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From the Realms of Light to the Eternal Night: Refashioning, Defending and Demolishing the Essence of the Christian Myths in the works of John Milton, J. R. R. Tolkien and Philip Pullman.

Relatore
Ch.ma Prof.ssa Laura Tosi

Correlatore
Ch.ma Prof.ssa Loretta Innocenti

Laureando
Daniele Giusto
Matricola 827456

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List of Abbreviations

John Milton's *Paradise Lost*   PL

J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*   Sil.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring   LOTR, FR

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy:

Northern Lights   NL

The Subtle Knife   SK

The Amber Spyglass   AS

Introduction

There is a distinctive feature common to all religious cultures and that is the relationship between the individual and the infinite, the divinity. This relationship is expressed through the creation of myths. Rolland Hein affirms that: *"myths are, first of all, stories: stories which confront us with something transcendent and eternal."* (Hein, 1998:3). Certainly, for religious cultures – which are the most primitive cultures ever – the main issue is related to the creation and use of cosmogonic myths, in order to define the origins and purposes of their existence and of the cosmic system. There is of course a religious and metaphysical meaning in myths, as the gods and supernatural beings are not only the protagonists of these stories but also the object of worship in these cultures, and they are believed to generate natural phenomena.

The purpose of this thesis is, first of all, to understand the importance of myths in human cultures, in order to realise, on second examination, the way in which the religious and in particular the traditional biblical myths are reinterpreted into such a peculiar literary genre like fantasy fiction. Fantasy, after all, is a genre which has generally been considered as a generator of wonder, mystery and supernatural events, but above all a genre conventionally connected with surreal representations, for instance, myths, legends, folk and fairy tales, dreams and science fiction, which on the whole express alternative visions of the ordinary world in which individuals live. Anyhow, even though fantasy has almost usually been believed to be a minor literary genre, this study will discuss the way fantasy itself is capable of dealing with important issues like the traditional biblical myths of Creation, War in Heaven and Fall, and their moral values in human existence. These dominant myths are the sacred truths upon which the Christian faith is patterned, and represent the essence of the

Christian message, that is to say the spiritual pathways and narratives of trial and struggle, leading to the formation of the Christian character and his world.

This thesis, in particular, will explain how these myths were reimagined and rewritten by the most relevant authors of fantasy literature, since the Biblical theology itself demands belief in other worlds and, in a way, in supernatural beings and happenings. More specifically, we will analyse the way of these writers refashion archetypes and recurrent themes and structures, in order to defend and strengthen their Christian faith and message, for example Christian well-known writers like C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien. Tolkien indeed will be one of the writers included in this study, as he is considered one of the greatest Christian mythmakers ever. Anyway, on first examination, the thesis will also examine *Paradise Lost,* by John Milton, and its features, which belong to Christian mythopoeia. Milton, in a certain way, can be read as a great inspirer of the literary model, which will be later called *Christian Fantasy*. Furthermore, we will pay attention to a last contemporary writer who, despite the fact that he deals with religious matters in his writings, sees the Christian faith as something oppressive that has to be attacked and demolished. Certainly, Philip Pullman has been one of the most debated writers of our time just because of his anti-Christian ideas.

Overall, these authors commonly follow the pathways of the biblical myths and of this particular branch of fantasy fiction, in order to defend and re-express the Christian faith but also to attack and destroy its grounds. Therefore, one of the principal purposes of this study will also be to analyse the reinterpretations of Biblical myths in Christian fantasy from these two antithetical perspectives.

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Chapter 1

The Revival of Mythology in Fantasy Fiction

1.1 The Matter of Mythology

The origins of the word "mythology" date back to the history of ancient Greece, in which the fusion of the Aristotelian terms *mythos* and *logos* was the equivalent of "spoken word" or "stories." These stories were related to the divinities of Olympus and to the heroes' deeds. Indeed, myths are interconnected stories which are meant to make up a mythology, that is to say all the religious and historical issues related to the culture those myths belong to. David Harvey asserts that: "myths are tales concerning gods or superhuman beings and extraordinary events, or amazing circumstances, in a time that is quite different from normal human experience." (Harvey, 1985:4). In particular, the time of mythic events is a transcendent time, almost a temporarily suspended time. Rolland Hein explains that time in myths is called Kairos time by mythologists and that it can be considered as transcendent time, which is opposed to chronological time and its regular rhythmic development. Indeed, it is a biblical feature to consider a thousand years as a day and a day as a thousand years. Rolland Hein also relates Kairos time with a psychological state, since we can experience it "whenever we become so completely absorbed in something that we lose consciousness of ourselves; it is as though the self is extinguished, and we become the other" (Hein, 1998:4). Thus, in addition to their identity as narrators of the origins of a culture, from the very beginning of their foundation, myths have always constituted the solid expression of the relationship between the individual and the infinite, the divinity, but also a relevant aspect in the continuing development of human society.

Fictions or stories are a dominant factor for every human society, as the scholar Northrop Frye explains. More precisely, Frye considers them as forms of verbal cultures, which can be classified in two typologies: the mythical and the

fabulous. The mythical is generally related to the history of a culture, since it allows the main features of a society, such as religion, laws, social structure, history and cosmology, to take shape. It is, therefore, one of the pillars of a civilisation. On the other hand, the fabulous deals with stories conceived to entertain or amuse, which are generally associated with folktales and legends. This means that these stories are created to satisfy the imaginative needs of the community. Therefore, according to Frye, the difference between the mythical and the fabulous is in social function and spirit rather than in structure. There is, indeed, a solemn and religious spirit in myths, not only because they have gods and supernatural beings as the object of their worship but also because their purpose is to explain the reasons for the existence of things and creatures. They are the embodiment of a religious heritage. However, both the mythical and the fabulous emerge from the nature of man and his desires to find the answers to universal questions. They are the symbolic representations of an individual's expectations, values, fears and aims.

The historian Mircea Eliade explains: "Myth narrates a sacred history (…) it tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality." (Eliade, 1973:45). Eliade in particular considers myths as "the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred or the supernatural into the world", which are called revelations or with the biblical term *epiphany*. Folktales, instead, possess a more nomadic spirit, in the sense that they are not tied up together or expanded into larger structures, but rather they have gradually interchanged or enriched their motifs and themes over the centuries. Nonetheless, David Harvey argues: "in common with myths, legends were handed down through generations and have enriched the lives of their listeners, and their values and lessons were a link with a heroic past and often divine wisdom." (Harvey, 1985:7). For this reason, we can consider the mythical writer as promoter of tradition and history, whereas the writer of folktales may, in a

certain way, make up his stories and characters, by rewriting stories that are already embedded in some elements of the history of a nation.

Over the centuries, myths have been the subject of many debates, in particular regarding their meaning and truthfulness. The early Greek philosophers, for instance, applied the meaning of *mythos* to those stories in which the truth had been distorted or altered. It is only with Plato that myths will emerge into a new light, since, despite the fact that he considers *mythos* as essentially untrue, at the same time he realises there could be elements of truth in them. Thus, philosophers like Pindar or Thucydides are sceptical regarding the matter of the truth of myths, whereas Plato is the first who starts to see them as a vehicle for disseminating a sort of truth, which can be compared to the biblical parables. Parables, indeed, are the plainest example of stories embedded with religious symbolism. Religion, after all, contains multiple elements of mythology, since they both share this symbolic approach to life, whereas they have different perspectives on truth. Religion and parables, indeed, aim at disclosing a solemn truth through the usage of daily objects and events, whereas myths narrates the deeds of divine beings and extraordinary events to explain supposed truths.

There is also the psycho-analytical perspective on myth, at the end of XIX century, when Carl Jung retraces a possible source of myth in the human psyche and its depths, with its archetypal desires and urges, which are symptomatic of the collective dreams of a society. Jung, indeed, attributed a particular sense to the word archetypes, considering them as the recurrent themes, universal symbols and motifs of the different mythologies. Myths, after all, could be different from each other, but do represent, according to Jung, similar themes and meanings, that is to say the archetypes. Both Jung and his onetime master, Freud, interpreted myth as imaginative and metaphorical expressions of the human psyche, both from the individual's and the community's perspective. Notwithstanding, Jung rejected Freudian theories since they focused too much on the neurotic rather than the healthy features of

the psyche. In particular, Jung went beyond Freud's theories of the individual unconscious, asserting that the unconscious itself is a primeval, immortal feature of the psyche, contrary to Lockean and Freudian psychology that considered mind as born as a clean slate. Like the body, Jung believed that mind had a pre-established individual definiteness, structural elements that would manifest themselves into motifs and archetypes, which are, therefore, expressions of the psyche. Jung focused in particular on issues regarding middle and later life, in order to face the split-off aspects of themselves and thereby attain wisdom. Freud, instead, focused on a primordial research of the infantile development and the psychological conflicts between human desires and the forces that frustrate them. One of these conflicts is expressed in the well-known psychosexual myth of Oedipus, in which he asserted that every human being possesses innate impulses that take shape in the actions they undertake.

Northrop Frye asserts that myths and legends take on a common connotation of truth and a structural identity, which differentiates them from the conception of truth of religion. He considers this common connotation as "not really true" (Frye, 1976:18). More specifically, to use the two Aristotelian terms again, *Mythoi* are just considered as stories and are generally believed to belong to pagan religions or cultures, and to represent non-realistic or partially truthful facts. *Logoi,* on the other hand, are considered as true stories and are related to the Christian Scriptures, the Bible, and its sacred stories.

Christian mythmakers, Tolkien and Lewis in particular, felt that the importance of each biblical message were altered, in a way, and influenced by the various myths of these pagan religions. They believed this influence could have consequently given birth to a paradoxical Christian mythology. Therefore, it was almost as if the supposed truths of these mythologies foreshadowed the solemn deep-rooted realities of Christian faith. Nonetheless, mythological elements could be retraced in religion. After all, the Bible could be also read as the epic of the great and powerful Creator, God the hero, his creatures and his

deeds. Also, the Bible is replete with supernatural elements and mysterious events, which increase its epic tone. These writers, however, consider the Bible as the repository of ultimate truth and claim its authority not only in faith, but also in literary matters. As we will see, their literary experiments are intensely marked by religious allusions and imagery. However, it will be explained that their aim is not to rewrite Biblical stories by turning them into fairy stories, or to defile the sacred reality of the account; on the contrary, they aimed at putting them into a new light in order to glorify the essence of the Christian message.

1.2 Christian Fantasy: the Bond Between Myth and Religion.

In the history of literature, it has always proved difficult to classify fantasy as a single literary genre, since every literary work is fantasy and provides an imaginary representation. Anyhow, all critics agree to define fantasy as a complex and articulated genre, which is generally related with non-realistic representations like myths, fairy tales, horror stories and science fiction; in other words all literary manifestations resulting from the ability of imaginative minds to soar above the world of possibility. Mikhail Bakhtin in particular affirms that is a genre that serves "in the search after the truth, its provocation and, most importantly, its *testing*." [1] In other words, the narrative mechanism of fantasy is controlled by an explicit violation of what is conventionally accepted as possibility, but above all by an enquiry into universal and authoritative truths. Moreover, fantasy has been defined as a genre capable of evoking wonder, suspense, and magical atmospheres, through the usage of

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[1] Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* trans. By R. W. Rotsel. Ardis, 1973. P. 94).

quite remote locations and the account of supernatural events, and the intervention of archetypical characters who belong to the supernatural cosmos. These features can provide escapism from mundane reality. Indeed, as Brian Attebery asserts: "Fantasy is a form of popular escapist literature that combines stock characters and devices – wizards, dragons, magic swords, and the like – into a plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil." (Attebery, 1992:1).

The struggle between good and evil is one of the fundamental features of fantasy literature, and also of the religious world. Indeed, the legendary and infinite struggle between angels, the forces of good, and demons, the forces of evil, have always been considered as the milestone of religious cultures and their greatest book ever, the Bible. This historical book has often been believed to be the ultimate source for the archetypes, imagery and themes of Western literatures. In particular, it is the scholar Northrop Frye who, inspired by the works of William Blake and his important statement "The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art"[2], believed this theory to be one of the most plausible. Therefore, across the centuries, together with mythology, which provided a relevant number of sources for fantasy writers – The "old sources", as Karen Patricia Smith defines them (Smith, 1993:16) – it is religion that is brought under a new light and refashioned. It is no wonder, thus, if most fantasy authors declare themselves to be Christians and claim the Bible and its message to be *logoi,* that is to say the true stories, or ultimate truth, to use Aristotle's words.

In a way, there is a bond between myth and religion, *mythoi* and *logoi,* since both are intentionally conceived to express the relationship between the individual and the infinite. Biblical stories, indeed, are all patterned on peculiar features, each of which is replete with its own symbolical meaning. These

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[2] Frye, Northrop. *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature.* London, Melbourne and Henley: ARK, 1983. The statement is taken from William Blake's annotations surrounding his engraving of the Laocoon.

features follow a linear path that starts from the beginning to the end of times, and are conventionally defined, by the historians of religion, Creation, Heavenly War, Fall and Redemption.[3] Fantasy authors mould, refashion and rewrite these images, by turning them back into myths and, thus, creating a Christian Mythopoeia, as an ultimate celebration of Christian faith and history. The Bible is one of the purest examples of the way that different accounts, once they are all tied together, can make up a mythology. Somehow, we can say that Christianity relies on myths and legends to emphasise the importance of a saint or a prophet, as much as polytheistic cults do. In Greek mythology, for instance, the events narrated are meant to acclaim the greatness of the gods. In like manner, in Christian Mythopoeia the Bible is the epic celebration of the almighty hero, God, all the creatures of his universe like the son, Jesus, the angels and his messengers, the prophets and saints. The Bible is also intended to celebrate the triumph of good over evil, embodied by Satan and his followers, the rebel angels. In all its stories there are wondrous elements, which are mostly prodigies worked by divine power. Religion itself, indeed, demands beliefs in other worlds and extraordinary happenings and entities, and these writers' goal is to reinterpret them. Colin Manlove, defines them "the wonders of the Christian narrative", and explains how the most part of the biblical accounts are embedded with mythical features: "their supernatural elements, such as God being born in a manger, or Noah being chosen by God to survive the flood, or Christ being resurrected, are already generally believed." (Manlove, 1999:20). This means that both myth and religion are concerned with stories which confront us with something transcendent and secular: stories that passed down through the centuries.

In literary forms myths and their materials are adapted to fit public custom and tradition, but more importantly, to stimulate unconscious passions and the

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[3] These images belongs to the theological authentic account, which is recognised by the Church, and were theorised by St. Augustine, in particular in one of his most important philosophical essays: *The City of God,* as C. S. Lewis well explains in his Preface to Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

cognitive mind, which is concerned with trying to find answers to secular questions like the origins of the universe. However, fantasy fiction does not rely exclusively on a single author's imagery and refashioning of ancient myths. Originally it was mainly a collective literature, or rather a traditional oral narrative, and its themes were selected and revisited by generations of storytellers who, beyond mere entertainment, aimed at dealing with important issues with the audience.

The writer, indeed, in refashioning myths, will not only recognise the metaphysical that operates within nature, but he will also bind the imaginary and powerful world of myths to real history and facts of life, since myths are, first of all, part of a culture's legacy and history. In particular, the use of old sources, archetypes and supernatural elements by these writers is not only an aesthetic device for arousing wonder into the reader; it is, in fact, a way to put life's many issues under a new light, which is mainly a metaphorical, or, if we may say, biblical light. Indeed, in fantasy fiction, most characters, which are mainly the stock characters we mentioned earlier, are depicted as the embodiment of particular themes. More precisely, in C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* or in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Middle-Earth,* for example, the usurper Queen Jadis and Morgoth represent an ultimate depiction of primeval evil, deceit and corruption. Inevitably, they are modelled on the greatest evil force of the whole biblical world, Satan.

In Christian Fantasy, indeed, which is the object of this study, religious allusions and features are innumerable. Lewis and Tolkien, two important pillars of this genre, constantly recur to religious analogies when conceiving their works, almost as if they were rewriting and reimagining the entire Bible.[4] As they were both proud of their religiousness, their common goal was to

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[4] Tolkien and Lewis were both professors at Oxford. They met in the 1920s. The former was a devout Christian Catholic, while the latter was an atheist. The strong friendship between them soon helped Lewis to convert to Christianity, and to start together an intense study on myths , especially Norse myths, but above all to move Lewis away from his atheistic rationalism towards the recognition of the metaphysical which can be perceived through the power of imagination. (See Rolland Hein *Christian Mythmakers*. PP. 163-168).

celebrate and defend Christianity, the Bible and its universe. They both believed Fantasy to be the purest way to glorify God's deeds, and through the depth and complexity of their works they wanted to show that fantasy was perfectly capable of treating complex and sophisticated religious issues, despite the reputation of minor literary genre that has always impended on it. They see human creativity as the greatest God's gift to mankind, which accentuates the fact that they are made in his image, but it also gives them the opportunity of envisioning truth. As Tolkien himself affirms: "Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker." (Tolkien, 1966:75). Also, together with his friend Lewis, he believed Christian theology to be perfectly suitable for the fantasy genre, since they both imply beliefs in parallel worlds and strengthen mental activity, and therefore the power of imagination.

As we mentioned earlier, at first Tolkien and Lewis followed two different paths regarding their approach to religion. It was Tolkien who – devout Catholic from childhood – helped him to convert to Christianity and find all the answers in God. This complex path gave shape to Lewis' literary philosophy, which is concerned with the desire for searching and proving the existence of God and his son, Christ. In dealing with this driving force of desire, Lewis was inspired by the German Romantic notion of *Sehnsucht*[5], the constant spiritual yearning to God's immanence and transcendence beyond the universe. This is a recurrent notion in his fantasy writings, since he believed that certain signs in our life are sent to us by God to arouse the quest of him and of Heaven.

Tolkien also places his works within a Christian context, but moves them towards moments of lights and shadows. In particular, we will see how he celebrates the beauty of Creation and of Cosmos, which are threatened by the

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[5] Sehnsucht, which can be literally translated as *yearning,* or *craving,* was a key concept in German Romanticism. It was related to a deep emotional state of ardent longing for something that is hidden to ourselves. It originates from a sense of incompleteness and imperfection of life.

Fall and loss of grace. Tolkien believed this loss to be everlasting since the struggle between good and evil is inevitably endless, but also because in almost every myth the events go through an initial Golden Age, the age of Creation, until the Dark Age of the Fall and the perilous renewal of the Apocalypse. In particular, that of Creation is an age of harmony and blessedness, which is opposed to an age of chaos and loss of the initial perfection, the Fall. (See Mathews, 2002 PP. 54-63). The crisis of the Fall could lead to the winding path to salvation, which is generally related to a last age called Apocalypse. In Christian cults, in particular, this particular age is the hope for believers for Christ shall rise again in his second coming and make good triumph over evil for good, on Judgment day. At the end of times, the beauty of Creation and the Paradise that was lost could be regained, as it is the case in John Milton's *Paradise Regained* (1671). On the contrary, Tolkien does not believe in a rebirth of paradise; in other words, that the loss of the early splendour of Creation is difficult to overcome, and that the struggle against evil must last for eternity.

Tolkien and Lewis, together with other relevant authors like George MacDonald, G. K. Chesterton and Charles Williams, belong to modern Christian Fantasy, which reached the peak of success between the XIX and the XX century. However, earlier forms of Christian Fantasy had already been experimented in the 16oos and even in the Middle-ages. Those centuries went through a deep study of the human spirit and creativity, together with geographical and scientific discoveries, artistic and political revolutions. In Italy, Dante had already given shape to the power of imagination through the narration of three tumultuous journeys across the three worlds of Christianity, in order to achieve the all-desired Redemption, in his masterpiece, the *Divine Comedy* (1308-1321).

Three centuries later, the atheist playwright Christopher Marlowe wrote *Dr Faustus* (1604), which was about a German physician who ends up making a pact with the devil to achieve supreme knowledge. The "fantasy" element of this

play is Faustus fantasying about ruling the world, even though he is just suspended between Heaven and Hell. He is a victim of his own ambition, which is often and biblically considered as a sin. In the end, he will perish and recognise the only force that created and controls the universe, God. Moreover, the fantasy element of this play is also given by the awkward witchcraft Faustus attempts to perform, when conjuring numerous demons on stage.

In one way, Faustus can be seen as the archetypal hero of Christian fantasies, as well as Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* (1667), or even in Tolkien' s world. Anyhow, we will analyse the role of the Hero in Christian fantasies in more detail in the next chapters.

On the model of Dante's *Divine Comedy* – which has its roots in Christian Mythopoeia – John Milton conceived his *Paradise Lost* (1667). This epic poem is replete with religious allusions, themes and myths, which Milton combined together to explain the causes of the fallen condition of humanity, resulting from evil in ambition and pride, and the consequences of divine punishment. Obviously, as we will see, Milton himself had studied important Christian philosophers like Augustine and his theology contained in *The City of God (413-426 A.D.)* and the *Doctrina Christiana (397 A.D.)*, or Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, written between 1265-1274. *Paradise Lost,* indeed, is moulded upon the linear path of the biblical narration that we mentioned earlier. He illustrates, as Tolkien will do three more centuries later in his epic *Silmarillion* (1977), how the harmony of Creation was lost and devastated after Lucifer's rebellion, the consequent war in Heaven and the Fall of Lucifer and his rebel angels. In a way, both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are considered as the two earliest and most relevant forms of Christian Fantasy, to the point that authors like Tolkien, Lewis and the writers of modern Christian fantasy all borrowed features and materials from them. In the end, the authors we mentioned so far – except for Christopher Marlowe – can be considered as defenders and supporters of Christianity, since the goal of their refashioned and

reimagined myths is to re-express and acclaim the essence of the Christian message.

