a girl but that in turn is a part of her identity and helps her to be the hero the world and the entire universe needs. As Tison Pugh writes "Within *His Dark Materials*, heroism is achieved by rejecting childhood sexual innocence and by freeing eroticism from gender, not by enacting femininity and masculinity according to social clichés" (Pugh 67)

C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* are fantastic stories but they are problematic when it comes to issues of gender and their latent misogyny. Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is a series that works in response to that narrative to create a more progressive story that is female positive and sex positive. Pullman's point about Lewis and his books is that the Western Christian tradition Lewis is a part of and was shaped by is deeply misogynistic and through *His Dark Materials* we find that critique played out in the form of an epic story offering a radical new alternative that empowers rather than tears down the feminine character.

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