Nonetheless, in more recent times, at the end of the XX century, Christian fantasy went through a radical overturn after the debated success of Philip Pullman and his trilogy of *His Dark Materials* (1995-1997-2000). As the title of the trilogy suggests, Pullman quotes a line from Book II of *Paradise Lost*, even though his work is an open investigation on Christianity and its history, rather than a celebration of it. Anyhow, Pullman, just like his great predecessors, believes myths and stories to be the best vehicles for truth, even though, unlike these writers, Pullman revisited Christian Mythopoeia with a different purpose: to attack and destroy the Christian message. As Hugh Rayment-Pickard has put it: "Pullman would show his readers a world in which God dies and in which religious organisations, practices and beliefs are violent and malevolent." (Rayment-Pickard, 2004:16). In a way, Pullman's fiction can be read as a counter-myth generated by strong anti-clericalism.

Paradoxically, he approaches the study of Christianity and its myths, in order to subvert them. He can be seen, indeed, as an artistic transgressor, or a dissenting nonbeliever, even though deep down he is aware of the homage he is paying to the religion he so heatedly seeks to reject and destroy. More precisely, in order to attack the essence of Christianity, Pullman ends up revisiting its stories and myths. Therefore, Pullman's atheism is ambivalent, almost a *religious atheism* – as Rayment-Pickard seems to suggest – since, probably like the most part of fervent nonbelievers do, he disdains and admires at the same time the mysteries of theology.

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Chapter 2
Songs of Creation

2.1 The Account of Creation and its Interpretations.

Every mythology is moulded upon a peculiar plot that follows a logical order of beginnings, middles and ends. Therefore, everything starts with a particular account of the beginning, of how the universe, life and creatures were brought into existence by some supernatural force or forces. This account is that of the Creation, and it is the pillar of religious cultures, since it establishes the origins of everything and sets the pattern for every other myth. It stands at the top of the Christian mythological plot and at the basis of every primeval culture that follows the same pathway. In the ancient Greek tradition, the creation of the universe was believed to be made out of Chaos, which was the massive, dark and primordial matter destined to become cosmos and to be ordered by Logos, the ordering force of the universe. Thus, even though this matter was in a confused and disordered state at first, it was believed to contain the seeds of life for every organism. Moreover, Creation myths are almost always related to the relationship between the individuals and divinities, their ancestors, who belong to the sphere of the numinous. As David Leeming explains: "Creation is always linked to the concept of deity, and creation myths reveal our sense of our relationship with and the nature of our primal parents, the deities who created us." (Leeming, 2005:84). As we mentioned, this relationship has always proved essential in fantasy fiction.

However, the largest group of primitive cultures share the idea that the creator is principally a male and almighty figure. Thus, these cultures have advanced the theory of creation conceived by a sky-father, whereas in sexual creation myths the universe is made by an earth-mother. Christian doctrine shares the former theory. Indeed, the original society God creates is principally

hierarchical as the first woman is made out of the body of the first man. God's manhood highlights the ethics of a patriarchal society. (See Frye, 1983:106). With the rise of Christianity, in the account of Creation matter acquires a new connotation. In *Genesis* indeed it is considered as the *spirit of God* moving upon the face of earths and waters. More precisely, there are two theological theories regarding God, his substance, and the creation of the universe. The theory of creation *ex deo,* or *ex materia,* implies that the cosmos was entirely made out of God and his spirit, therefore it accentuates God's supreme power. On the other hand, the theory of creation *ex nihilo* affirms that the cosmos was created by God but from nothing; in other words, not out of any pre-existing raw material. (See Sullivan and White, 1999:78-79).

Augustine holds the theory of creation *ex nihilo,* which is monist in its nature since it develops the idea that God is the only essence of all things, therefore it denies that the massive chaos theorised by the Greeks could have coexisted with God. Milton and the followers of the *ex deo* theory, on the contrary, assert that Matter is a part of God. This dualist theory, which is in stark in contrast with the former, does not consider God as the only essence and origin of things; thus, from the beginning, God found himself faced with this pre-existing substance that he ordered and formed.[6] Therefore, God imposed light and order on the darkness of chaos, although he conceived days as the alternation of light and darkness, embodied by the sun and the moon. Northrop Frye thinks of chaos and darkness as both enemies and creatures of God, since outside his creation they were part of the matter he had to give shape to to make it ordered; yet, if matter begins to be considered as part of God, chaos and darkness are equally part of his creation. (Frye, 1983:111). Over the centuries, in many cultures and doctrines, the opposition between light and darkness, day and night, has been related to the eternal conflict between good and evil.

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[6] Many theists in history, in order to avoid heresy, agree with the *ex deo* theory , but they affirm that Matter was modelled by God on an idea already existent in his mind. Thus, God contains in himself Matter, since he created it, and it is not a substance existing other than himself. (Source: C.S. Lewis' *Preface to Paradise Lost.* (PP. 88-89).

As we mentioned earlier, the Bible is the epic account of the creator, the true hero and leader in the history of the world, God. This solemn and complex character begins to be the most relevant object of study for many fantasy writers. First of all, they see the creation of the universe as the ultimate expression of what a powerful and creative mind is capable of conceiving. God the creator, in particular, is the archetype of creativity and supreme intellect. He is the hero of creation, the greatest event in the Bible. Since the Bible itself can be considered as a narrative, in its own way, there are the agents who make things happen. As Seymour Chatman explains: "An event in a narrative doesn't happen by itself (…) plot actions require agents. These agents are usually human, but need not be (…)" (Chatman, 1993:58). In fantasy narrative most characters belong to the supernatural world. In one of the masterpieces of Christian fantasy, C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia (*1950-56) – whose narrative order is typically biblical, as it begins with an account of creation – the figure of the hero-creator is embodied in a lion called Aslan – which is the Turkish equivalent for *lion* – the most powerful and uncompromising of all animals. He gives birth to the universe of Narnia with the power of his singing.[7] The awe he initially inspires – as he is defined many times as *"not a tame lion",* by the inhabitants of Narnia – due to his austere figure of a lion and of solemn character, turns into the same magnanimity that characterises the Christian God and his son, Christ.

In *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), Vladimir Propp assumes that in folktales there is a common narrative structure that includes standard characters and functions. In particular, he begins to analyse the elements of a folktale in relation to their actions and functions, rather than their contents. Propp's approach is similarly archetypical, since there are conventional features in folktale as well as in fantasy fiction, as the latter partially descends from the former. God, for instance, goes through two transformations between the Old and the New Testament. In the Old Testament he is merciful, but at the same

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[7] Similarly, Tolkien will depict the creation of the planet of Arda and of Middle-earth.

time he shows the strictness of a punisher and put his chosen people to the test to prove their loyalty. In the New Testament his meekness is emphasized by the fact that he sends his son to save his creatures' souls, and to prove that he still has hope that the lost harmony of his creation would be restored.

In particular, he is principally a judicious and jealous God who punishes Adam, Eve, and his chosen people when they commit their sins or disobey him. This is because he establishes specific rules that must not be violated. Propp speaks of *an interdiction addressed to the hero* (Propp, 1968:26), by the members of a family or a community. In *Genesis*, God prohibits Adam and Eve from eating the fruits of the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge, in the Garden of Eden.

Interestingly, E. M. Forster speaks of *flat* and *round* characters in novels. Flat characters, which are also called types, are constructed round a single idea or quality, whereas round characters are more difficult to analyse because of their numerous and conflicting traits. (See Forster, 1975:75). In this framework, God – the hero-creator of Christian mythopoesis – is a flat character, as he is principally constructed round the ideas of the Christian doctrine. In this sense, we will see that Christian writers like Milton and Tolkien reinterpret God as flat character, since they infuses him with the ideas and qualities of Christianity.

On the contrary, we will notice that Pullman subverts the character of the Christian God. In particular, he turns the traditional almighty and merciful creator into a despicable liar and cruel being, who has come to power through deception and cruelty. Pullman's God can then be considered as a round character, since he remarkably surprises the reader. Indeed, Forster explains that "the test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat." (See Forster, 1975:85). In the same way, Milton offers a much more complex vision of Satan. Indeed, even though Satan is traditionally reinterpreted as a flat character – as he expresses the single idea of the enemy, the antagonist of Christianity – Milton infuses

him with surprising human depth and inwardness, which sheds new light on his haunted personality.

However, in the Bible we realise how God is merciful and assists his faithful so as to help them overcome the numerous hardships they have to endure. God is often the one who puts his chosen people to the test or charges them with a specific mission. In this case he acquires the function of the *donor* or *provider*, who Propp depicts as a character usually encountered accidentally and who provides the hero with some – usually magical – agent in order to accomplish his missions by overcoming adversities. In *Exodus*, for example, God appears to Moses in the form of a burning bush and entrusts him with the mission of leading the Hebrews from the oppressive land of Egypt to the Promised Land of Canaan. The magical agent God gives Moses, an apparently normal stick, but that will reveal its supernatural properties, showing God's prodigies. Moses' stick will turn to be fundamental, not only to prove to the Hebrews that he has been sent by God, but also for the crucial Crossing of the Red Sea, which permits the Israelites to escape definitely from the pursuing Egyptians.

On the other hand, in his appearances in the New Testament God gradually loses his stern and warlike attitude and turns into the loving and consenting father of the saviour, Jesus. It is with Jesus indeed that the human form of God manifests itself, the God who has become flesh. It is as if the Son had taken much of the role of the old powerful Father. In the example of C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia,* the divinity, Aslan, sends his chosen people, the four young boys and girls, and entrust them with the mission of restoring the lost beauty of the *Deeper Magic from before the Dawn of Time*, that is to say the harmony of the beginning, of the creation of Narnia, which had been lost after the rise of the tyrannical kingdom of the rebel Queen Jadis.

Thus, God, similarly to the gods of other mythologies, assumes a demanding attitude when he tests his chosen people's loyalty by charging them with specific missions. In literature, and especially in mythology, this particular form of narration is generally related to two other important and inseparable

archetypes: the hero and his Quest. For heroes learn by experience and by the mistakes they commit or the triumphs they score during their quest. These two archetypes represent the pathway every individual has to undertake to achieve moral and personal progress.

Therefore, the hero is the metaphor for self-realisation and for the individuals' willingness to progress ethically. As David Harvey put it: "*He ventures over the hill of everyday human existence to confront a possibly dreadful unknown, and does so willingly.*" (See Harvey, 1985:17-18). In our example, we see how God is the hero of creation and the metaphor for every creative mind. Anyhow, his chosen people – his creatures – are the heroes who undertake their quest to reach the perfection their creator expects of them. In their quest they often confront something unknown and mysterious. God himself, when revealing to his creatures does not show his true face but only speaks through a deep and resounding voice or unusual objects, like for example the burning bush in Moses' episode. Also, Greek myths narrate stories of valiant heroes, of their quests and ordeals to gain the favour of the gods. Their deeds are considered as models to emulate and follow for a humanity in search of moral progress, higher goals, and courage to overcome adversities. Therefore, one of the hero's higher goals is to do his best to acquire the gods' and the community's reliance. He embodies all the ideals men can achieve.

Moreover, setting is another important element of narrative, also for supernatural fictions. Seymour Chatman defines setting as "the larger backdrop against which the events transpire." (Chatman, 1993:63). In biblical narration and consequently in Christian fantasy, setting equally has an important role. In the account of Creation, events take place in Heaven, which is also the world of the gods in many myths. Heaven is also associated with the afterlife, that is to say a place of rest after death, and where all the righteous souls ascend to in a state of grace. It is the place where the primordial harmony – or in Tolkien's and Lewis' words the "great music" – of Creation takes place. Thus, Heaven, also known as Paradise, is originally depicted as a beautiful

garden, and is mainly the setting for an initial Golden Age of Creation, which, as we will see, is threatened by invading forces such as Satan and his rebel angels, in the biblical tradition. Besides, the initial beauty of this garden will also be disfigured by Adam's and Eve's disobedience and the triumph of Original Sin. This is due to the fact that God, in creating the universe creates also free creatures, who receive the gift of free will. In them, matter, even if it is coming from God, is much more exposed to contamination and deterioration. On the contrary, when human matter is not irreparably contaminated with sin, will return to its creator, God.

2.2. John Milton and the Supreme Power of Christian Mythopoeia.

Biblical myths have always held a distinctive position of authority in Western literatures. In particular, classic authors like Dante or Milton have been considered as the most successful, in terms of study and reinterpretation of Christian mythopoeia. In one way, they can be thought of as being the initiators of such a peculiar literary category like Christian fantasy. In medieval literature, indeed, we see how the wonders of Christianity are expressed through the narration of symbolical and redemptive journeys to the three Christian reigns of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise, which has its ultimate expression in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1308-21), or through the epic and mythological formation of the Christian world, which is narrated in Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667).

The Middle Ages were already a period in which imagination played an important and active role, but it is the Renaissance that marks the celebration

of the human mind and its creativity. This is the period in which Christian fantasies achieve an outstanding success. As Manlove explains: "in this period, which places more importance on the human mind, the imagination is sometimes transformed in status, seen as man's highest faculty." (Manlove, 1999:23). In like manner, as we already mentioned, modern Christian fantasy authors believe imagination to be the greatest of God's gift to his creatures.

When *Paradise Lost* was published, in 1667, the English Civil war and the Puritan revolution had already affected the political and religious stability of the country. It is the age in which the dissenting Puritans marked a radical shift on religious, but also on political matters. Their origin is related to the Calvinist theories, which developed the crucial idea that humanity is irrevocably predestined by God to everlasting salvation or damnation. This strict theology had dominated the English protestant scene for the first half of the 17th century. Puritans, by developing this concept of predestination believed in the absolute authority of God's word on the life of each individual. Therefore, every other material form of authority, like the state or the church had to be rejected and abjured, in favour of the Scripture itself. For this reason, Puritanism was in stark opposition to the Anglican Church of that time, which they considered as idolatrous and corrupted, as if it were still contaminated with Popery. (See Loewenstein, 1993:25-29). For these reasons, puritans began to be accused of heresy; they were persecuted to the point that they were forced to leave their country to migrate to the new continent of America, in order to found a new land in which to profess their faith freely. This new country will be the *New Jerusalem, the City Upon a Hill,* theorised in John Winthrop's sermon of 1630. In this conflicting era, the fashion for Arthurian epics slightly retreated to the background in favour of a reassessment of the Bible and all its features. This is the age in which the greatness of John Milton (1608-1674) stands out.

Milton grew up in this conflicting society and in a family of radical Protestants, with Puritan leanings. In his young age he undertook an intense

study of both classic and modern subjects. More precisely, he paid particular attention to Latin and English poetry, in addition to a deep and personal analysis of the Bible and its matters. As a Puritan himself, indeed, he placed the utmost importance on the Holy Scriptures, which he considered as the ultimate expression of divine greatness and authority. He also rejected the Anglican Church's authority, in particular the liturgical innovations of Archbishop William Laud (1573-1645), which Puritanism condemned as idolatrous and even as a regression to Popery[8]. Consequently, he began to be viewed as unorthodox thinker and heretic. In a way, Milton develops an unorthodox theology of his own, which culminates with his complex theological treatise, the *Christian Doctrine.* This important treatise, written before *Paradise Lost,* remained unpublished until the 19th century, because of its heretical contents. The ideas contained in the *Christian Doctrine* will be fundamental to *Paradise Lost*, since he will turn them into poetic and dramatic expression. As a Puritan, Milton supported the idea that God's word, the Bible, is the only law to follow. In other words, he believed in a spiritual, rather than material form of principal authority. Moreover, in these theories Milton discloses his Anti-Trinitarian vein, in which Christ, the Son, though divine in nature, is subordinated to his Father, from whom he received his powers. The Son is not even co-essential to the Father, whose nature is superior in all things. However, Milton was particularly attracted to the notion of human free will, which is deeply in contrast with Calvinist and Puritan doctrines. Moreover, he begins to condemn the Calvinist concept of predestination, in the sense that he recognises God's foreknowledge in his creatures' lives, but that these are free to choose between good and evil, or to accept or reject the divine grace they need to achieve salvation. He was even arrested but escaped execution, and was inevitably forced to live in retirement. From 1640 he began

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[8] These ideas emphasised the Anglican Church's ceremonialism, although in a way that Puritans saw as idolatrous and merely popish. They were formulated by Archbishop William Laud, who was arrested and executed for having almost covertly favoured Roman Catholic doctrines. See Loewenstein, 1993:25.

to conceive a massive work based on the subjects of the Old and New Testament. The model he wishes to follow is that of the Greek and Elizabethan tragedy, embedded in the form of the epic tradition. The experiment will end up in the publication of one of the greatest works in the history of British literature, *Paradise Lost.*[9] Somehow, it is as if Milton's poem had set the real patterns for the creation of a universal Christian mythology.

Indeed, Milton can be viewed as a modern prophet, since he believed he had been charged with explaining the ways of God to men and that he had been chosen by God to be his spokesman. God's ways are not that evident. The pathway is too winding and difficult to follow. Milton considers it as his heroic Christian mission, or a "dangerous flight", as Orgel and Goldberg assume. (Orgel and Goldberg, 2004:16). More precisely, Milton's intention is to venture beyond the world of classical poetry, epic, and even of God's ways, in order to approach the centre of God's knowledge, which is something almost nobody has ever dared to do. As he affirms in the first lines of the poem:

I thence invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. (P.L. 1.12-16)[10]

Milton's personal mission has been compared to his Satan's pride and his intention of reconquering the paradise he had lost. For these reasons, other classic authors like Blake and Shelley realise that Milton could be seen as an unconscious follower of Satan; as we will see, Milton depicts his Satan as a hero with great humanity and sensitivity, rather than the figure of enemy of Christianity, as he is traditionally represented. Besides, Satan's rebellion against authority is an important *leitmotif* of Christian fantasy. Indeed, we will also investigate to what extent this was going to be a recurrent theme in

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[9] References: Loewenstein, 1993:24-30.
Orgel and Goldberg, 2004, 7-14.
[10] For all references to *Paradise Lost,* we will use the Oxford Edition, 2004, ed. Orgel, Stephen & Goldberg, Jonathan.

Tolkien and in Pullman. In particular, the theme of rebellion has a particular appeal to those who have gone through wars and drastic political changes, but above all to those who have experimented totalitarian regimes of any sort.

Milton's masterpiece is a successful attempt to refashion the most solemn of all literary genres, the epic, which is considered the highest and most accomplished form of literature, by the Renaissance thinkers and critics, in order to bind it with the most important book of all times, the Bible. For Milton, epic constitutes the starting point for the development of something innovative. Indeed, he knows the epic models very well, but he aims at adding more creative potential to such a universal subject matter as Biblical mythology. The compromise of his poem is then related with the conflict between Christian orthodoxy and Milton's own imagination, in reinterpreting the most crucial myths of Christianity. In doing so, he will use a more adventurous tone and the already mentioned archetypes of the hero, the quest – expressed through journeys between the three Christian kingdoms: Heaven, Hell and Chaos – and the fall from God's grace, connected with the almost dreamlike original perfection of the Edenic existence, which Margaret Kean defines as "an inspired revelation, the authorized truth of divine creational perfection." (Sullivan and White, 1999:78), and which Tolkien will later reinterpret as the inevitable *loss* of creational harmony. This loss is for both authors the result of evil in ambition. For these reasons, Milton's imagery is believed to have been the inspirer of Christian fantasy and the ultimate celebration of Christian Mythopoeia.

2.2.1 How the Heavens and Earth Rose out of Chaos: Creational Power in John Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

Of course, it would prove difficult to define *Paradise Lost* as a work of fantasy literature. However, it is possible to find traces of fantasy elements in its structure, since it deals with supernatural creatures and worlds of Christian

mythology. Indeed, as we mentioned, the Bible itself narrates of supernatural events. Therefore, in one way we can define Milton's masterpiece as a sort of "pioneer" in fantasy genre[11].

Its structure is based upon the model of St Augustine's *City of God,* which is the one the Church officially approves of. The account of Creation is usually the first event to be narrated.

In *Paradise Lost* Creation is depicted as the ultimate expression of divine creational perfection. We have seen how Milton supported the theory of creation *ex deo,* or *ex materia,* which believes that the universe was created directly from God, in contrast to the theory of creation *ex nihilo,* that is from nothing, which is supported by Augustinian doctrines. As C.S. Lewis explains: "In so far as *Paradise Lost* is Augustinian and Hierarchical it is also Catholic in the sense of basing its poetry on conceptions that have been held *always and everywhere and by all.*" (Lewis, 1941:81). Thus, beyond Milton's own reinterpretation and unorthodoxy, which are hidden beneath the text, the traditional Christian doctrines have a relevant influence on its poetry. More precisely, he has assembled parts of Biblical revelation and of Christian tradition in order to approach truth. Nonetheless, Milton's concept of Creation slightly diverges from that of the Christian tradition. As he creates the cosmos out of himself, he is now considered as a creator internal to his creation, in other words, a complete and perfect being who contains in himself Space, Matter and Time. He is the first and absolute cause of the existence of the cosmos and his own substance is the real driving force, in the act of Creation. This substance is God's essence, which is something primary in him and without which he cannot even exist. It is also something eternal and immutable. Milton's God is depicted as author and ruler of all things. (See Curry, 1957:24-47)

Nonetheless, the *ex deo* theory asserts that the substance God contains in himself and that was involved in the process of Creation is Matter. Milton did not consider Matter as a malignant force, since it was already existing in God's

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[11] We will see to what extent the other authors object of our study, Tolkien and Pullman, share Milton's model.

mind and spirit, and it was fundamental in the act of Creation. Indeed, this primordial substance – which has also given origin to space – was believed to contain the seeds of life, but it was in a disordered state at the beginning. In ancient Greece, the equivalent for Matter was Chaos – literally meaning "abyss" – out of which the cosmos was created. (See Babb, 1970:96-107, and Sullivan and White, 1999:78-79). In Milton's cosmogony, Chaos was described as an immense ocean held between Heaven and Hell, which was the bearer of dark matter, for the making of worlds; the same dark matter that will inspire the title of Philip Pullman's trilogy of *His Dark Materials*. Before God's creation Chaos was just defined as an immense void or utter darkness. Thus, this term is later introduced in Christian mythology. It is God, the creator, who gives shape to Matter and orders it within finite structures. Milton's God's immanence is indeed limitless and his presence is part of infinitude. The order God imposes on Chaos is Nature, which is related to light, the antithesis of Chaos and darkness. In *Paradise Lost* Chaos and darkness are both bound together and described as ultimate expression of superlative in confusion:

Where eldest Night
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold
Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand. (P. L. II. 894-97)

In particular, Milton describes it as a "wild abyss, the womb of nature and perhaps her grave." (P. L. II. 910-11). It is a tumultuous and massive matter that has to be ordered. Light and Nature, the antithesis of Darkness and Chaos, is then coeternal with God, as it is God's true evidence of his presence, power and infinite wisdom. It is no wonder, thus, if in Creation the first authoritative words to be pronounced were "let there be light." It marked the triumph of light over darkness.

At the time of creation, God and Matter permeated space, even though the latter existed in a too much confused and incorporeal state. This was primeval matter, almost the raw material already existing in God's spirit even before he

willed its emanation. In the fifth book of *Paradise Lost* the Archangel Raphael already mentions primary matter to Adam, which he defines as: "one first matter all, imbued with various forms, various degrees of substance, and in things that live, of life;" (P. L. V. 472-74). In this way, Raphael underlines Milton's support for the *ex deo* theory. Raphael himself explains that God created the universe out of an original essential matter, even if this does not indicate that God was himself material; it was rather as if he included materiality in himself. The effusion of matter in the universe had already been described in the book of *Genesis* as the spirit of God that was moving upon the face of the waters. In the act of Creation, this spirit was indeed infused with matter and vital energy, in order to give birth to animate and inanimate forms. After the six days of Creation, the ultimate perfection of these forms was achieved with the creation of man. However, every creature must obey the law of nature, which God had created to prevail upon Chaos. (See Babb, 1970:119-120).

The seventh book of *Paradise Lost* is dedicated to the account of Creation. More precisely, it is Adam who asks the archangel Raphael about Creation. His greatest desire is "to know what nearer might concern him, how this world of Heaven and Earth conspicuous first began." (P. L. VII. 61-63). Therefore, Milton narrates of Creation through the words of Raphael, who assumes almost the role of a muse of the ancient Greek tradition. Thus, following Raphael's account, it is possible to deduce that God first created his angels, his sons. Before them, he created their kingdom, the empyreal Heaven, even before he conceived of the creation of the Earth. After Lucifer's rebellion, God expelled him and his followers from Heaven and created a new kingdom, Hell, in which he could expel all the rebel angels. After these two important kingdoms God created the Earth, the world, thought of as the dwelling of the human race, created in order to replace the apostate angels:

Another world, out of one man a race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,

Not here, till by degrees of merit raised
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tried,
And Earth be changed to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth,
One kingdom, joy and union without end. (P. L. VII. 155-161).

Milton's remarkable success was due to the beauty and perfection of God's work that he managed to re-create in poetry. *Paradise Lost* celebrates the act of Creation from beginning to end of its narrative. In other words, we can say that Creation is the true core and pillar of Milton's poem. In this achievement no other author has equalled him, except perhaps for one of the icons of fantasy literature we will analyse, that is, J. R. R. Tolkien. The latter, following Milton's example, managed to refashion and celebrate the wonders of Creation in Middle Earth, in his epics *The Silmarillion* (1977), and is considered as one of the most successful inventors of a cosmogony in fantasy fiction.

Just like Tolkien and Lewis recreated the process of Creation, through the magic of God's great music and the power of his voice, Milton had already added a sort of magical touch in his narration. Indeed, just like Aslan in Lewis' *Narnia,* or Ilùvatar in Tolkien's *Middle Earth,* Milton's God – as W. B. C. Watkins asserts – began to be depicted as a powerful wizard who creates all things as their name is uttered (See W. B. C. Watkins, 1966: 134). The power of his voice and music has no limits, since:

And Heaven he named the firmament: so even
And morning chorus sung the second day (…) (P. L. VII. 274-75)
When God said
Be gathered now ye waters under heaven
Into one place, and let dry land appear.
Immediately the mountains huge appear (…) their tops ascend the sky. (P. L. VII. 282-87)

It is as if while creating God the wizard had the magician's wand in his voice, which is combined with the heavenly music of Creation:

The sixth, and of Creation last arose

With evening harps and matin, when God said,
Let the earth bring forth soul living in her kind,
Cattle and creeping things, and beast of the earth (P. L. VII. 449-452),

and the angelic hymns of the last day through which he is celebrated:

Up he rode
Followed with acclamation and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps that tuned
Angelic harmonies: the earth, the air resounded (P. L. VII. 557-561).

Nonetheless, even in Creation Milton perceives a sense of incompleteness. At creation, God endowed Adam and Satan before him with the reason which enables him to dispute with God but, even so, when Adam was created, indeed, he felt an intense sense of solitude and asked God for a companion. In this way, it is as if Milton were telling us that God created men and women with this sense of emptiness already implanted in them, even though in *Genesis* he remarks that "it is no good that man should be alone." Also, when he created Eve out of Adam, that feeling was perpetuated in both of them. This is why men's heart is more inclined to corruption and weakness. Like the archetype of the hero and his quest we have mentioned earlier, human life can be thought of as a perpetual quest for the missing element in each individual, but also of a process coming to knowledge of the self. In this way, Milton is justifying the reasons why man chose to disobey and to bring original sin into the world. (See Orgel and Goldberg, 2004:24).

However, beyond the creation of his angels and of the human race, God has to engender an agent to carry out his will in the temporal space. The figure of this agent is embodied by Christ, his Son, who also embodies God's word. Therefore, the Son was the first of all creatures, since the Bible remarks "In the beginning was the Word" and Christ is the Word. In these matters, Milton was inspired by theories of Neoplatonists and pre-Nicene fathers, according to which the Logos is the word, that is God's wisdom and mind, and that like God it is eternal.

Then, following his will, the Word comes to life through a separate entity, the Son. Anyway, Milton believed that the Son was God's ultimate expression and that, since he possessed a material body, he was God's manifestation to angels and men. Thus, the Son was the most excellent of all God's creatures, but he differed from the Father in omnipotence and omnipresence, for he was himself a creature. He was subordinated to the Father, since from him he derived his powers and faculties. Therefore, Milton believed the Father to be greater than the Son. He was not coeternal with the Father but he was "of all Creation first" (P. L. III. 383). His original spiritual matter will assume the flesh of human body so as he will die to redeem the sin of Adam and mankind. (See Babb, 1970:121-26 and Loewenstein, 1993:27).

As Walter Clyde Curry put it: "the Son functions as secondary cause in creation and as mediator between God and Man." (Curry, 1957:32). Thus, he is clearly a subordinate essence generated by the will of God, from whom all things proceed.

Anyhow, despite the paternal grimness that God would seem to emanate when establishing the natural laws that he wants to be respected, he decides to make a gift to his creatures – to men in particular – that is freewill. Therefore, Adam and Eve were free to choose between good and evil; they were free to sin or to follow the pathway God had conceived for them. They must be free to make the wrong choice, to learn by their mistakes. The choice they made was partially influenced by contamination and weakness their soul was more inclined to. Indeed, besides the account of Creation – as the poem's title itself clearly suggests – *Paradise Lost* begins when the universe has already been created out of Chaos, and the harmony and beauty of Creation has already been lost. There has been loss because:

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all or woe,
With loss of Eden (…) (P. L. I. 1-4).

As we will see, this loss will consequently lead to the Fall.

Lawrence Babb delineates the cosmogony of *Paradise Lost,* which slightly diverges from that of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In particular, as he explains: "It is best simply to think of the empyreal Heaven as a plane area at the top of the cosmos, of the world as a sphere hanging just below Heaven, of Chaos as a vast space between Heaven and Hell through which unorganized matter is diffused, and of Hell as a flat area at the very bottom." (Babb, 1970:99). Thus, the Earth is a stationary sphere separated from Heaven and Hell. In this way, Babb summarises the Miltonic conception of universe and of creational order.

2.3 J. R. R. Tolkien and the Restless Searching for the Numinous.

It is impossible to deny the role J. R. R. Tolkien played in breathing new life into modern fantasy fiction. When he published his most influential work, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, between 1954 and 1955, the world had already gone – and was still going – through an age of hysteria, machinery and death. The two world-wars, the civil conflicts, and the rise of industry and technology had turned the world into a haunted place in which a culture of alienation and destruction was prevailing. Besides, Tolkien's family background had often been exposed to disenchantment and loss. Born in South Africa, he experimented the hardships of the wilderness and the bitterness of its landscape and climate. He also lost his home and parents at a very young age, which implanted in him a deep sense of loss and fall from heavenly grace. For these reasons, Tolkien's characters are often asked to make moral, rational and strategic choices in the eternal struggle to survive and recover from loss.

One of the main purposes of Tolkien's fantasy was to reject this material and mechanical world. In particular, he aimed at recreating the atmospheres of a

pre-Industrial world, in order to move backwards to a medieval and almost Edenic harmony. This is why many critics agree in considering Tolkien as one of the greatest escapist writers ever. The mythical and unreal cosmos he created still enables the reader to escape the horrors of the contemporary age and, thus, to rely upon the power of imagination, which he considered as the greatest God's gift to humanity. After all, it was God's imagination and creativity which had brought the world into existence. In particular, Tolkien considered fantasy as a human right, which reminds us of our being "made in the image and likeness of a Maker." (Tolkien, 1966:75). Therefore, he believed fantasy fiction to be the ultimate celebration of God's creativity, which his creatures had inherited. (See Mathews, 2002: 54-58) and (Wood, 2003: 1-8).

However, Tolkien's art originally focused on the study of the literary genre called fairy tales, which he believed to be the most successful in recreating the atmosphere of myths. This atmosphere was mostly characterised by magic and wonder. Anyway, the magic Tolkien wanted to recreate was not the ordinary magic related to witchcraft and the wizards' longing to hold control over nature, rather it was more concerned with the magic of nature itself. More precisely, as we will see, Tolkien, but also his friend Lewis, thought that this particular magic was the real driving force in the process of Creation. Indeed, Tolkien and Lewis believed that there was a bond between fairy tales and Christian myths, in the sense that both demanded belief in supernatural worlds and events.
The world of myths and fantasy began to be thought of as the ideal refuge into which to escape from the alienated and fallen identity of a mechanical society. This is what Tolkien considered as rebirth and recovery, also in their religious sense to which he seemed to allude. More precisely, Tolkien described fantasy as the ultimate and oldest form of imagination, which possesses the ability to make joy and light triumph over darkness. Also, myths help us to develop our critical judgement; therefore, they make us investigate more carefully on things in their entirety and preciousness. (See Hein, 1998:160-163).

Tolkien's interest in mythology and its aspects came directly from his intense passion for the study of ancient languages and northern myths. When he attended King Edwards' school, in Birmingham, he soon developed a deep interest for ancient languages like Anglo-Saxon, Middle English and Old Norse. Tolkien gradually turned this interest into the creation of his own languages, which are the vehicle of his mythopoeia. His restless hunger was then satisfied when he started to study comparative philology at Oxford, where he met his great friend C. S. Lewis, in the 1920s. The latter was deeply influenced by Tolkien's ideas as to the beauty of northern myths, but also – and it was crucial in the literary production of them both – Tolkien helped him to convert to Christianity. Together they founded the intellectual group of the Inklings, which was supported by the seminal thinker Owen Barfield.[12] Barfield, in particular, focused his studies on semantics and philology, and believed that languages in their earliest stage were directly related to myths, in the sense that through the multiplicity of words ancient civilisations gave shape, expression and identity to natural or extraordinary phenomena; in other words, their myths. Nonetheless, Barfield affirmed that earliest myths and languages were not created rationally but they were a sort of spontaneous expressions of those civilisations. These expressions were primarily given by some driving and stronger entities resulting from the unconscious mind of ancient cultures; the same unconscious that is related to the belief in divinities and supernatural agents of myths involved in the happenings of the cosmos. (See Barfield, 1928:102). Therefore, as Rolland Hein put it: "The languages we know in all their multiplicity are fragmented from ancient tongues of great simplicity and unity, tongues characterized by a deep richness of mythical awareness" (Hein, 1998:166), since all ancient people could give meaning to was not what they apprehended consciously, rather it was only what they could experience, live, or what was dictated by the unconscious.

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[12] See Humphrey Carpenter's *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends,* 1979: 24-45).

Tolkien was deeply influenced by Barfield's theories – especially by the idea of the strong mythological power that languages can evoke – to the point that he created languages of his own, which were the driving force of his wondrous worlds. Indeed, by referring to the god of his Christian faith, Tolkien made, in a way, a god of himself, who is capable of creating entire worlds with the only power of the word. As we mentioned earlier, Tolkien believed in artistic creation as the greatest of all God's gifts to humanity, since it gives them the possibility of envisioning truth. Even though they will fall from God's grace, through the act of imagination the godlike potential of human beings can be disclosed, for they were created in God's image. Thus, fantasy becomes a vehicle for realising the divine nature of the world. Tolkien defined this concept as *Sub-creation* and we will see to what extent it will be crucial in his production. Therefore, art is in itself a sign of God's infinite wisdom and the triumph of his light over darkness. The result is the bond between light and *logoi,* words. The light the creator emanates enlightens the creative potential, while words are the driving force in forming conceptions of truth. More precisely, Tolkien believed that the beauty of literary art came directly from the beauty of God's creation, so the two had to harmonise with each other. He believed, thus, that all human expressions of creativity were a re-interpreting of God's primordial act of creation. (See Hein, 1998:168-170 and Mathews, 2002:57-58).

As we can now assume, Tolkien's escapist literature celebrated the unbreakable union between myth and religion through an attentive study of their traditions and aesthetics. The Bible was the main source to shape his ideas, but then it was the unconditional love for mythology – northern myths in particular – that breathed true life into the narrative mechanism. We have previously hinted that Tolkien was a deep lover of his studies and experimentations. He drew themes from philology, folklore, history and Christian mythopoeia to enlarge the scope of his writing, but above all to deal with complex moral issues and to express his deep religious creed. This helped

him to add to the early religious fantasies a much more sophisticated and meticulous body of work.

In his essay Ralph C. Wood argues that there could be signs of an implicit Christianity in Tolkien's works, for they do not deal with any formal religion at all. Even though the inhabitants of Middle-earth sometimes sing or quote ancient sacred hymns, there are not any references to specific celebrations, rituals, or even places of worship like temples. (See Wood, 2003:3-4). Therefore, this hidden religiousness could be the result of a willingness to let his readers perceive the essential Christian element of his narrative indirectly. This was possible because Tolkien never intended to make his works overtly Christian, otherwise he would have neglected the importance of the story itself by just illustrating a mere set of ideas. As he himself asserted: "the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism." (Carpenter, 1981:172). Thus, even if it possible to draw out the Christian message that Tolkien is celebrating anyway, the reader should refer back to the heart of the story and its rich complexity, in which the Christian message itself is concealed.

Rosemary Jackson asserts that: "fantastic literature has always been concerned with revealing and exploring the interrelations of the 'I' and the 'not-I', of self and other" (Jackson, 1981:53), and so the relationship between the individual and the infinite. The latter is depicted as something metaphysical, beyond the human, whether it is a good or evil force. Jackson, in particular, explains how otherness has always been linked to something otherworldly, above the human. She also explains that, in the history of cultures, this otherness has usually been identified with evil. Thus, it is considered as evil whatever is radically different or unusual within a particular context. Puritans, for example, had developed a particular fear for the concept of the unknown, which they believed it manifested in the wilderness of the first American colonies.

Jackson also speaks of evil as anyone speaking in an unfamiliar language. (See Jackson, 1981:52-53). In the Harry Potter novels, for instance, anyone knowing

or speaking *Parseltongue,* the language of snakes, tends to be feared and set apart as evil. Indeed, there is no wonder if snakes has always and biblically been associated with Satan, the ultimate evil.

In the religious tradition, for instance, the infinite is expressed through the definition of two arrays: God and his angels versus Satan and his demons. This is the main pathway that Christian fantasies generally undertake.

In Tolkien, the struggle between good and evil is considered as something deeply rooted in the history of the world. Thus, as we will see, he believed this struggle to be eternal, but above all a struggle that often ended up with losses that were hard to reconcile. Indeed, he perfectly knew what the brutalities of a world war were like, since he experienced both wars first-hand. The rise of totalitarian regimes of those years through violence and mass destruction, and the submission to tyranny and absolute power all took an active role in shaping his two masterpieces, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (1954-55), and *The Silmarillion* (1977). The latter was posthumously published by his son, Christopher, even if it possessed the key to understanding the whole story and genesis of Tolkien's world: Middle-earth. By following the biblical model he was so devoted to, Tolkien here described how his fantastic worlds came into existence, and to what extent the rebellions and wars brought destruction and loss into these worlds. Consequently, both with *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings,* Tolkien narrated of the consequences of this loss and the hardships of its reconciliation. More importantly, these books showed an intense but indirect parallelism with the features of Tolkien's real experiences we already mentioned. By looking carefully at *The Lord of the Rings,* it would prove logical to compare the Dark Lord Sauron's tyranny and willingness to dominate all races with the features upon which totalitarian regimes patterned their policy. (See Mathews, 2002:60-63 and Attebery, 1992:18-30).

However, as we were saying, Tolkien's ability as a writer resided in the indirect parallelisms he made when binding together his personal experiences, his own relationship with the infinite, the common themes and features of

fantasy fiction – as we will see in detail – but above all the Christian background, which rests at the basis of his literary creation. Both Tolkien and Lewis, indeed, felt this longing for the non-existent, the infinite, in their lives, which they believed it could be a preliminary to personal experience of the numinous. As they also believed, fantasy was the key to arousing hidden desires, even those desires the reader was still not aware of.

We already hinted at the fact that both Tolkien and Lewis believed in a true relationship between Christianity and myth. Indeed, in 1931 Tolkien dedicated an epistolary poem to his friend called *Mythopoeia,* in which he explained this relationship. He argued that myths were the successful attempts to disclose the divine truth of the world. More precisely, he believed that this truth could be disclosed only by the constant discovery of meaning, which is given to us by the power of God's word. God is the only wise from whom the human heart draws the immanent wisdom of Creation.[13]

2.3.1 The Multiple Features of Tolkien's Mythopoeia.

In the previous chapter we mentioned Ralph C. Wood's idea of a possible hidden Christianity in Tolkien's works. Tolkien himself believed that the religious message was kept concealed into the story and, thus, it had to be deduced. However, just like his friend Lewis, Tolkien claimed to be a defender of Christianity. In creating his own universe he could not avoid referring back to the maker of the universe he lived in. For this reason, the immanence of sacredness is the main force of his cosmos, in which all creatures and landscapes are both the reflection of the creator's greatness, and the agents of what he called "sub-creation." We have already seen that Tolkien related this concept with the humanity's ability to create things by using the given gifts of its creator wisely.

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[13] See J. R. R. Tolkien's *Mythopoeia,* in *Tree and Leaf,* 2001:85-90.

Tolkien, therefore, never denied his Catholicism as part of his personality. As he affirmed in his letters: "more important, I am a Christian (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic." (Tolkien, 1981:288). His identity of Christian writer is then undisputable. In *Mystery and Manners,* Flannery O'Connor gives an important definition of what a Catholic novelist might be like. She rejects the idea of a Catholic writer as a mere "evangelist" who hides the religious message of his tales behind allegory.

Tolkien himself despised any forms of disguised allegories as an obstacle to narrative freedom and to the reader's experience. Nonetheless, the concept of allegory cannot be completely abandoned. Indeed, as he affirmed: "I dislike Allegory – the conscious and internal allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of my myth or fairy-tale must use allegorical language." (Tolkien, 1981:145). In order to achieve his narrative potential, Tolkien – and also every fantasy writer – uses allegorical language to create the multiple interpretations upon which these stories are patterned. This is what makes the story compelling and full of meanings. In particular, we can assume that Tolkien preferred much more the symbolic rather than the allegorical mode. In one of his most important essays, *The Allegory of Love,* C. S. Lewis provides guidance to the distinction between allegory and symbol. In particular, he explains that the allegory is the embodiment of the immaterial, like a state of mind, whereas the symbol is the attempt to imitate the immaterial through material inventions, "to see the archetype in the copy." (See Lewis, C. S. 1958:44-45). Also, as Seymour Chatman put it: "an allegory is a kind of narrative whose characters stand for abstract qualities, typically vices and virtues." In particular, Chatman explains that allegory in fiction is one of the ways of expressing the main theme, or thesis, of the story itself. (See Chatman, 1993:274). Therefore, Tolkien did not merely conceal the holy behind allegories. On the contrary, he gradually worked through the symbolic to express a greater truth, that is the divine truth. As Christian sacraments are symbols with a meaning beyond themselves, Tolkien's aim was to reconstruct their meaning by

deconstructing their roots; in other words, by refashioning the essence of Christian Mythopoeia. (See Bernthal, 2014:30-33).

Flannery O'Connor believes that a Catholic novelist builds his art out of his Christian perspective. More precisely, she affirms that "the chief difference between the novelist who is an orthodox Christian and the novelist who is merely a naturalist is that the Christian novelist lives in a larger universe. He believes that the natural world contains the supernatural."[14] Christian fantasy writers affirm that in the Christian universe God is transcendent but that he is primarily immanent.

However, the Christian writers' point is not to distort or to alter the sacredness of Christian truth. On the contrary, they feel they have to acquire a more naturalist approach to its orthodoxy. In other words, if they believe in God's immanence into the universe their main point is then to depict his prodigies and his greatness through the natural, which is the spontaneous manifestation of the sacramental reality of his creation. In Tolkien's universe of Middle-earth, to discern the holy is to discover the real driving force of this universe itself. Its huge and awe-inspiring natural landscapes, together with its creatures, possess sacramental value, since they mediate the presence of their creator. The entire universe speaks of God, since it was made by God.

Tolkien had a very intense relationship with mythopoesis, to which he devoted his entire life. Just like John Milton, he was influenced by the Augustinian doctrine, which considered the universe as a huge text written by God, the "Logos", in which all myths of human invention were an effort to discern the underlying truth of the Logos, that is the primordial design of Creation. In his recent study Craig Bernthal clarifies that Tolkien considered the gospels as an expression of God's true myth, the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus, the one mythical event on which all other pagan myths of dying and reborn gods converged. (See Bernthal, 2014:51).

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[14] See Flannery O'Connor's essay *Catholic Novelists*, in *Mystery and Manners*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961:173.

However, as Bernthal and Ralph C. Wood clarify, to analyse Tolkien's work from the only Christian perspective it is not the most satisfactory way. In fact, we always have to bear in mind his unconditioned love for Anglo-Saxon literature and Northern legends and languages. All these were the true stable elements of his entire literary creation. It is, thus, in here that the power of Tolkien's creation resides. He managed to create his own mythopoeia out of pagan mythologies he was fond of. Then, as a Christian novelist, he refashioned them with Christian depth. This constitutes the key for understanding the purpose of his literary production. (See Bernthal, 2014:17-18 and Wood, 2003:1-10).

A Great Music: Creation and Sub-creation in Middle-earth

David Harvey illustrates that, even though Tolkien's mythology possesses such a unique and personal taste in its shaping, it deals with themes and issues of universal acceptability. His geniality allowed him to give life to one of the most remarkable mythologies of English literature. (See Harvey, 1985:24). Indeed, among his main aspirations Tolkien's desire was to create a mythology for his beloved England, which could only boast of the Arthurian legends, though they originated in the ancient French tradition. As he affirmed "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (…) There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian and Finnish (which greatly affected me); but nothing English." (Tolkien, 1981:144). In order to fulfil his mission he constructed his mythology upon the main themes and symbols of all the mythologies he was fond of, as a scholar.

We can now assume that Tolkien's universe, which is called Arda in *The Silmarillion*, is deeply theocentric. In particular, like in the Old Testament, this universe is based on a monotheistic system, in which God is considered as the One. His name is Eru, or Ilúvatar, as he was known to the Elves. Just like the

Christian God, Ilúvatar creates Arda out of Chaos, in which his spirit already resided. With his own spirit he imbues the whole cosmos and breathes life into his creatures. We are here reminded of the *ex deo* theory, in which God was considered as the true architect of Creation. (See Harvey, 1985:25-26).

Tolkien's meticulous account of Creation is narrated in his most complex but significant work: *The Silmarillion* (1977)[15]. This work constitutes the background of the mythic history of Arda and the worlds of Middle-earth. It is the true pillar of Tolkien's mythopoeia. *The Silmarillion* began a lifetime of creation that evolved during years of intense studying and scholarly productivity. Indeed, what is peculiar about this work is that it was compiled before and during the writing of its sequels *The Hobbit* (1937) and the trilogy of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), but it was published only four years after Tolkien's death, by his son Cristopher. (See Mathews, 2002:61-62).

Tolkien provides two creation accounts, framing them as treasures of the Elven wisdom. The two accounts are, indeed, defined in Quenya (the original Elvish language). The first is called *Ainulindalë*, which means "The music of the Ainur." The Ainur are the first creatures of Ilúvatar – also called the Holy Ones – and constitute a sort of Greek pantheon of godlike beings. In other words, they could be defined as guardian angels, inferior to Ilúvatar, yet gifted with the power of sub-creation. Therefore, Tolkien developed the vision of a god who is acting communally for consistency of his conception of art as sub-creation. After creating them, Ilúvatar reveals his cosmic design to the Ainur, who are then given the power to enact it.

In the beginning of this first creation account the parallelism with *Genesis* seems inevitable. We read that:

There was Eru, the One, who in Arda is called Ilúvatar; and he made first the Ainur, the Holy Ones, that were the offspring of his thought, and they were with him before aught else was made. And he spoke to them, propounding to them themes of music; and they sang before him, and he was glad. (Sil. 3).

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[15] For all references to *The Silmarillion,* we will use the HarperCollins Edition, 1998. Ed. Cristopher Tolkien.

Again, we are reminded of the power of the word, the Logos, which permeates the act of Creation. Like the Christian god, Ilúvatar speaks worlds into being. More precisely, Tolkien framed this act as a great heavenly concert. He gives order to Chaos not only through the power of the Logos, but above all through the magic of his celestial music. Together with his Ainur, Ilúvatar develops these themes of music, and then he transposes them into light. In this way, the light acquires the potential for a concrete realisation of the universe. Tolkien called this light "Flame Imperishable" (Sil. 3), which symbolises the light of creativity, that is the transformation of a work of art from a simple vision to an actual reality. Also, Tolkien defined the Ainur as the offspring of Ilúvatar's thought, in the sense that originally they are creatures of his imagination, thus, they exist as spiritual beings at one with their creator. (See Harvey, 1985:26-27 and Bernthal, 2014:81-83).

The Ainur are later hierarchically divided into Valar and Maiar. The Valar are given the task to prepare the earth for the creation of other two creatures, called Children of Ilúvatar: elves and men. The Valar, indeed, have a strong resemblance with the elves. The two most important Valar are Manwë, lord of the air, and Varda, lady of the stars. The Maiar are the servants of the Valar. We will see how one of the Maiar, Morgoth, will rebel against the will of Ilúvatar, causing in this way the Fall of Middle-earth and the consequent loss of heavenly harmony of creation. The nature and powers of each of these Ainur is well-defined in the second creation account, the *Valaquenta,* which means the History of the Powers.

Thus, Tolkien envisioned Creation as a communal process, in which only the light of creativity could turn a vision into reality. We already mentioned that Tolkien deeply believed creativity to be God's most significant gift to humanity. In his mythology this gift is symbolised by the Flame Imperishable that Ilúvatar kindles in his creatures. Also, this gift can be perfected only in

community with others. In a way, Ilúvatar invites his Ainur to join with him in the composition of the music of creation:

Then Ilúvatar said to them: "Of the theme that I have declared to you, I will now that ye make in harmony together a Great Music. And since I have kindled you with the Flame Imperishable, ye shall show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices, if he will. But I will sit and hearken, and be glad that through you great beauty has been wakened into song. (Sil. 3).

Craig Bernthal explains that with this flame he also confers the additional gift of free will to his creatures, who develop their freedom within the boundaries of the divine plan of creation. In a way they add perfection to creation, even though their freedom is subordinate to Ilúvatar's overall plan. Thus, Tolkien seemed to follow the Christian belief that free will and full actualisation of the self are the result of submission and obedience to God, for he is the almighty, the only omniscient being in the universe. (See Bernthal, 2014:95-96).

Bernthal also argues that, since the Christian faith is primarily constructed upon mysteries, or dogmas, the great music of Ilúvatar may be interpreted as supreme knowledge, which is part of the Logos. The Ainur, indeed, will not fully understand their creator's design, since he is the only one who can claim to possess supreme knowledge. In the Christian imagery it is generally believed that divine truth will be disclosed to humanity only at the end of days. Likewise, Ilúvatar will reveal the complete content of his sacred theme in the end:

Though it has been said that a greater still shall be made before Ilúvatar by the choirs of the Ainur and the Children of Ilúvatar after the end of days. Then the themes of Ilúvatar shall be played aright, and take Being in the moment of their utterance, for all shall then understand fully his intent in their part, and each shall know the comprehension of each, and Ilúvatar shall give to their thoughts the secret fire, being well pleased. (Sil. 4).

At that moment they will all make an even greater music, which will mark the victory of light over the darkness of the void, of Chaos[16]. After all, dogmas and mysteries are components upon which Christian faith is patterned, and are expressed as paradoxes that can only be accepted through a deep faith. (See Bernthal, 2014: 94-96).

However, in Tolkien's Arda it already existed a form of primeval light, a secret fire that "were subdued or buried beneath the primeval hills." (Sil. 27). Yavanna, the Earth Mother, wants to make this light more substantial, thus, he asks her companion Aulë – who is Tolkien's equivalent of the Greek god Hephaestus, the smith – to create two Great Lamps that would give life to all things that grow naturally. These lamps are filled with light by Varda, Lady of the stars. They are so fundamental in the growth of natural life that in Tolkien's mythology they precede the creation of the sun.

Later on, after Morgoth's rebellion and the consequent destruction of the Lamps – which we will analyse in the next chapter – the Valar establish their realm in the Holy Land of Valinor, which Ilúvatar donates to them in order to restore the lost harmony in Arda. In Valinor the Valar create new sources of light that will even excel those of the Great Lamps. Thus, on the sacred mount Ezellohar, the Valar sing two big trees into being, called Telperion and Laurelin. These trees, as they came directly from the earth, symbolise the growth of natural life. Likewise, in Christian belief, Jesus Christ was commonly believed to be the tree of life. Moreover, the light they emanate is the light of nature; a perfected light of artistic creation.

The trees of Valinor, like the Great Lamps, precede the creation of the sun and the moon. Indeed, the greatest of all the works of the Valar will be the creation of the stars, which they create out of two elements of the trees and then place in the sky.

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[16] This light/dark dualism is one of the main features of the *Genesis* account and will be a continuing motif throughout the Old and the New Testament, as well as essential elements in Tolkien's fiction. (See Verlyin Flieger's *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World.* 2002:4).

Therefore, that of creation and sub-creation is an ongoing communal process. The Valar, who become the true archetypes of the human creative mind, bring things into being always in accordance with the plan of their creator.

However, since Ilúvatar is the supreme being, he will intervene again when creating the three main races of Middle-earth: Elves, dwarves and Men. When giving life to the Elves, Tolkien was deeply inspired by Scandinavian myths, but then he made them more solemn and majestic in their aspect and functions. They are similar to men, yet they represent a magnified aesthetic and scientific of the human nature. Also, they are gifted with immortality. Tolkien wanted them to represent the highest level of human creativity and art. Also, since the Elves's sub-creation is based on mystical energy, it is untainted by human corruption and possesses a higher spiritual and moral quality.

Men are the younger Children of Ilúvatar and inferior to the Elves in wisdom, craft and skill. Since they are mortal, their life is also briefer than the Elves. At first, Men fear the Valar, since they could not understand their identity and the source of their powers. Tolkien here wanted to underline what we mentioned in the previous chapter, that is to say the fear of the other, of the unknown, to which mankind is doomed. Moreover, Tolkien's Men also symbolise the corruption and depravity of human heart. Indeed, we will see how they will fall prey to Sauron and Morgoth, who will play upon their fears and bring them to evil. Sauron and Morgoth are, indeed, Tolkien's equivalent for Satan and his temptations. (See Harvey, 1985: 30-33, Wood, 2003: 12-19 and Hein, 1998:171-174).

In conclusion, we can assume that in these two first sections of *The Simarillion* Tolkien drew his major source out the Bible, the greatest book of Christianity. The Bible has always been his starting point of literary creation, and it was a work that, as Randel Helms comments "Tolkien feels free to revise and use for his own creative story." (Helms, 1981:25). Like the Valar, Tolkien had the free will in sub-creation and the Plan of Ilúvatar to him is to create within the boundaries of universal mythical themes he was so affectionate to.

2.4 Philip Pullman: The Black Sheep of Christian Fantasy.

As we have seen so far, Christian myths are refashioned in fantasy fiction through mythopoesis, in order to celebrate and defend the essence of their message. However, in very recent times there has been someone who has assigned a completely different purpose to his mythopoesis: the attack and demolition of the roots of Christianity. This is what makes Philip Pullman the most debated author of our time and his writings are believed to contain the most controversial material ever expressed in literature.

He was born during the golden age of fantasy fiction, in which Tolkien and Lewis dominated its scene. These authors believed that the richness and complexity of Christian truth were best expressed through mythology. Thus, they breathed new life into Christian myths by constructing their own mythical universes of Middle-earth and Narnia. Many years later, Pullman would also devote himself to mythopoesis, but at the same time he would totally subvert the main purpose of their predecessors. Indeed, he has always expressed a particular distaste for both Tolkien and Lewis, since they relied too much on the Christian elements of the story. Pullman believes that the Christian faith has often blurred the human mind and that he had to reconstruct the entire Christian story in order to create a more convincing and respectable mythology. (See Rayment-Pickard, 2004:15-16). Therefore, the clincher of Pullman's narrative is that he upsets the essence of the Christian story by creating a sort of Christian counter-myth.

Anyhow, Pullman describes his childhood as typically middle class. He regularly attended mass, catechism and had had a conventional Christian upbringing. Also, he was intensely fond of his maternal grandfather, who was a clergyman and had always looked after him and his brother. Thanks to his teachings, Pullman studied the stories of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Thus, he was initially surrounded by Anglican culture.

Despite his upbringing, his identity went through a radical change in adolescence, when he started to embrace scientific – in particular Darwinian –

theories concerning the origins of the universe and of life. (See Houghton, 2004:99-100). Nonetheless, he has never denied his early influences, since he affirms that: "I'm still an atheist who has a great deal of the Christian in him."[17] He also adds that: "Although I call myself an atheist, I am a Church of England atheist, and a 1662 Book of Common Prayer atheist, because that's the tradition I was brought up in and I cannot escape those early influences." (From Miller, 2005). Despite his explicit atheism, Pullman inevitably has to dig into the essence of the Christian story in order to construct his counter-myth.

Pullman's works have drawn both the highest praise and the harshest criticism. He has been defined as "one of England's most outspoken atheists" or "the writer the atheists would have been praying for, if atheists prayed."[18] Nonetheless, scholars like Hugh Rayment-Pickard seem to suggest that Pullman's atheism is paradoxically imbued with religiousness since, as we mentioned earlier, in his stories Pullman initially deals with religious and theological themes and then he puts them on trial. As Rayment-Pickard puts it: "Perhaps the religious questions are important to Pullman, even if he doesn't like the Christian answers." (Rayment-Pickard, 2004:4). Thus, Pullman's narrative could be the kind that arouses more questions than answers. He initially faces the most crucial themes of Christianity only to have them turned down. In other words, he plays with the possibilities and variations of these themes to subvert the Christian answers.

In this way he alters the meaning of the themes and characters of the Bible. In the trilogy *His Dark Materials* (1995-2000) – which is his most important and debated work – Pullman gives life to a church-burdened universe in which

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[17] From the article *Philip Pullman and the Republic of Heaven*, by Robert K. Elder . The Chicago Tribune, December 07, 2007. Available at: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-12-07/features/0712060145_1_dark-materials-philip-pullman-golden-compass (Accessed February 08/2015).

[18] From the article *Far From Narnia: Philip Pullman's Secular Fantasy for Children,* by Laura Miller. The New Yorker, December 2005. Available at: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/12/26/far-from-narnia (Accessed February 08/2015).

God is the villain, a true tyrant, and all of his followers – the representatives of an organised religion – are violent and malevolent. Therefore, following the model of Milton's *Paradise Lost* he was so devoted to, Pullman reconstructs the myths of the War in Heaven and the Fall from the opposite perspective. God and his religious organisations are the true enemy that must be annihilated by Lord Asriel – Pullman's version of Satan – and all his followers who intend to free the world from religious oppression. Pullman gradually provides us with insight about a universe in which God's tyranny and the terror of original sin are not impending anymore. As a result, humanity would achieve a higher level of consciousness, which would allow it to respond to the apocalyptic global chaos the world is going through in this new millennium.

Moreover, in *His Dark Materials* Pullman is depicting a God who did not have any part in the creation and sustenance of the universe. As he affirms: "I don't know whether there's a God or not. Nobody does, no matter what they say. I think it's perfectly possible to explain how the universe came about without bringing God into it." (See Freitas and King, 2007, XIV). Pullman's God is not only accused of falsity and harshly attacked, but he even dies at the end of the trilogy. This constitutes the most thought-provoking issue for literature, above all for the most susceptible Christian minds.

However, beyond his explicit denial of theology, Pullman's disdain revolves mostly on organised religions, which to him are nothing but corrupt theocracies, like the ruling Magisterium in *His Dark Materials*. More precisely, Pullman is giving us a hideous portrait of religion as an institution, which to him is now on the wane and whose values would not be approved of by Jesus himself. (See Lenz, 2001:157-158). He believes that theocracies demonstrate "the tendencies of human beings to gather power to themselves in the name of something that may not be questioned." (from Miller, 2005). For instance, we can think of this statement as consistent with the multiple terrorist attacks and religious conflicts of today. Also, Pullman seems to tell us that, even though there were a

god, he would be disgusted with all the cruel deeds that his followers commit in his name. (See Freitas and King, 2007, XIV).

It is no wonder that Pullman draws much of his inspiration from literary experiments built on the ground of Christian tradition. In particular, as we will see, he has been attracted to the works of John Milton and William Blake since he was an undergraduate. He was already deeply impressed by their artistic imagination, above all by the fact that they so brilliantly played with the nuances of the Christian myths.

We have already analysed Milton's identity as a defender of Christianity. Even so, as we have seen, he wrote during an age of social and political disorder, so he began to acquire a role of revolutionary, taking an active position against censorship, bishops and in favour of divorce and of Oliver Cromwell's politics.

However, what fascinates Pullman is the fact that, unintentionally, Milton aroused transgression in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, Satan is the most appealing character and the true hero of the poem, since he is depicted with human thoughts and feelings. As we will see, Pullman gives life to Lord Asriel as one of the main leaders of the trilogy. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), William Blake defined Milton as someone who was "of the Devil's party without knowing it." (See Butler, 2005-292). Later on, Pullman will give a slight nuance to Blake's statement affirming that "I see myself of the Devil's party, but I know it." (See Rayment-Pickard, 2004:18).

From Blake, Pullman inherits the negative vision of God the Father as an awful monarch and oppressor. Also, he inherits Blake's intense disdain for every form of organised religion, which constitute an obstacle to human experience and to the course of natural life. Pullman affirms that: "we don't need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do's and don'ts: we need books, time and silence. Thou shalt not is soon forgotten, but Once upon a time lasts forever. (See Freitas and King, 2007:XVI). Just like Blake, Pullman is here condemning the disguised moral education of religious institutions, who are

obsessed with sin and its eradication and do nothing but issuing orders and restrictions. Also, like all artistic transgressors, both Blake and Pullman have to make reference to the Christian myth in order to subvert it.

As we mentioned in the first chapters, in the history of civilisation the main purpose of myths was to provide answers to universal questions, such as the origins of life and of the cosmos. In Pullman's case, as he explains: "Science was one of those things (music was another) that I was fascinated by at home and turned off by at school. (…) What I did try to do was get the science right – though not for a scientific purpose: for a storytelling purpose." (Pullman, 2003:15-17). Thus, we can assume that he attempts to find the answers to his infinite questions on the basis of a more scientific ground.

For this reason, some critics agree to define *His Dark Materials* as the first post-Enlightenment fantasy, in terms of Pullman's detachment from religion in favour of the more rational answers of science concerning life and its origins. This is a definition Pullman himself embraces, since he has always considered Enlightenment as a great step forward in the evolution of human beings. At that time, indeed, humanity was escaping from ages of barbarity, superstition and ignorance, which he explicitly condemns in his works. To him this is a predicament that has endured in the present day, and for that humanity must be aware of the horrors and mistakes of the past to avoid slipping back into them. (From Elder, 2007). As we will see, the main characters of *His Dark Materials* – instead of mythic gods, heroes or elves – end up to be explorers and physicists, always to underline Pullman's attraction to the ideals of the Enlightenment.

Although Pullman has generally been included in the frame of fantasy literature, he has always sought to distance himself from it. As he affirms: "I don't like fantasy. The only thing about fantasy that interested me (…) was the freedom to invent imagery (…) but that was only interesting because I could use it to say something truthful about human nature. If it was just picturesque or ornamental, I wouldn't be interested." (See Gray, 2010:152). Pullman believes

that many fantasies of the past were preoccupied with the mere narration of reiterated adventures in improbable worlds and all sorts of unreal creatures who do not have any connection with human reality. Thus, his innovation consists of using the techniques of fantasy fictions – that he calls "the fantastical sort of machinery of the stories" (See Gray,2010:153) – for the opposite end: to dig into realistic stories to say something more profound about morality.

In his narrative Pullman distinguishes fantasy from the imaginative realism he is trying to give life to. He does not merely invent a fictional universe that is out of our reach, but he gives us an alternative version of our world. However, this reality must not be confused with our own reality but with that of the unconscious, of human undisclosed desires and purposes. These hidden truths can only be revealed through the same imaginative power fantasy authors are so devoted to. Thus, to Pullman fantasy is not intended as a mere process of makings things up, rather it is a process of seeing and revealing. (See Gray, 2010:152-155 and Rayment-Pickard, 2004:27-31).

Therefore, despite his explicit criticism of Tolkien and Lewis, Pullman shares with them the idea of the concern for the story. He believes that maintaining the story-telling process alive is imperative, for without stories human beings would lose a part of themselves. The story is so crucial that he would like to hide behind it and become its invisible narrator. This means that what he tries to avoid is to let his own personality and attitudes emerge from the text, since he considers the identification of the author and the narrator as a common mistake.

The narrative voice of *His Dark Materials* is a voice Pullman conceives only for story-telling purposes. However, we can assume that Pullman's idea has been repeatedly frustrated by the widespread belief that his stories contain explicit and controversial attitudes towards religious issues. Nonetheless, he has tried to distance himself from these assumptions affirming that: "what I'm doing is telling a story, not preaching a sermon." (Rayment-Pickard, 2004:23).

Whatever the right assumption might be, it is certain that Pullman's aim is to lead the reader to shed light on the Christian debate and the meaning of life.

2.4.1 The Original Deception: Philip Pullman and the God Who Lies in Creation Counter-myth.

Written between 1995 and 2000, the trilogy *His Dark Materials* is Pullman's most controversial work, which has shed new lights on the evergreen theological debate. It raises questions concerning the origins of life, religion and human consciousness.

The most attentive readers would notice that *His Dark Materials* is an expression drawn from the second book of John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* in which Milton describes the chaotic union between the four elements – water, earth, air and fire – which were left wandering around the universe from the time of its creation. For consistency with the *ex deo* theory, Milton intends to say that God, the almighty creator, has to piece these four elements together to create cosmic order and life.

Pullman has always claimed to be an atheist and in his narrative, the immanence of the numinous is expressed as something disturbing and dangerous. It is no wonder, thus, that *His Dark Materials* can be considered as the first fantasy work founded upon the ideals of the Enlightenment. Even though Pullman digs deep into the ground of Christian mythology, in his counter-myth he launches an attack on the essence of Christianity by celebrating the marvels of science and its discoveries. The truly supernatural element of his Post-Enlightenment fantasy is the magic of knowledge and

science, which provides humanity's universal questions with rational answers and puts the human mind more in control of things.

As Mary and John Gribbin assert: "Science is explainable magic" (Gribbin, 2003:3). Indeed, in ancient times humanity was fascinated but also frightened by natural phenomena and everything it had no control over. Consequently, humanity used to link these phenomena to the world of the supernatural; the world of the numinous. The universe was believed to be imbued with magic, therefore humanity needed myths to explain these phenomena. As the centuries passed, scientists have acknowledged that science is the real driving force of the universe. Thus, Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy can be seen as a journey across scientific discovery and mythological quest in order to acquire knowledge and consciousness. (See Gribbin, 2003:3-6).

Anyhow, as Nietzsche affirms: "we godless anti-metaphysicians still take our fire, too, from the flame lit by a faith that is thousands of years old … Christian faith." (See Rayment-Pickard, 2003:88). Therefore, as we mentioned, even in his explicit rejection of religion Pullman builds his counter-myth upon the Christian myth he seeks to reinterpret. In his Creation counter-myth, for instance, Pullman seeks to offer an alternative interpretation of the divine. The alternative, then, becomes a mysterious, undetectable but vital substance simply known as Dust.

As we have seen earlier, the *ex deo* theory asserts that, in the process of Creation, God contains in himself Matter, the initially disordered substance out of which he gives life to the cosmos. In *His Dark Materials,* instead, Dust is the only unifying and animating principle of the universe that orders all things within finite structures. Therefore, despite Pullman's explicit atheism, it would not prove difficult to see how Dust acquires many qualities that are typically related with the numinous. Dust is the primordial source of all creation, a sort of invisible matter permeating the universe. It was generated before everything else and provides all living creatures with consciousness and wisdom. However, in contrast with the Christian belief of God as almighty and immutable,

Pullman depicts Dust as a dynamic force that generates, but is also kept alive by human consciousness.

In the last book of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), the angel Xaphania[19], who is the embodiment of wisdom or *Sofia* in Greek, clarifies the idea of Dust as dynamic force by saying that: "Dust is not a constant (...) Conscious beings make Dust – they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on." (AS, 520). Thus, Dust is a natural force that creates life, but at the same time it needs to be preserved and respected in order to survive. Instead of God, the creator, Dust is not wholly other and independent from all creation but needs to interact with his creatures to be kept alive. As Freitas and King assert, Pullman's view could be in line with panentheistic theologians. The word *Panentheism* literally means "all in God" and reflects the notion that the universe itself is composed of a god and his creatures in the process of evolving. Thus, Pullman's world is empowered by the relationship between Dust and his creatures, rather than being ruled by a remote divinity detached from their lives. This is perhaps one way of framing the trilogy as a Post-Enlightenment work, since the power and driving force of the universe is Dust. Dust is connected with truth, freedom, consciousness and creativity. Just like Enlightenment theorists, Dust has the difficult task of fighting against the darkness of ignorance. (See Freitas and King, 2007:30-33).

In Pullman's universe Dust is what living creatures are made of. At first, we are reminded of the *Genesis* account, in which God creates the first man, Adam, out of the dust of the ground. In particular, when God affirms "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (*Genesis* 3:19), dust seems to reveal our nothingness in comparison with God. However, the presence of Dust in *His Dark Materials* also places the human body in a cosmic perspective, in the sense that living beings are nothing but frail particles of matter, which in the end

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[19] We can think of Pullman's Xaphania as the Ainur in Tolkien's cosmogony. The latter, indeed, are the symbol of wisdom and creativity, which are God's greatest gifts to his creatures.

disintegrate back into the infinity of the cosmos. This seems to suggest that Dust could also symbolise the transience and frailty of human life.

As we previously hinted, Pullman reconstructs the Christian story from a more scientific perspective. In his counter-myth of Creation he draws his inspiration from scientific theories concerning the composition of the universe. It is no wonder that the heroes Pullman depicts are not the archetypical heroes of Mythopoesis like solemn gods or supernatural creatures. In fact, in his new myth the scene is dominated by cosmologists, physicists and explorers whose mission is to investigate on the origins of Dust. Lord Asriel, one of the trilogy's most controversial characters, conducts experiments with Dust to understand its origins but also its meaning for the future of humanity. Just like the astronomers and cosmologists of the second half of the twentieth century, Lord Asriel uses special detectors and telescopes and finds out that there is a high quantity of dark matter filling the universe. In particular, he finds out that there is a stream of Dust surrounding humanity.

He conducts his experiments in the northern regions of the world and then, in the first book of the trilogy *Northern Lights* (1995), he tries to explain this important discovery to the sceptical scholars at Jordan College:

He lifted out the first slide and dropped another into the frame. This was much darker; it was as if the moonlight had been filtered out. The horizon was still visible (…) but the complexity of the instruments was hidden in darkness. But the man had altogether changed: he was bathed in light, and a fountain of glowing particles seemed to be streaming from his upraised hand. "That light," said the Chaplain, "is it going up or coming down?" "It's coming down," said Lord Asriel, "but it isn't light. It's Dust. (NL, 21-22)[20].

What Lord Asriel discovers is that in the northern regions of the Earth the fabric between the world is thinner, thus Dust in a way can be seen falling through a very peculiar phenomenon, that is the aurora borealis, or Northern Lights, like the title of this first book seems to suggest. Pullman turns this

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[20] For all references to the books of the trilogy *His Dark Materials,* we will use the Scholastic Press editions, London, 1995, 1997 and 2000.

phenomenon as a magical element of the story. Indeed, even though Northern Lights today can be explained by science, in ancient times Norsemen were fascinated by their beauty and mystery. They believed that these charming coloured lights across the dark sky were a sort of light show put on by the gods, therefore it became a stable element of their sagas. (See Gribbin, 2003:22-35 and Houghton, 2004:28-30).

The clincher of his counter-myth is that Pullman constructs it as a sort of hybrid genre, into which science and religion must confront each other, not only as ideological but also warlike factions. Indeed, at first he connects his idea of Dust with John Milton's dark materials out of which the universe was created, so he creates his alternative to divinity. Then, he connects Dust with the scientific theories he was fond of, that is the Bing Bang theory. Thus, Dust acquires the meaning of the dark material that cosmologists make use of to make the physics and gravity of the universe work. In a certain way, we can define Pullman's myth as an alternative version – more than an interpretation – of the Christian story. In contrast with Tolkien or Lewis, he presents Christianity as a depraved institution that provides a serious obstacle in the path of human development.

Of course, in Pullman's Creation counter-myth God has some part to play, even though the meaning of his role is completely subverted. In *His Dark Materials,* God in the classical meaning of the Creator does not exist. This God clearly acquires the role of the antagonist, since he is depicted as a deceiving first angel. He is a liar who for thousands of years has claimed himself to be the creator of the universe and all the creatures in it. He has coerced all these creatures into submission because of the fact that he preceded all of them. In order to accentuate his tyranny, Pullman depicts this impostor as the Authority.

There is a scene in *The Amber Spyglass* in which the Authority's original deception is unmasked by the angel Balthamos:

The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty – those were all names he gave himself. He was never the Creator. He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are (…) The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was the first of all. He told those who came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie. (AS, 33-34).

Again we are reminded that Dust is the ultimate animating principle of the universe and what all creatures are made of. This means that the Authority is the first being among many made of Dust, who just relied on the force of his falsehoods to come to power. Moreover, through the words of the angel Balthamos, it is evident that the god Pullman intends to attack is the God of the Bible, a god that was traditionally given many names; he is the God of Christianity, who after centuries of tyranny, lies and oppression is unmasked and ready to be defeated.

As we have seen, Milton already depicts God with a sort of paternal grimness that he emanates when establishing his laws. In particular, when we considered Vladimir Propp's study – concerning the archetypical characters of fairy-tale – into examination, we noticed that in the Old Testament God seems to embody Propp's idea of the judicious punisher who addresses interdictions to the hero (See Propp, 1968:26). In like manner, Milton portrays an authoritarian and austere God, who establishes specific rules that must not be violated and punishes his creatures when they disobey him. This controversial vision of God has set the patterns for Pullman to turn his Authority into a despicable tyrant, who establishes a malevolent institution called Magisterium to perpetrate his deception to all human beings. The Magisterium, which is Pullman's caricaturised portrait of the depraved Church, uses violence and force to secure obedience and respect from its opponents.

In the most crucial moment of the trilogy, the Authority is depicted as a powerless and aged monarch who is forced to vanish into the darkness of the universe, in order to avoid his execution:

But in the open air there was nothing to stop the wind from damaging him, and to their dismay his form began to loosen and dissolve. Only a few moments later he had vanished completely (…) Then he was gone: a mystery dissolving into mystery. (AS, 432).

Just like a human being himself, the Authority dissolves into the universe and returns to Dust. However, Pullman clarifies that the God who dies in *His Dark Materials* is a particular notion of God. As he explains: "The God who dies is the God of the burners of heretics, the hangers of witches, the persecutors of Jews … that God deserves to die." (See Houghton, 2004:116).

Of course, in proclaiming the Authority's death, we can perceive echoes of the "death of God" in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85), and the moment of revelation in which: "when Zarathustra was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: "Could it be possible? This old saint in the forest has not yet heard any of this, that God is dead!" (Nietzsche, 1978:12). With this thought-provoking affirmation, Nietzsche intends to prophesise the rising of a new divine being better suited to human creativity and imagination. More precisely, just like Pullman, Nietzsche believes that the distant, static and almighty God of Christianity obstructs human development. Therefore, he must pass away so that he would no longer interfere with the human quest for enlightenment. (See Freitas and King, 2007: 13-20).

Nonetheless, Pullman seems to diverge from Nietzsche in one crucial way. In contrast with the German philosopher, he does not simply reject a corrupted vision of God in order to replace it with a better one. As we have seen, Pullman constructs a completely different version of the divine, whose name is Dust. Therefore, he rewrites the whole Christian story with a divinity who is deceiving, manipulative and cruel. This false divinity is nothing but an enemy that must be annihilated once and for all.

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<center>**Chapter 3**
Songs of Heavenly War</center>

3.1 The Account of the War in Heaven and its Interpretations.

Of all literary genres, fantasy has always been believed to be the most successful in providing escapism from the grim reality. It is a genre capable of evoking wonder, suspense and magical atmospheres through the intervention of archetypical characters who belong to the supernatural imagery. As we have seen, Brian Attebery defines fantasy as a successful form of escapist literature "that combines stock characters and devices (…) into a plot in which the perennially understaffed forces of good triumph over a monolithic evil." (See Attebery, 1992:1). The battle between good and evil is indeed the real stable element of fantasy narrative.

However, the legendary conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil is biblical in nature. In the biblical account, indeed, this conflict is presented through the array of two factions: God and his loyal angels against Satan and his demons, the rebel angels. More precisely, the myth of the Heavenly war is recounted in the book of the *Apocalypse* – or the *Book of Revelation*[21], which is attributed to St. John the Divine. The *Apocalypse* is the final book of the *Bible*, and so, according to many theologians, it depicts the war in Heaven as an "eschatological myth", that is to say a prophetic vision of the end of days, but above all as a prelude of the spiritual warfare within Christianity, which culminated into Protestantism. The traditional leaders of this conflict are the angels led by the archangel Michael, and the rebel angels led by the "Dragon", identified with Satan.[22] In the end, Satan and his troops are defeated and thrown down to Hell.

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[21] The Greek word *Apocalypsis* literally means "revelation", and it is usually referred to a revealed future. (See Leeming, 2005:22).
[22] In particular, see Joan Young Gregg's *Devils, Women, and Jews: Reflections of the Other in Medieval Sermon Stories*. State University of New York Press, 1997, P. 28.

According to other theologians, the war in Heaven is also a myth of origin, in which the angel Lucifer rebels against God before the creation of mankind and brings primordial evil into the world. Lucifer is one of God's most beautiful angels and he is associated with the Morning Star, whose beauty and light prevail upon all the others. Lucifer, which is the Latin version of his name, literally means Light-bearer. His rebellion is a result of his great pride and resentment against his creator. Indeed, since he was once the favourite of God's angels he refuses the new hierarchy in Heaven, according to which all creatures must be subject to God the Creator and his Son, the Messiah. (See Shawcross, 1979:137-38).

Therefore, after his rebellion Lucifer acquires the name of Satan, which in Hebrew means "adversary" or "accuser", and he begins to be considered as bearer of evil and corruption. Since he dares challenge and disobey his almighty creator – who becomes the punisher when his laws are not respected – Satan and his rebel angels are degraded and condemned to a life of shame in Hell, the eternal place of woe and pain. Hell is a place of darkness, distant from the realms of light in Heaven. It can be compared to the Greek concept of Chaos, which refers to the formless space originated by the first separation of heaven and earth. Chaos also represents disorder and darkness.[23] As we have seen, in Christian tradition God is believed to have imposed light and order on chaos and darkness when creating the universe. In a certain way, he decides to cast Satan and his followers out of Heaven and to relegate them to this sort of underworld as an attempt to eradicate the primeval evil from the universe.

Milton shares the notion that the war in Heaven took place before the creation of the universe was completed, and so that this was a myth of primeval times. On the contrary, most theologians seem to agree that the conflict took place after creation, since on the seventh day God established that everything was good. In *Apocalypse* 12:7-9 we read that: "There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his

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[23] See G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schoefield's *The Presocratic Philosophers.* Cambridge University Press, 2003, P.44.

angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in Heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray."[24] Therefore, with the war in Heaven Satan brings evil into the world only after its creation and makes its original perfection change into ruin. In like manner, we will see how in Tolkien's myth, the rebel Morgoth destroys the original harmony of creation and makes evil and discord appear in Tolkien's universe.

Of course, in the myth of the heavenly war Satan is depicted as a charismatic military leader who is capable of arousing numerous legions. If God is depicted as the hero of Creation and the ultimate expression of creativity, Satan can be considered as the true hero of the heavenly battle. Yet, Satan is a hero of rich complexity and ambivalence. What prompts him to rebel against his creator is a deep sense of injured merit and the willingness to revenge. Since he was once God's most privileged angel, he expresses his fierce willingness not to be overcome.

In like manner, Milton and Tolkien depict Satan as a hero of theological perversity. He defiantly turns away from his almighty creator and asserts that he is the architect of his own identity, of which he takes advantage to act independently from God. In both authors, Satan is then a sort of pagan hero in the ambitious search for personal glory and dominion. Yet, we will see how Milton also emphasises Satan's identity as a fallen creature by exploring his deepest feelings and conflicts. (See Loewenstein, 1993:59-65). In Pullman's case, instead, Lord Asriel is a prophetic hero, who rebels against the Authority and his malevolent Church for just causes; he intends to eradicate the Authority's oppression from the world in order to raise humanity to a higher level of consciousness and freedom.

We can assume that in Christian writers like Milton and Tolkien the war in Heaven symbolises the frailty of the human soul, when it is tempted and overcome by the seductive power of evil. This power leads God's creatures to

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[24] Passage quoted from: Houghton, 2004:72.

disobedience and rebellion against his plan, which in the end is distorted. Consequently, at the end of the war sin and evil enter into the world and the original harmony of Creation is lost. (See Loewenstein, 1993:99). Indeed, by refashioning the account of the heavenly battle, Milton and Tolkien intend to educate humanity about the tragic consequences for the human soul when, in the never-ending yearning for power, it gives itself over to evil. Then the heavenly war becomes an examination of the seductive nature of evil and the way in which it operates within the world.

3.2 That Foul Revolt: The Meaning of the Heavenly War in *Paradise Lost.*

Renaissance authors and critics regarded the epic as the noblest and most accomplished form of literature. In particular, celestial warfare in all its aspects is one of the essential features of most Renaissance epics, which revaluate the heroic deeds of gods and great warriors. In conceiving his "adventurous song", Milton was intensely aware of the models, rules and themes of this complex genre, which he was attempting to revive, in order to create something entirely new out of it.

Paradise Lost diverges from previous classical and Renaissance epics, in the sense that Milton revises the traditional models in order to fit the inward and Protestant influences of his Biblical inspiration, themes and imagination. In contrast with classical epic poems, *Paradise Lost* is not concerned with celebrating military successes or the foundation of national identities. Its

leitmotiv is an exploration of the moral consequences of disobedience, resulting from the failure of humanity to live according to divine order. In particular, Milton explores the consequences for the human soul when this is attracted to the seductive power of evil. Indeed, as a Puritan, Milton placed the utmost importance on the Holy Scriptures, which he considered as the ultimate expression of divine greatness and truth. Just like Christian fantasy authors would do, Milton supported the idea that God's word, the *Logos*, is the source of ultimate truth and celebrated its authority in all matters of faith and doctrine. Therefore, Milton depicts *Paradise Lost* as Protestant and Biblical in nature, and chooses to reject the older pagan values of the chivalric tradition in favour of sacred subject matter. (See Loewenstein, 1993:32-34, and Sanders, 1996:231).

As we have seen, Milton's epic ambition derives from his willingness to celebrate the greatness of Christian Mythopoesis. He believed that God himself had assigned him with the prophetic mission of explaining God's ways to men, which are not that simple to interpret. In order to succeed in this mission, and thus to reach the realm of God and his supreme knowledge, Milton must venture beyond the boundaries of classical epic and then soar above the sacred mount of the Muses. At that point he confronts "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." (P. L. 1.16), so as to raise the name of epic to a new level of prominence and sacredness. However, just like for Christian fantasy writers, Milton's compromise is to find a balance between the orthodoxy of religious faith and authority, and the power of his own prophetic imagination.

Together with warfare, the wrath of heroes and gods is one of the recurrent themes of classical epic. In a way, Milton turns the anger of classic pagan characters into divine or biblical anger. In *Paradise Lost*, for instance, we can think of Satan as the wrathful and vengeful Achilles of the *Iliad*, who is even capable of turning against his king to assert his own rights. On the other hand, God's avenging wrath possesses a more biblical meaning. More precisely, it is related with the already mentioned God's identity as punisher that he takes on when his creatures transgress his will. (See Loewenstein, 1993:36-38).

Milton's Satan – as well as Tolkien's and Pullman's counterparts, Morgoth and Lord Asriel – is the most controversial character of the revisited war in Heaven. In the first book of *Paradise Lost* he is soon presented as the "infernal serpent" (P. L. 1.34), or "the arch-enemy, thence in heaven called Satan" (P. L. 1.81-82) who coerces his legions into his warlike and vengeful desires. He, who was once called Lucifer – the bringer of light – was God's dearest and most virtuous angel. After his rebellion, he begins to be seen as a despicable and ungrateful creature called Satan, whose Hebraic name means "adversary." From now on, he will be considered as the "apostate angel" (P. L. 1.125), the enemy of God and humanity.

Yet, in arousing his rebel legions before the battle, he appears as a strong-willed and charismatic leader, whose fierce passions and feelings gives his persona greater complexity and depth. The first two books of the poem accentuate his heroic appeal. He is described as an experienced military leader, who has maintained his godlike stature and still emanates divine energy and splendour:

In shape and gesture proudly eminent
Stood like a tower; his form had yet not lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than archangel ruined (…) (P. L. 1.590-593).

In contrast with the more conventional depictions of Satan's character – which make him usually look like a physically repulsive and grotesque figure – Milton's Satan has preserved his original beauty and strength.

In their introductory essay, Orgel and Goldberg explain that despite the essential evil Satan represents, Milton depicts him as a figure of passionate intensity and inwardness. The tone of his speeches and soliloquies is deeply elegiac and psychological. This seems to make him the most human character of the poem. (See Orgel & Goldberg, 2004:XVI). Unlike the classic epic heroes, whose admiration and greatness emerge from their public actions and victories,

Milton tends to be a much more inward and anguished hero. The moving monologue of book IV accentuates the pathos and tragedy of his restless soul:

O sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down
Warring in heaven against heaven's matchless king (…) (P. L. 4.37-41).

David Loewenstein points out the fact that through this long soliloquy Milton heightens Satan's dramatic power and inner conflicts. In particular, what prompts him to introduce such an inward character into an epic poem is his willingness to communicate the controversial feelings of a fallen creature to the reader. Loewenstein also adds that it is possible to compare Milton's Satan with the most memorable tragic heroes of the Renaissance plays like Dr Faustus, Hamlet or Macbeth. Indeed, these characters give compelling soliloquies, through which the most authentic human passions and torments emerge. (See Loewenstein, 1993:65).

Nonetheless, as John T. Shawcross asserts: "In a concept of tragedy Satan is the hero only if one believes that God has been and is wrong in his treatment of the angels and particularly of Satan." (Shawcross, 1979:138). Just as we have seen with Pullman's Authority, Shawcross illustrates that Milton's Satan is hardly heroic in many of his actions. He uses deception and coercion to assume superiority over his followers. This seems to blur our perception of the hero in the poem, since in his rebellion Satan is unconsciously accusing God of the same thing he is risking of falling prey to, that is, the abuse of power. After all, Loewenstein explains that Milton's portrait of the regal Satan is directly related with the politically involved Milton, who fiercely scrutinises and attacks the politics and art of tyrannical power.[25] Just like a tyrant, Satan expresses his fierce determination not to submit but to continue his rebellion at all costs. Moreover, what principally motivates him is an intense desire to achieve

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[25] We have seen that the age Milton lived in was an age of revolutions and instability, and that he witnessed first-hand the horrors of political tyranny.

individual glory and prestige. (See Loewenstein, 1993: 60-63). In this sense, Shawcross defines Milton's Satan as an antihero, since he does not accept the immutability of events and things as they are, but he desperately seeks to change the structure of the world and his miserable position in it.

If God is the architect of Creation, Satan is the architect and instigator of the heavenly conflict. As we have seen, in writing *Paradise Lost* Milton draws much of his inspiration from Augustinian theories. Interestingly, it is C. S. Lewis that explains that according to St Augustine, God created all things good, therefore all bad things are good things perverted. This perversion emerges when God's creatures become more interested in themselves than in God and inevitably commit the sin of Pride. Satan is indeed the first creature who ever commits this sin. At first, he is willing to accept, it seems, the hierarchy of Heaven until God's generation of his Son accentuates his lesser position to God. He is preoccupied with preserving his own dignity, thus, what prompts him to rebellion is the fact that he "thought himself impaired." (P. L. 5.665). (See C. S. Lewis, 1941:65).

Therefore, Satan is seduced by the power of evil and turns away from God to himself. His rebellion marks the beginning of the cataclysmic war in Heaven, which will last for three days and in which Satan, the archangel Michael and the Son will act as warriors. The angel Raphael, prompted by Adam's restless desire for further knowledge, acquires the role of narrator for the first time in the poem. Indeed, before narrating Creation in Book VII Raphael addresses Adam by narrating the story of Satan's rebellion and the heavenly war between Books V and VI.[26] B. A. Wright defines this episode as a "picture of monstrous disorder" (Wright, 1962:128), which represents the first irruption of evil into the universe and thus the consequent loss of the original perfection of Creation. Wright adds that the conflicts can also be seen as a preparation for the consequences of the angelic and human Fall, since Satan, the defeated leader, in search of revenge will successfully bring evil into the human universe.

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[26] This choice seems to underline Milton's belief that the war in Heaven took place before the creation of man.

During the battle, the archangel Michael confronts Satan and accuses him of being:

Author of evil, unknown till thy revolt,
(…) how hast thou disturbed
Heaven's blessed peace, and into nature brought
Misery, uncreated till the crime
Of thy rebellion? How hast thou instilled
Thy malice into thousands, once upright
And faithful, now proved false (…) (P. L. 7.262-271).

Satan is then accused of having marred the harmony of heavenly nature. Wright explains that evil first originates in Heaven, since Heaven itself is a part of created nature. Satan is also part of this created nature, thus, through him evil can invade Heaven. However, he fails in his attempt, since God and his troops defeat him and heavenly order is at once restored. On the contrary, when Satan invades the Earth he gives origin to what will be the endless struggle between good and evil, which will be at the centre of Tolkien's production. (See Wright, 1962:132-33).

Moreover, Wright and Loewenstein seem to suggest that Milton's version of the war in Heaven can also be interpreted as a parody of warfare in general. Indeed, at the end of the second day of battle there is still no resolution to the conflict, or the "horrid confusion" (P. L. 6.668) as Milton defines it. As he says:

Whence in perpetual fight they needs must last
Endless, and no solution will be found:
War wearied hath performed what war can do (…) (P. L. 6.693-95).

This seems to underline Milton's belief that warfare, in all its brutality, is pointless. Therefore, his war in Heaven can also be seen as a reflection of the religious and political conflicts Milton had witnessed in life. More importantly, Loewenstein explains that the revolt of the warring angels in Heaven can also work as a reflection of the Protestant revolution, which had brought nothing but destruction and terror into the world.

On the third and last day of battle God sends his Son to the battlefield, and imbues him with all his power and wrath to overcome Satan and the rebel angels, and so to purge evil from Heaven. This is a crucial moment in which the glorious Son triumphs and make Satan and his followers precipitate into Chaos for nine days until they reach Hell: "Down from the verge of heaven, eternal wrath / Burnt after them to the bottomless pit." (P. L. 6.865-66). As we can assume, the final heroic act in the tragic heavenly battle is reserved then for the Son of God himself who, unlike Satan, had spontaneously decided to serve and obey his father's will. The Son's triumph seems then to underline Milton's idea that strength is often made perfect in the weakness of humility. At the end of his account, indeed, the angel Raphael tells Adam:

But listen not to his temptations, warn
Thy weaker; let it profit thee to have heard
By terrible example the reward
Of disobedience; firm they might have stood,
Yet fell; remember, and fear to transgress. (P. L. 6.908-12).

Therefore, Raphael depicts this great conflict in order to warn Adam and Eve against the tragic consequences of the sin of pride and disobedience, but above all how evil can often masquerade as good in tempting fragile souls.

Nonetheless, Colin Manlove asserts that readers from Blake onward have found a certain level of ambivalence at the heart of the poem. (See Manlove, 1999:27). Indeed, he points out that, while Milton's intention is to show the just triumph of good over evil, it is as if he supported the rebel and adventurous Satan rather the hierarchical and static society of Heaven.

3.3 The Endless Conflict: Harmony and Dissonance in Middle-earth.

It is no wonder that many critics and reviewers historicise Tolkien's production in the light of the two world wars. Warfare and death indeed play an important part in shaping his mythology, which contains many hints of the horrors perpetrated during the two brutal world conflicts. After all, Tolkien had experimented all these horrors first-hand and had addressed the world wars as the ultimate manifestation of unprecedented evil.

As we have seen, in rewriting the myth of the heavenly war Christian writers explore the power of evil and its engagement with the perpetual struggle against good. In like manner, Tolkien recreates this myth out of the wartime context he was living through, but above all on the basis of a deeply Christian examination of the radical nature of evil. Just as Milton had witnessed and condemned the brutalities and pointlessness of warfare in general, throughout his mythology Tolkien depicts warfare as a pointless means of mass destruction and as the consequence of the corrupting force of power to which the human heart is often attracted.

Jonathan Evans explains that, together with the Bible, John Milton's imaginative retelling in *Paradise Lost* is probably the most valid source for Tolkien as for much of English-speaking Christianity. Indeed, Milton's theological epic is considered as the most successful endeavour to render a literary vision of such a complicated philosophical issue like the origin of evil and sin into the human world (See Evans, 2003:205). Nonetheless, Thomas Shippey clarifies that there could be signs of Tolkien's probable dislike for Milton, who was a Protestant and a supporter of divorce and regicides. More precisely, he explains that, although they pursued similar literary schemes, Tolkien's vision was deeply influenced by the Catholic doctrine Milton so explicitly condemned (See Shippey, 1982:200-204).

However, Shippey explains that, like Milton, Tolkien narrates of the heavenly war at the beginning of time, before the creation of humanity; thus, he illustrates the origin of evil and sin as taking place in Heaven, after the rebellion of angelic beings (See Shippey, 1982:209). This choice seems to underline the already mentioned Augustinian belief that God creates all things good but that Pride prompts angels to rebel and to preserve their own dignity. Their rebellion inevitably brings primordial evil and sin into the world. Evil is then a perversion, but also a denial of good. To put it in Augustine's words, evil is *privatio boni,* the absence of good, which emerges when God's creatures become more interested in themselves. (See Wood, 2003:51).

Just like Milton, Tolkien adheres to the Augustinian model in shaping his mythology. As we have seen, in *The Silmarillion* Ilúvatar creates Middle-earth out of an harmonious design that he translates into music. Then he creates the Ainur, his angels and agents who possess the gift of sub-creation. The Ainur are then invited to join with Ilúvatar in the composition of the "Great Theme of Creation." However, in rewriting the myth of the heavenly war Tolkien focuses on the dangers of sub-creation. In particular, he intends to show that improper attitudes toward Ilúvatar's greatest gift could lead to the abuse of power. In this case, sub-creation is subverted since it is appropriated for self-serving ends.

The first character to commit this sin is Melkor, who is Tolkien's equivalent for Milton's Satan. Melkor, whose name means "He who arises in Might" (Sil. 23), is the most privileged of the Ainur, whom he exceeds in power and knowledge. We have seen that Ilúvatar's gift of sub-creation entails a powerful grant of free will, which allows the Ainur to take a crucial role in perfecting Ilúvatar's Great Theme of creation. Craig Bernthal illustrates that, because of this freedom, sub-creation has the risky potential to be abused. Interestingly, he explains that Tolkien identifies the origin of absolute evil within the act of creation, thus, at the beginning of time. Since it is the abuse of free will that can lead the individual to make mistakes, Tolkien shows how the sub-creator

can grow envious of the works of his peers and thus his thirst for more power and individual glory proves quite difficult to quench (See Bernthal, 2014:100).

In like manner, Melkor becomes the renegade in the hierarchy of Heaven. His discontent leads him to abuse his gifts and to become a solitary subverter of Ilúvatar's plan. Melkor yearns for possessing the "Flame Imperishable", which is the secret source of creation; the light out of which Ilúvatar creates life. He seeks this boundless light to create things and beings of his own. As we read in *The Silmarillion:*

But as the theme progressed, it came into the heart of Melkor to interweave matters of his own imagining that were not in accord with the theme of Ilúvatar; for he sought therein to increase the power and glory of the part assigned to himself (…) He had gone often alone into the void places seeking the Imperishable Flame; for desire grew hot within him to bring into being things of his own (…) But being alone he had begun to conceive thoughts of his own unlike those of his brethren. (Sil.4).

Instead of choosing to take part in the communal act of creation, Melkor decides to turn away from Ilúvatar and thus to deprive himself of all communal reliance. Like Satan, he is overcome by pride and begins to compose his own music in total isolation. Tolkien himself, indeed, believed pride to be the deadliest of the cardinal sins, since in a way it prevents us from relying on others (See Wood, 2003:49). Melkor's first desire is then to emulate or equal his creator; this desire inevitably takes him outside the plan of Ilúvatar.

At this point, Tolkien depicts the first conflict in Middle-earth, which he will repeat in variation after variation throughout his mythology. This is the conflict between light and darkness, or harmony and dissonance. In composing his two main themes, Melkor expresses his discontent, anger and malice:

Some of these thoughts he now wove into his music and straightaway, discord arose about him, and many that sang nigh him grew despondent, and their thought was disturbed and their music faltered; but some began to attune their music to his rather than to the thought which they had at first. Then the discord of Melkor spread even wider, and the melodies which had been heard before foundered in a sea of turbulent sound. (Sil.4).

If Melkor's first attempt just introduces dissonance into the "Great Theme", his second theme arouses an even more violent discord to the point that many of the Ainur grow dismayed and interrupt their counter-composition. At this point, Melkor's theme gains strength and he submits the defeated Ainur to his will. He thereby introduces primordial evil and discord into the universe (See Bernthal, 2014:97-98). Significantly, David Harvey explains that, in Tolkien's scheme, Melkor represents the essential opposite to the forces of creation and creativity. In the heavenly conflict, he leads the forces of darkness and destruction, which are the antithesis of the forces of light and creativity.[27] In doing so, Melkor also intends to deny the creative power of Ilúvatar and of the Ainur, since his sub-creation is not a way of glorifying the Creator anymore. Therefore, this first struggle's ultimate end is to preserve the purity of Art as a creative force.

Moreover, since evil lives always in the shadow of good, Melkor will never attain the source of the "Imperishable Flame", which is imbued with the goodness of Ilúvatar he has decided to reject. In particular:

He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness. And darkness he used most in his evil works upon Ard, and filled it with fear for all living things. (Sil.23).

As Melkor becomes the antithesis of Creation, he is unable to produce any creatures or things of his own, out of creative light. He can only produce artifices in the darkness of his isolation. Interestingly, he uses the dark powers he acquires to create an army of enslaved beings, who are nothing but parodies of Ilúvatar's original creatures.[28] Like Satan, Melkor uses deception and

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[27] Interestingly, Ralph Wood points out that Tolkien wisely considers evil as the Shadow. In particular, it is something secondary and derivative from the Light. If it were something dominant it would mark the utter triumph of Shadow over Light. In this sense, evil is always something that tarnishes and blights good, though it cannot undo it completely. Thus, "to mar" is Tolkien's favourite verb to express the work of evil. (See Wood, 2003:51).

[28] Like the Miltonian Satan, Melkor grows envious of the two races Ilúvatar creates through his own agency: elves and men. Therefore, he subtly mocks Ilúvatar's creative powers by giving life to the Orcs, a hideous and scornful mixture of both creatures.

coercion to bring his creatures under his own mastery. Yet, his blind hatred prevents him from realising that true lordship never coerces but always allures and invites. His creatures then serve and worship him only in fear and hatred, rather than true loyalty, since they have been corrupted physically and spiritually. In a way, they become mindless and unwillingly committed to an evil course they initially disdained, for, as we have seen, it is in the nature of Evil to deceive and seduce. As Melkor himself realises, he cannot create anything out of his own powers – since he abjures Ilúvatar's plan by creating his own dissonant music, whose true purpose is to mar the harmony of creation, and then to take all the good from it. In this sense, Craig Bernthal defines Melkor as an "archetypal nihilist", who denies life and never attains its "Imperishable Flame." His fire of sub-creation is instead dark and consuming, since the essence of Evil is anti-creation, sterility and destruction. (See Bernthal, 2014:101-4).

After having introduced dissonance into the "Great Theme", Melkor begins to spread discord and despair among the Ainur, by plunging Middle-earth into darkness and destruction. His lies sow the seeds of distrust between the creatures of Middle-earth. In particular, this is the time in which the so-called "War of the Jewels" takes place. It all begins when the Ainur, in order to celebrate and restore the light of the "Imperishable Flame", forge the Silmarils, which are the most beautiful product of their sub-creation. The Silmarils are forged by Fëanor who, like Melkor, is the most talented and ambitious of the Ainur. He begins to love the Silmarils with greed and lust, to the point of being possessed by them. At the same time, Melkor grows envious of this new creation and steals the Silmarils, which contain part of the light he so desperately yearns for. At this point, Fëanor renames Melkor, calling him Morgoth, which means "the dark enemy."

The conflict for the possession of the Silmarils precipitates Middle-earth into centuries of war, in which all the Ainur and the first race of men are involved. During the conflict, Morgoth is imprisoned twice by the Ainur, until Ilúvatar

intervenes and takes on the archetypical role of the punisher. Thus, like Satan, Morgoth is ultimately banished from Middle-earth and cast into the void of everlasting night. In the end he perishes because asserting oneself against the divinity through sub-creation – a gift that is first of all given by the divinity itself – is an attempt that is always doomed to fail. In this sense, Tolkien wants to accentuate the dangers but also the limits of sub-creation. Indeed, to create solely for oneself is to deny that only God possesses the ultimate creative power. (See Harvey, 1985:68 and Bernthal, 2014:96).

Moreover, as Randel Helms explains, the struggle between Good and Evil perennially recurs in Middle-earth. The seed of evil is indeed deeply implanted in Tolkien's cosmos and it surfaces again in different forms. (See Helms, 1981:57). When Morgoth is cast into the timeless void, Middle-earth is not purged from the evil he has generated. After Morgoth's defeat, Sauron, his most powerful lieutenant, becomes an evil force that, as Harvey affirms "was more subtle and finely realised by Tolkien than was Morgoth." (Harvey, 1985:64). Sauron's evil is indeed more insidious and subtle than his master's. As the narrator says, Sauron:

Was only less evil than his master in that for long he served another and not himself. But in after years he rose like a shadow of Morgoth and a ghost of his malice, and walked behind him on the same ruinous path down into the Void. (Sil. 24).

Like Morgoth, Sauron is consumed by his pride and devises new plans for subjecting men and elves to his will.

A new age starts in Middle-earth. It is the age in which the great rings of power are forged. With these rings, Sauron expresses all his subtlety and convinces the creatures of Middle-earth that they can accomplish immense good and power. However, they are all deceived, since Sauron secretly creates the One and Ruling Ring, in which he places much of his craft and power. With this one ring he wields absolute control over the others. At this point, Middle-earth

is again devastated by the "Wars of the rings", which will also continue in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Craig Bernthal explains that the desire for the One Ring re-enacts the desire for the Silmarils. Indeed, these objects contains absolute power, which is what every creature yearns more than everything. However, unlike the Silmarils, the Ring is imbued with evil, for it contains the malevolent spirit of Sauron. It is almost like a living object; it resembles the *Horcuxes* in which Lord Voldemort hides part of his soul to escape death, in the Harry Potter saga.

The essence of Sauron's Ring is then coercion and seduction. He possesses the ability to enslave the will for it contains every creature's darkest desires. After the multiple wars the longing for the Ring had generated, at the end of *The Lord of the Rings,* Frodo Baggins – who is the only one who manages to carry out the quest for the Ring's destruction, rather than its possession – throws the Ring in the fires of Mount Doom, the same place where Sauron had created it. (See Bernthal, 2014:116-17).

Therefore, in Tolkien's mythology the endless struggle between Good and Evil constitutes an examination of the origins and consequences of evil. It is a spiritual force that always hides in the shadows and corrupts and seduces human virtues. Through the wars of Middle-earth, Tolkien shows us that evil is primarily generated by the abuse of power, which means to act under an enslaved will. In other words, as a Christian, he shows that the true freedom of sub-creation can only result from following God's design, thus, always from obedience to him. Moreover, since evil operates always in the shadow of light it is something secondary and derivative from it, thus in the end as much as it mars and blights good, it will never prevail upon it.

3.4 Authority's Demise: Pullman and the Revenge of the Fallen Angels.

As long as there have been myths concerning gods and heroes, there have been many examples of the pervasiveness of warfare between them. As we have learned, in Christian tradition this important issue is related with the perpetual struggle between angels and demons; the forces of Good against the forces of Evil. This struggle is perennially revived in Christian Fantasy with multiple variations. Thus, Pullman embraces this long tradition and his trilogy seems not to be remarkable in this regard. Yet, in his narrative scheme Pullman realigns the traditional roles of the hero and the villain. Unlike Milton, he is keenly aware of the fact that he belongs to the "Devil's party", since in the trilogy *His Dark Materials* he depicts Lord Asriel and his rebel army – the equivalents of Satan and his rebel angels – as the heroes of the story. They represent goodness and reason, and are engaged in a morally justified rebellion against the oppression and ignorance of the "Authority" and his depraved Church.

Interestingly, William Gray explains that, in a certain way, Pullman resembles Tolkien in that he shares an "hidden Christianity" [29] resounding through the trilogy. However, Pullman seems to be more like Lewis, for the pervasiveness of the Christian element over the story, although it is never explicitly named in *His Dark Materials.* In contrast with both Tolkien and Lewis, anyway, the Christian element in Pullman's counter-myth is presented in an exclusively negative light. Gray adds that in depicting the Church as the antagonist, Pullman could have been influenced by the historical *odium theologicum* (hatred of theologians)[30], which seems to revolve on all forms of institutional religions, or theocracies, who has always plunged the world into centuries of darkness and ignorance. (See Gray, 2010:171-73). In particular,

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[29] We have seen how Tolkien never mentions Christianity explicitly in his mythology, rather he makes it emerge through symbolism.

[30] It is a deep-rooted intolerance that theologians seem to have developed towards those who reject the orthodoxy of religion: the atheists. (See Gray, 2010:171).

Rayment-Pickard explains that the Church Pullman depicts and condemns in the trilogy is both Catholic and Protestant. Indeed, even though its organisations are patterned upon a Catholic model – like the Magisterium or the Inquisition – they are all located in Geneva, which is the birthplace of Calvinism. (See Rayment-Pickard, 2004:49).

Just as his predecessors, in his "Post-enlightenment" fantasy Pullman explores the nature of evil and deception before aligning the two arrays who will take part in the rewritten heavenly war. As Freitas and King explain, in *His Dark Materials* the Authority and his institutions are the most challenging representatives of evil, in the sense that they hide their hypocrisy behind goodness in order to cloak the terrible actions they commit. Therefore, like Milton's Satan, or Tolkien's Morgoth and Sauron, Pullman depicts the Authority as the despicable tyrant who seduces, deceives and is infused with an unyielding desire for absolute power. This is thought-provoking image, since the oversensitive Christian minds traditionally considers God as the compassionate and benevolent creator, who protects and instructs his creatures to do good. (See Freitas & King, 2007:61-63).

Pullman then explores the often subtle line between good and evil by reviving the classical Christian theme of evil masquerading as good.[31] Indeed, if the Authority is the first deceiver, his institutions who, like the fallen angels, are subjected to the Authority's will. Thus, as their minds are enslaved, they believe his lies and commit the same terrible actions that he cunningly cloaks in goodness. In this case, Pullman not only explores an evil that masquerades as good but also an evil that is believed to be good, since it is performed by enslaved beings. (See Freitas & King, 2007:64). As we will see, the Authority is obsessed with Dust, which he believes to be the physical manifestation of sin. Thus, he issues the command to eradicate Dust from the world, regardless of the horrible deeds they would commit in the course of achieving it.

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[31] As we have, evil often masquerades as good, since it is in its own nature to deceive and seduce to attain apparently good purposes.

In *His Dark Materials,* the satanic hero of *Paradise Lost* is reinterpreted through the controversial character of Lord Asriel. Interestingly, his name derives from *Azrael,* the angel of death in Jewish and Muslim mythology, whose task is to separate body and soul.[32] In the beginning of the trilogy, Asriel appears as a cold-hearted and almost unapproachable person, characterised by a both physically and intellectually intimidating presence. In a way, he represents the purest example of a man who always believes that the end justifies the means. Indeed, he is acutely conscious of the fact that, in waging war on a corrupted system, he cannot show any concern or regret about the loss of life; instead, he often has to resort to violence to achieve noble purposes. After all, the agents of the Authority's Church show no distance for violence, but they plan and execute it in the supposed justified battle against sin. (See Rayment-Pickard, 2004:39-40).

As we can assume, Asriel's chief end is to refight the war in Heaven to restore freedom, creativity and human consciousness into the world. In the second book of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife,* Asriel's manservant, Thorold, clarifies that:

"I think he's a-waging a higher war than that. I think he's aiming a rebellion against the highest power of all. He's gone a-searching for the dwelling place of the Authority Himself, and he's a-going to destroy Him (…) The church teaches that some of the angels rebelled before the world was created, and got flung out of heaven and into hell. They failed, you see, that's the point. They couldn't do it (…) And they had the power of angels. Lord Asriel is just a man (…) But his ambition is limitless." (SK, 48-49).

The mission the ambitious Asriel undertakes is the greatest, but also the most difficult to fulfil in the history of the universe. Thus, in waging his own war he is prompted by a vengeful spirit, as if he were a descendant of Satan himself seeking personal revenge against "Heaven's awful monarch", who once defeated him and his legions. To fulfil this purpose, Asriel builds up a huge army,

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[32] In particular, see: Davidson, Gustav. *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Angels.* Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 66-19757, 1967. (PP. 64-65).

composed of every creature in the universe who still has unresolved business towards the Church. Significantly, there is a moment in *The Subtle Knife* in which it is stated that:

"Lord Asriel's army numbers millions (…) assembled from every world. It's a greater army than the one that fought the Authority before, and it's better led (…) It would be a close fight, but Lord Asriel would win, because he is passionate and daring and he believes his cause is just." (SK, 284).

In doing so, Asriel almost intends to rewrite universal history. He presents himself as an improved version of Satan, since he attempts to complete what Satan himself had only begun, by relying on his considerable wits and academic knowledge.

Nonetheless, Freitas and King suggest that in fulfilling his aim Asriel runs the risk of emulating the tactics of the Authority he despises. In a way, Asriel builds up his army to achieve his own ends, just as the Authority had imposed his own will over the centuries. Even with the best of intentions, Asriel is trying to replace the Kingdom of Heaven with a Republic that, whether right or wrong, is imposed from above; it is imposed from his own will. (See Freitas & King, 2007:81-82). In this sense, Andrew Butler suggests that Asriel could be considered as a Cromwellian or Satanic figure, as he may well be a new saviour of the universe, or he may prove to be a new tyrant. (See Butler, 2005:291). As we have seen, power possesses a sort of hypnotic effect over men, since it is what they desire more than everything. It is a tempting force that can even corrupt the noblest soul.

Of course, the end Asriel pursues is worthy, even though the means are debatable. The violence he resorts to is sometimes necessary, in a world that is oppressed by the Authority and its malevolent Church. In a way then, Asriel convinces himself that the only way of overcoming them is to "fight fire with fire." However, in *The Amber Spyglass,* the ghost of John Parry warns that: "Lord Asriel's great enterprise will fail in the end (…) we have to build the

Republic of Heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere." (AS, 382). In order to avoid becoming a new tyrant, Asriel must not impose a Republic from above, because true freedom can never be imposed, but is built up through a communal act. For this reason, he makes and remakes himself through the story, until he understands, in the end, what is better for humanity, rather than for himself. Indeed, after the Authority has vanished, he learns that the only way of defeating Metatron, the Authority's regent is to sacrifice himself and drag him into the bottomless abyss.

As Rayment-Pickard points out, if we compare Pullman's Asriel with Milton's Satan, we can see that Milton gives a much more nuanced and complex portrait of his Satan. He also gives voice to his inner conflicts so that we understand the reasons for his resentment. Thus, Milton leaves the reader with an unresolved tension between his negative moral assessment and an emotional identification with Satan's personality. On the other hand, Pullman sets all Asriel's faults and emotions against the nobility of his grand designs, rather than offering any moral exploration of his personality. (See Rayment-Pickard, 2004:43). However, Asriel slightly diverges from Milton's Satan, in that in the end he grows and learns from his mistakes. He understands that true power must be wielded for the ultimate good, rather than for domination over humanity. Instead, Satan never repents of his deeds because he acts exclusively out of his fierce pride.

In this cosmic struggle, there is also a peculiar kind of witches who decide to side with Asriel in his rebellion. Pullman depicts them as a separate clannish society that have very little interest in the issues of human beings. Even so, they decide to side against the Church; the same Church who had persecuted and burnt their ancestor centuries ago, during the dark years of the Inquisition and the later Protestant witch-hunting. In *The Subtle Knife,* Ruta Skadi, queen of the witches, proclaims:

"Let me tell you what is happening and who it is that we must fight. For there is a war coming. I don't know who will join with us, but I know whom we must fight. It is the Magisterium, the church. For all its history – and that's not long

by our lives, but it's many, many of theirs – it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse (…) every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling." (SK, 52).

After all, witches have historically believed themselves to be the servants and worshippers of nature. However, as we all know the Church had condemned their nonconformity and accused them of defiling natural order with their demonic deeds. Pullman evokes them on stage in order to underline their identity as misunderstood characters, but also to emphasise the Church's conservatism. Indeed, the Church itself often condemns nonconformist phenomena as dangerous.

Finally, in *The Amber Spyglass,* Pullman introduces another important leader in his cosmic battle. This is the angel Xaphania. She is portrayed as a feminine figure, as she represents the Greek *Sophia,* mother of wisdom. As the angel Balthamos narrates: "One of those who came later was wiser than he was, and she found out the truth, so he banished her. We serve her still." (AS, 34). Xaphania is then the only one who knows the truth about Authority's true identity and reveals his original deception. For that reason she will be banished, even though the rebel angels had served her from the time of the first war in Heaven. In a certain way, Xaphania is the helper, in Pullman's narrative scheme, since she supports and give voice to the parallel battle between wisdom and ignorance in the trilogy. (See Lenz, 2001:148). Xaphania had narrated that:

All the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity. She and the rebel angels, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and his churches have always tried to keep them closed (…) And for most of that time, wisdom has had to work in secret, whispering her words, moving like a spy through the humble places of the world while the courts and palaces are occupied by her enemies. (AS, 506)

This reinterpreted cosmic war seems then to be at the core of Pullman's Post-enlightenment fantasy. His heroes yearn for revenge on the darkness of ignorance perpetrated during the centuries by the Church, so as to rekindle the

flame of human wisdom and let it evolve it towards a higher level of consciousness.

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Chapter 4

Songs of Fall

4.1 The Account of the Fall and its Interpretations.

In one of his *Letters,* Tolkien declares that Creation and the Fall are the two central themes in many mythologies. He explains that "there cannot be any 'story' without a fall (…) all stories are ultimately about the fall." (See Tolkien, 1981:147). With this statement Tolkien intends to emphasise the fact that all mythologies – those belonging to Christian tradition in particular – reflect the essentially fallen condition of humanity, caused by the first irruption of evil and sin into the world.

The centrality of these two themes in Tolkien's narrative – which is of course derivative of the biblical scheme – accentuates the cyclic scheme upon which the Christian story, but also the main Christian fantasy production is built. The most relevant expression of this cyclic scheme is the rhythmic recurrence of good and evil events. In other words, just as the recurrent struggle between good and evil logically represents the causes of the refusal of good and divine order, the Fall represents an exploration of the moral consequences of evil resulting from disobedience and self-assertion. Therefore, just like the Christian Bible, Christian fantasy usually resorts to a sequence of cyclical phases, proceeding from the myth of origin and beginning (the myth of Creation), to the account of disruption of heavenly order (the war in Heaven), and finally to the consequential and eschatological myth of the Fall from divine grace.

As we have seen, God creates a perfect world in which everything is originally good. Consequently, Northrop Frye frames that of the Fall as an alienation myth, which marks the contrast between the perfect universe God has created and the tainted world angels and men have accidentally created out of their sin. (See Frye, 1983:109). Interestingly, C. S. Lewis explains that,

according to the Augustinian account, the Fall consists in disobedience and results from pride. As we have learned, the human Fall is preceded by the angelic Fall. Satan, once God's dearest angel, is prompted to rebel and turn away from God's design, by his overriding pride and fierce determination not to be overcome. After the great battle in Heaven he so fiercely fights, Satan and his rebel legions are defeated and cast away from Paradise. They fall for nine days through Chaos until they reach Hell, the mournful place God had created for these renegade creatures. (See Lewis, 1941:68-70).

At this point, the biblical account of the human Fall is given to us through the central story of such fundamental characters as Adam and Eve. The two progenitors of humanity are indeed created by God in order to replace the fallen angels and so to give life to a new race of loyal creatures. In Christian tradition, they are initially presented in their primal state of innocence and are totally unconscious of the dangers and insidiousness of evil. They live in the heavenly garden of Eden, where they observe the law of natural obedience to God's will. As B. A. Wright explains, Adam and Eve live in natural goodness as happy lovers, and their mutual love mainly depends on their loving obedience to God, their creator. This seems to underline the Christian idea of the egalitarian nature of God's creatures, in the sense that they are happy when their nature adheres to God and miserable when it adheres to itself. (See Wright, 1962:156).

Nonetheless, God fears that he could be betrayed again, and this time by man, his newest creature. Indeed, like the angels man is gifted with the power of free will, since God traditionally puts his creatures to the test to prove their loyalty. In his universe then every creature is free either to obey and observe his laws, or to transgress them and consequently fall. The theodicy of free will is originally developed by Augustine and is one of the crucial issues in many theologies. Substantially, this theodicy asserts that the Fall is exclusively derivative of the misuse of free will by God's creatures. In this way, theologians

exonerate God from any responsibilities for the Fall.[33] However, the theological conflict between God's omnipotence and omniscience and the consequences of free will have always affected Christianity by creating a tension that perhaps will never be resolved. Indeed, the great unresolved issue of this theodicy is the oft-posed problem of how an almighty divinity could permit evil to exist in the impeccable universe he has created, and therefore to wreck his creatures' existence for eternity.[34]

The myth of the Fall is extrapolated from Christian exegesis of *Genesis.* When God creates the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, he gifts them with the idyllic Garden of Eden, the Paradise on Earth in which they live in an harmonious state. At the centre of the garden, God places the symbolical and archetypical Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and forbids them to eat its fruits, as sole pledge of their loyalty and obedience to him. Once again, Satan, the first creature to fall, enters the scene as the antagonist of Christianity. While in Hell, he grows envious of God's creation of man. Thus, for consistency with his identity as tempter and to take revenge on God, he cunningly enters the garden and tempts the minds of Adam and Eve. He plays on their innocence and liability to sin by masquerading evil as good. Interestingly, we might say that, in his coercive act, Satan could have adopted Lady Macbeth's suggestion in act I, scene V, to "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under it." Indeed, he cunningly convinces them that to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge would allow them to acquire ultimate wisdom, and therefore to be as gods. When God finds out he has been betrayed again, he expels them from Eden, preventing them from eating of the Tree of Life, which would have granted them immortality.[35]

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[33] For further information, see: Douglas, J. D. & Bruce, F. F. *Evil,* in *The New Bible Dictionary.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974.

[34] In particular, see: Lam, Raymond's *The Problem of Evil and Theodicy: A Non-classical Approach Through the Philosophy of the Gospels.* From: *Emergent Australasian Philosophers*, Issue 2, 2009. Available at: **http://www.scribd.com/doc/24790170/The-Problem-of-Evil-and-Theodicy.** Accessed May 04/2015.

[35] All biblical sources are taken from: Kugel, James L. *Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Northrop Frye explains that it is with the Fall that the "legal metaphor" begins and constantly recurs through the Bible. This metaphor conceives human life as subject to a trial and judgement. (See Frye, 1983:110). Together with the original sin and death, the Fall then brings moral trial and experience into humanity. Indeed, God gifts human beings with free will, which allow them to make choices – whether they are right or wrong – and constantly learn by their mistakes. Satan is the first creature to fall, since his first desire is to emulate God and therefore to test his omnipotence. However, God's omnipotence never becomes a reality because Satan never acknowledges it and is inevitably doomed to fall. In like manner, Adam and Eve show all the human difficulties of dealing with temptation and make the wrong decision. Therefore, far more than intentional disobedience, the Fall seems to be derivative of human lacking experience and ignorance, since to do evil is to act under an enslaved will. Consequently, Satan, and then Adam and Eve choose wrongly, even though they do not realise the consequences their choice would lead to, because it is in the nature of moral experience to learn by mistake.

The relation between the Fall and moral experience is at the centre of the narrative of *Paradise Lost*. Like Tolkien, Milton revives the stories of the angelic and human fall in order to illustrate the failure of God's creatures to live according to his order and the consequences of the seductive power of evil they give themselves over to. Just as Satan, Milton's Adam in the end has no heroic destiny. Through his, and Eve's frailty all human beings, their descendants, inherit the original sin, and are consequently doomed to live a life subject to spiritual trial and struggle, in the difficult path to salvation. (See Sanders, 1996:231).

Although in *Paradise Lost* both the angelic and the human Fall are accurately illustrated, in Tolkien's mythology the Fall is in a certain way peripheral. Indeed, Tolkien decidedly focuses on the many effects of the Fall, rather than its central story. Of course, his Fall is derivative of the Augustinian concept of "misuse of free will", which he turns into the abuse of sub-creation.

As we mentioned, the Fall in Middle-earth generates a sense of harmony lost and is visible through the effects of the marring activity of evil. This sense of loss will indeed be much more evident through *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in which the main characters sing of the ancient days in which everything was perfect, and how much evil has affected their world. Thus they are inevitably aware of their permanent fallen condition. (See Evans, 2003:206-207).

Of course, in contrast with both Milton and Tolkien, Pullman offers his completely different version of the Fall. He depicts a paradoxical fortunate fall, in the sense that it is a positive, necessary event in the lives of human beings. Pullman's Fall is indeed the driving force in the passage from innocence to experience. As we will see, his Fall is particularly related to sexual experience, which – unlike the biblical account – he will explicitly include in *His Dark Materials.*

4.2 *O How Fallen!* **The Meaning of the Fall in** *Paradise Lost.*

As we have seen, that of the Fall is the central and crucial myth in the history of Christianity, as it represents the fallen condition of God's creatures in the universe he has created. In like manner, Milton's *Paradise Lost* revives the central myth of the Fall by depicting a Christendom on the wane, and by offering only a distant and doubtful hope of redemption. In other words, in reviving this myth, Milton ambitiously asserts himself as God's spokesman and illustrates the origins of evil into the universe and how it first and permanently affects Christianity.

Like the Christian Tolkien, Milton assumes the human Fall to be predicated on a prior angelic Fall, in which Satan's rebellion makes the original sin enter into the world. After the Heavenly war, the malicious and destructive energy of Satan and his followers collapses before the divine and creative energy of God. They are indeed the first creatures to be expelled from Heaven and punished for their unforgivable sin. As we read in Book VI of *Paradise Lost:*

Hell heard the unsufferable noise, hell saw
Heaven ruining from heaven and would have fled Affrigthed; (…)
Nine days they fell; confounded Chaos roared,
And felt tenfold confusion in their fall (…) hell at last
Yawning received them whole, and on them closed,
Hell their fit habitation fraught with fire
Unquenchable, the house of woe and pain. (P. L. VI.867-877).

The defeated angels are precipitated into the vast abyss of Chaos for nine days. As David Loewenstein suggests, the intensity and duration of their "Titanic" Fall is related with the seriousness of the evil action they have recklessly committed. The brutality of their fall causes confusion and disorder – which Milton defines as the "wild uproar" (P. L. II.541) – into God's harmonious order. To punish them – and so to deprive them of the joys of the Realm of Light for eternity – he creates the gloomy Hell, to which they are exiled after their fall. (See Loewenstein, 1993:70-71).

Hell is indeed the place in which the fallen condition of the rebel angels is accentuated. Interestingly, Milton depicts Hell as both a physical place and a mental or psychological state. However, unlike Dante, he depicts Hell as a very distant place, which is situated far away from the earth.[36] Hell is encircled by the absolute darkness of Chaos, which, as Lawrence Babb explains, accentuates the absence of God's beneficial influence and the infinite distance between Heaven and Hell. The same darkness reigns in Hell, and this seems to underline the alienation from the light of God, for those who have betrayed him.

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[36] In the *Divine Comedy,* Dante places Hell within the centre of the Earth. On the contrary, Milton chooses to situate it well outside the earth, since the human Fall had not yet taken place, and so sin had not yet tainted the world of men. (See Loewenstein, 1993:70).

(See Babb, 1970:115). Its location seems then to be original with Milton. However, in outlining its features Milton draws his inspiration from traditional Christian literature and the classics.

At first sight, Milton's Hell can be associated with the classical underworld, the Hades. Indeed, it soon appears as a forlorn and gloomy place, dominated by sorrow and despair. It is described as a "dungeon horrible (…) where peace and rest can never dwell" (P. L. I.61/66), and also where "one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames no light, but rather darkness visible served only to discover sights of woe (…) (P. L. I.62-64). Babb points out that in order to accomplish his punishment God subverts the nature governing in Hell. More precisely, he imposes a nature in reverse which, unlike the benign nature of Heaven, turns out to be a totally malignant and hostile nature. In this sense, Hell begins to be the mirror upon which the emotional and psychological states of the fallen angels reflect themselves. Interestingly, Loewenstein asserts that Hell in a way functions as a parody of Heaven, since in its wasteland every light is as darkness and all creatures are obliged to face their inner torments. Therefore, in his harsh representation Milton gives life to a horrifying world which alone is capable of superseding every other representation his epic predecessors had ever been able to offer. (See Loewenstein, 1993:72). The rich complexity and imagery of Milton's Hell has inspired many fantasy authors. Tolkien, for instance, draws up the land Of Mordor, which is a land of fire, ashes, and where the air one breaths is poisonous. In a way, he recreates some Miltonian atmospheres within this hellish land.

At this point, Satan and the fallen angels becomes fully conscious of their fallen condition, but above all of the fact that Hell materialises all their Homeric rage and wrath. In other words, they realise that, as long as they have to put up with torments and anger they will develop hell which is mostly mental, or psychological. In one of his soliloquies, Satan himself acknowledges this predicament:

Me miserable! Which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell;
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide (…) (P. L. IV.73-77).

Satan's greatest lamentation then resides in this psychological pain to which he and his angels are doomed. It is an unbearable pain which, as Babb explains, is derivative of a sense of exclusion from the joys and delights of Heaven. In this sense, Hell becomes an even more limitless place of misery. (See Babb, 1970:112). Nonetheless, Satan does not give up on this humiliation and in Hell he focuses exclusively on his revenge. Indeed, he learns that God has created a new world called Eden, in which he places two sinless creatures: the first man and woman.

At this point, the story of the second Fall begins. It is the account of the human Fall, which will mark the ultimate tragic destiny of the universe for eternity. Satan, driven by his strong pride, ventures beyond the gates of Hell. Like the Homeric Ulysses, he sets out on a journey of enormous difficulty through Chaos, to fulfil his heroic mission. Since he has grown envious of God's new and sinless creatures, he definitely uses his free will to give himself over to evil. He then reinforces his identity as the Tempter and enters Eden to corrupt the human soul.

The account of the human Fall begins in Book IV, where we are firstly introduced to the idyllic garden of Eden and its inhabitants: Adam and Eve. The first man and woman are depicted in their primal state of innocence. They live according to a law of natural obedience to God's will. As B. A. Wright explains, just as the angels before their Fall, Adam and Eve live in natural goodness, and their mutual love is pure because it is related to their loving obedience to their creator. The landscape of Eden possesses a fantastical, almost dreamlike element in itself. It is a fertile land, which God creates in deep contrast with the bareness of Hell. In particular, as Margaret Kean explains, the idyllic atmosphere of Eden is mainly due to the flow of its rivers,

which constantly regenerates the land. The metaphor of the water as a life-giving force is indeed typically religious, but also mythical. (See Kean, 1999:80).

However, just like the angels, Adam and Eve are gifted with free will. Thus, they are frail creatures who are free to choose their own destiny. Again, God puts his creatures to the test in order to understand whether they deserve the gift of eternal life. Even though God knows that in the end they will fail him, God creates Adam and Eve to repair the loss of the fallen angels. (See Wright, 1962:154-56). As Milton's God affirms: "I made him just and right, sufficient to have stood, though free to fall." (P. L. III.98-9). This seems to remind us of the great Christian paradox we previously hinted at: God creates a universe in which all creatures are free to fall, but even so he continually tests them to see if their fate can be different. This makes God the most problematic character of the poem, or, as Orgel and Goldberg explain, Milton makes it clear that God's perspective can never be ours, since God himself is the character that Milton has most trouble with. (See Orgel & Goldberg, 2004:XX).

Satan understands the complexity of this situation, and cunningly decides to tempt Adam and Eve into sin by playing on their innocence and liability to temptation. At this point, he takes on the role of the Serpent – which in many religious cultures symbolises the canniest among the beasts. He hides within the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and prepares his vengeance. God places this symbolical tree at the centre of Eden, even though he forbids Adam and Eve to eat of its fruits. As Orgel and Goldberg point out, in the unfallen world, the yearning for supreme knowledge is indeed something malicious; it is a sinful act. In particular, the knowledge the tree symbolises is that of good and evil, and the consequent ability to distinguish and to choose between them. This knowledge is the one that truly makes free will and all choices meaningful. (See Orgel & Goldberg, 2004:XXVI).

The climax of the Fall takes place in Book IX. Satan the Serpent drags Eve to the Tree of Knowledge in order to tempt her. He chooses to tempt the woman first since she possesses a certain liability to adulation. Then, just as he had

done with the angels, he resorts to lies and deception to coerce Eve into his will. Because of her lacking experience, indeed, Eve has no means of detecting his lies. However, she knows she cannot eat of its fruits, otherwise death would come to both her and Adam. Again, Satan plays on her ignorance, since she is totally unaware of the meaning of death. He therefore assures her: "do not believe those rigid threats of death; ye shall not die: How should ye? By the fruit? (…) look on me, me who have touched and tasted, yet both live." (P. L. IX.684-88). He makes her believe he has already tasted the fruit and have consequently improved his lot, in becoming a god-like creature. In doing so, he tempts Eve with the same ambition. To accomplish his revenge, he clearly intends to make Adam and Eve make his same mistake: the firm belief that it is possible to emulate God in his omnipotence. This is attainable only through knowledge; in this case, the knowledge of good and evil.

Of course, as we have hinted, to test God's omnipotence means to fall. Satan knows it very well, since has already failed this mission. He then tempts the fragile mind of Eve, telling her that:

In the day ye eat thereof, your eyes that seems so clear (…) shall perfectly be then opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods, knowing both good and evil as they know. (P. L. IX.705-09).

Satan's temptation is once again entirely psychological, because he plays on Adam's and Eve's hunger for knowledge, which makes their reason surrender to his will. Therefore, Eve first, and then Adam through her, are seduced by Satan's arguments and inevitably fall prey to his evil ways, always because it is in the nature of evil to deceive and seduce. Satan's mission is now accomplished; his strong coercive power leads Adam and Eve both to abjure God's word and to accept himself as their benefactor. Moreover, it is important to consider that Eve is seduced by Satan, but also that Adam falls through the great power Eve exercises over him. In doing so Adam makes the carnal love of Eve prevail upon the spiritual love of God. Sexual awareness is then another result of the knowledge of good and evil: "each the other viewing, soon found

their eyes how opened (…) innocence, that as a veil had shadowed them from knowing ill, was gone." (P. L. IX.1052-55). It makes the primal state of innocence and dignity disappear, in favour of a confused and fragile sense of shame. At this moment, the human mind gives herself over to passion, abandoning reason and letting sin and death invade the world. (See Wright, 1962:177).

Unlike Satan, Adam and Eve face the situation and accept their responsibilities. After the Fall they become nothing but sinful mortals who repent of their actions. Although their fate is inevitable and they can do nothing to repair their deathly mistake, God announces that he will send his Son to redeem their souls and grant them and their descendants an eternal and spiritual life after a corporal death. *Paradise Lost,* which has begun with Satan's expulsion from Heaven, ends now with Adam's and Eve's expulsion from Eden. In book XII we read that: "Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon; the world was all before them, where to choose their place rest (…) They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, through Eden took their solitary way." (P. L. XII-645-49). Although they are not the happy lovers in Eden anymore, they continue to be lovers. Regretful for the paradise they have lost, as Wright explains, they stay united and enter the long and patient work of human history. (See Wright, 1962:204).

Milton's version of both the angelic and human Fall is remarkable in its own way. Milton presents them as sinful but also comprehensible and inescapable. Both falls are more derivative of ignorance and inexperience, rather than intentional disobedience. Indeed, what Milton dramatizes is the reality of the human experience, in order to explain the fallen condition of humanity. As we have seen, on first examination he introduces Satan in all his humanity and frailty, which both justify his resentment. Then he presents Adam and Eve in their innocence and lack of experience, and the way in which they are seduced by evil, the evil that enslaves the mind.

Therefore, we understand our fallen condition through the model of Satan's, but also Adam's and Eve's, experience. In this way, Milton's tragic characters do not possess enough experience to understand what they are choosing, since their ignorance prevents free will from manifesting. Neither Satan nor Adam and Eve possess the benefit of hindsight, which would help them to make a rational choice and consider its consequences before doing it. With his version of the Fall, Milton intends to say that human beings cannot know and learn anything except by trial and experience.

4.3 Life as an Endless Spiritual Struggle: Fall, Loss and Redemption in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

As a Christian himself, Tolkien considers the account of the Fall as the central myth in Christian tradition. Throughout his mythology he revives the alienation myth of the Fall, so as to accentuate the imperfection of the world and the moral condition of a substantially fallen humanity. Just as in Milton's, in Tolkien's mythology there are the two cataclysmic accounts of the human Fall, which is preceded by the earlier angelic Fall. Therefore, both Milton and Tolkien displace the origins of evil into the prior world of fallen angelic creatures, who seduce and corrupt the originally sinless human race to take their revenge on God. However, unlike Milton, Tolkien decides not to make this secondary Fall the central theme of his mythology, but to hide it behind the cryptic allusions of his symbolism, and so to develop it in various forms throughout his literary corpus. It is presented through a series of temptations, seductions and rebellions affecting all races of Middle-earth, and originating in the beginning of times.

As we hinted, the origins of evil in Tolkien's universe are primarily related with the Augustinian theodicy of the "misuse of free will," or, in Tolkien's words, sub-creation. In one of his letters he explains that the Fall and its consequent mortality affect "art and the creative desire (…) It may become possessive, clinging to the things made as "its own," the sub-creator wishes to be the Lord and God of his private creation. (…) Both of these (alone or together) will lead to the desire for Power, for making the will more quickly effective." (Tolkien, 1981:145). The burning artistic desire – which obsessively leads the sub-creator to venture beyond his own limits – is then the main cause of the Fall and mortality. The abuse of sub-creation, in Tolkien's substantially Christian world, leads then to continuous dissatisfaction, rebellion and, inevitably, death. It is an abuse that – as Jonathan Evans explains – alludes effectively to the idea of the human tendency to idolise artistic creation through an inordinate love for one's own art. (See Evans, 2003:204-10).

To assert oneself as a divinity through the gift of sub-creation is then the true original sin that mars the harmony of Middle-earth. As we have seen, the satanic character Morgoth is the first creature to commit this sin, when he first brings disruption and dissonance into the Great Theme of Creation. With Morgoth, Tolkien shows that the first Fall of a created being is concomitant with the act of Creation, which could consequently contain within itself the risk that something might go awry. Like Satan, Morgoth falls as he is consumed by his impossibility of attaining the supreme creative powers of the "Flame Imperishable." In his obsessiveness, Morgoth also influences and corrupts many of the Ainur, and precipitates Middle-earth into a perpetual series of wars and cataclysms.

In *The Silmarillion,* in conjunction with Morgoth's Fall, Tolkien introduces us to the story of Fëanor and the making of the three Silmarils, the hallowed jewels. Fëanor proves himself to be the most talented and ambitious of the Ainur. Nonetheless, like Morgoth, he possesses a fiery spirit, which is tilted more towards mastery than compassion. He creates the radiant Silmarils, in

order to celebrate the beauty of the two Trees of Light that shine in Middle-earth. Like the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge, the Silmarils begin to possess and seduce him:

For Fëanor began to love the Silmarils with a greedy love, and grudged the sight of them to all save to his father and his seven sons; he seldom remembered now that the light within them was not his own. (Sil. 70).

Fëanor, like Morgoth, operates in secret, and begins to grow jealous of his own creation, to the point that he forgets and adulterates his role of sub-creator by assuming absolute ownership and self-assertion over his peers. His malicious action inevitably triggers Morgoth's lust for the Silmarils and the numerous wars that devastate the First Age of Middle-earth. [37]

Morgoth and Fëanor are then the first creatures to fall, and are both seduced by evil within the act of sub-creation. Their chosen isolation prevents them from taking part in the communal act of Creation, but above all it makes them fall prey to the sin of Pride. However, unlike Morgoth – who refuses to accept the limits of his imperfect powers – Fëanor is able to create something precious, even though he decides to hoard it all for himself. In doing so, he is overcome by the inordinate love and idolatry of an artisan for his art; like Milton's Adam, he is thus launched on a similar downward moral pathway leading to the destruction and loss of the Trees, together with the perpetual damnation of his descendants.

Interestingly, in Tolkien's mythology the onset of evil and sin is repeated throughout history, always as a symbolical representation of the darkest human desires and the harms they can cause. In other words, Tolkien portrays with psychological subtlety the moral temptations of all races of Middle-earth, who are continuously confronted with the desire to do good, even though they are seduced by the power they believe as necessary for doing it. Tolkien's characters are indeed initially presented with opportunities for heroic resistance against the multiple temptations of evil. In this framework, he

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[37] In particular, see Evans, 2003:208-10, and Bernthal, 2014:106-11.

introduces us to the race of Men. They are the younger children of Ilúvatar, but above all, the ones who show a stronger liability to temptation. This weakness will lead them to easily be seduced and corrupted by Morgoth and Sauron.

Tolkien presents men as an already fallen race, in order to stress the fact that Morgoth's terrible actions has done nothing but accelerating the moral corruption of Middle-earth. If the Elves' greatest sin is associated with the idolatry of artistic creation, the human sin resides in the longing for power, political domination and control of others. In this sense, Sauron will be even more cunning than Morgoth in playing upon the weaknesses of these races. The Third Age of Middle-earth, indeed, witnesses Sauron's rise to power. It is a "twilight age," in which Middle-earth is presented as a worn-out land, and in which Sauron assumes the role of absolute evil. This age is the most important in witnessing the effects of the Fall, and in showing its main characters how to walk through the difficult path to redemption. Also known as the "age of the Rings," it begins at the end of the Second Age, in *The Silmarillion;* then it will embrace the whole trilogy *The Lord of the Rings.*

After Morgoth's defeat, Sauron spends many years in exile from which he returns to Middle-earth, leading other races to believe that he repents of his terrible actions. However, like Satan, he "fell back into evil, for the bonds that Morgoth had laid upon him were very strong." (Sil. 341). He wants to take advantage of the making of the Rings of Power by gaining the full control of all races, and by making them fall again through their weaknesses and lust for art and power. Therefore, he treacherously helps the Elves to forge seven rings for the Dwarves, nine for mortal Men. Sauron makes all these rings subject to control by a more powerful ring he is secretly forging for himself. Nonetheless, the Elves – who no longer wishes to commit the sin of their ancestor, Fëanor – see through Sauron's deception and secretly forge three more powerful rings to contrast Sauron's evil, and to preserve goodness in Middle-earth. (See Mathews, 2002:64-66).

When Sauron completes the forging of the One Ring, all lesser rings fall under his sway. His control achieves a greater impact on Men:

Men proved easier to ensnare (…) They obtained glory and great wealth, yet it turned to their undoing (…) too often they beheld only the phantoms and delusions of Sauron. And one by one, sooner or later, according to their native strength and to the good or evil of their wills in the beginning, they fell (…) under the domination of the One (…) they became for ever invisible save to him that wore the Ruling Ring (…) darkness went with them, and they cried with the voices of death. (Sil. 346).

Men fall as they prove themselves to be subject less to the allurements of artistry than they are to the longing for political power. Just as Milton depicts Adam and Eve as too prone to the human frailties resulting from their lacking experience, Tolkien accentuates the terrible doom of Men: to repeatedly fall through the fear of the unknown; not to be aware of the consequences of their choice. Moreover, as Tolkien asserts: "Reward on earth is more dangerous for men than punishment." (Tolkien, 1981: 154). As human beings are totally unaware of their life after death, many of them yield to material temptations in seeking selfish personal achievements like power and glory.

As we have seen, the stable element of Tolkien's revival of the Fall is to focus mainly on the effects it produces, instead of a simple retelling of its events. These effects are better expressed through *The Lord of the Rings,* in which the survival of Sauron's Ring – caused by the frailty of Men – precipitates Middle-earth into a new age of fear and instability. Indeed, the main feature of the Ring is that it contains evil. Into this ring, Sauron pours all his cruelty, his malice, and the willingness to enslave the mind. As an object of desire, it has the power to lead characters to dispute and die for its possession, which is then achieved through murder or deception, rather than generosity. The main characters of the trilogy, known as "The Fellowship of the Ring," undertake the archetypical Quest but for the opposite end: to destroy the magical object, instead of finding it.

Throughout the journey across Middle-earth, the members of the fellowship, like the Homeric heroes of the Odyssey, have to face all manner of ordeals, with

which Tolkien wants to express the nature of any spiritual struggle as involving numerous individual choices and decisions. After all, Tolkien patterns Middle-earth upon a Christian universe, in which every creature is free to choose between good and evil. Life is indeed a continuous choice, which can lead to downfall or salvation. Anyhow, both results can affect the delicate balance of good and evil hanging on the universe.

In the end, the Hobbit Frodo Baggins will be the only one to carry the Ring up to the hellish land of Mordor, and throw it in the fires of Mount Doom; the same place where Sauron has forged it. Above all others, he possesses the right charisms. Like the Son, in *Paradise Lost,* he shows a paradoxical strength in the weakness of humility. His love is more tilted towards the wealth of Middle-earth and its races, rather than its personal ambitions. Therefore, he will not yield to the coercive power of the Ring, since he truly perceives it as a burden that must be destroyed, rather than an object of desire. As he valiantly decides:

I will do now what I must (…) the evil of the Ring is already at work even in the Company, and the Ring must leave them before it does more harm. I will go alone. Some I cannot trust, and those I can trust are too dear to me. (LOTR, FR: 519-20).[38]

In a way, Frodo's personal journey truly teaches him that to repair the loss of the Fall, impending on Middle-earth, he must root out the evil at its source.

On the contrary, the other members of the fellowship prove themselves incapable of bearing the Ring, as they realise their personal desires are too intense to perform the task. As the wizard Gandalf affirms:

With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly (…) I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good (…) The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength. (LOTR,FR: 95).

Gandalf's fear accentuates the great power of evil: to seduce and corrupt even the noblest and purest soul. Its power of lust is so strong that anyone who used

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[38] J. R. R. Tolkien. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings.* New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.

it would become mastered by it, beyond the strength of any will. Gandalf resists temptation, since he understands that it is not possible to use an evil means for good purposes.

Besides, the Ring accentuates the effects of the Fall through isolation and division. Throughout *The Lord of the Rings*, the fellowship is usually called to make decisions that sometimes bring discord among its members. This division resides in the historical mutual distrust that the races of Middle-earth have for each other as fallen creatures. In the book, the elf Haldir affirms that: "Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him." (LOTR, FR:348). In this sense, Sauron's Ring truly takes on the role of "the bone of contention," since it reinforces this deep-rooted distrust and division among the races. In the clear example of Boromir, Tolkien offers the mirror portrayal of Gandalf. Just as Adam and Eve – thus as the human race they represents – Boromir does not have enough experience to understand the evil power of the Ring. Therefore, even though his desire is to do good in the world he chooses the wrong means, as the Ring cannot be used against his creator. The idea of seizing the Ring leads him to madness. Too late he realises he is mistaken, even though he repents of his greed and desire, and sacrifices himself to save two Hobbits and to atone for his sins. (See Bernthal, 2014:215-23, and Evans, 2003:211-13).

In conclusion, we can assume that Tolkien – and this is consistent with his Catholicism – decidedly focuses his narrative on the effects of the Fall to demonstrate that even though the past can never be fully recovered, it is only through a boundless love and self-sacrifice that it can be possible to limit the power of evil. Even though the loss caused by the Fall cannot be fully repaired, it is possible to prevent the lost harmony from disappearing completely. This is the great power of fantasy, which he calls "Consolation," or "Eucatastrophe," the joy of the happy ending. (See Mathews, 2002:57). Only through the imaginative power of fantasy it is possible to allow fleeting, but significant glimpses of joy to resonate amid the darkness and despair of a fallen world.

Therefore, with the transmission of ancient myths through fantasy it is possible to provide a salvific vision, and partially overcome the infinite flaws of man.

4.4 The Delightful Taste of Knowledge: The Fortunate Fall in *His Dark Materials.*

Through the mythopoetic imagery and revival of Milton and Tolkien we have seen that the traditional Christian doctrine considers the Fall as the onset of all evil and misery into the universe. Therefore, this perspective clearly accentuates the fatalist and defeatist Christian view of the Fall itself. For the "black sheep" of Christian fantasy, Philip Pullman, the Fall should be considered instead as a turning point in human history and evolution, as it marks the beginning of wisdom through the important passage from innocence to experience. However, the concept of the Fall as positive event is not totally unknown to Christendom. Theologians call it *felix culpa,* thus a "fortunate fall," and it is related with the coming of Christ. Indeed, through Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, God symbolically gifted humanity with redemption, in order to repair the catastrophic loss of the Fall. Also, God gifts humanity with the immortality of the soul after death. (See Houghton, 2004:86).

In the trilogy *His Dark Materials* Pullman revives this paradox of the fortunate fall, though in a spirit that is essentially anti-orthodox. Interestingly, he draws his main inspiration from an essay called *On the Marionette Theatre,* written by the German philosopher Heinrich Von Kleist in 1810, in which he holds the "theory of fall from natural grace." In particular, Kleist explains that

grace is more evident in those part of nature that are inanimate – like puppets – or animals, or innocent and unformed beings – for instance, the child. He argues that all these beings possess natural grace, which emerges from a lack of self-consciousness and conscious thought. Unfortunately, human beings lose this graceful balance between innocence and experience, or self-consciousness, when they eat from the tree of knowledge. Kleist believes that in order to restore this balance humans must resort to discipline and suffering. In a metaphorical way, humans would have to eat again of the tree of knowledge to learn from experience how to be gracefully innocent. Thus, the regained grace is more valuable than the grace previously lost, for it is empowered by wisdom. (See Lenz, 2001:124-25, and Gray, 2010:1-3).

William Gray suggests that in reviving the idea of the fortunate fall in *His Dark Materials* Pullman constructs his own "high argument," in that he attempts to offer a possible reconciliation for humanity with itself and with nature, in which it could reconquer the innocence lost through the power of experience. (See Gray, 2010:4). As he affirms: "My story resolves itself into an account of the necessity of growing up, and a refusal to lament the loss of innocence." (See Miller, 2005). In this sense, the great achievement of Pullman's trilogy resides in his strategic depiction of two pre-adolescent characters who learn to grow up, to be human and to suffer. In his counter-myth, what Christendom has historically been obsessed with – sin – takes on the meaning of consciousness, which is the most important factor in human development. Pullman's Fall then is more a fall into consciousness than sin and death.[39]

In Pullman's counter-myth of the Fall, the role of protagonist is not idly assigned to a spirited, but half-civilised young girl on the verge of adolescence. Her name is Lyra Belacqua, whose name seems to suggest a near-homonym of "liar," foreshadowing the important role she will take on in the ultimate fate of

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[39] We have seen that the idea of the Fall as resulting into consciousness is already conveyed in *Paradise Lost,* in that Milton dramatizes the reality of the human experience in the process of learning. Milton's strange ambivalence as a religious – but also revolutionary – man, is what Pullman mostly admires of him. The rich complexity of Pullman's background gives *His Dark Materials* an ever more remarkable degree of intertextuality.

the universe. Interestingly, she's presented as an orphan, even though she will find out she is the daughter of Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter. Indeed, orphans are the typical protagonists of fantasy and Children's literature, and are related with archetypical features like the birth under unusual circumstances, a prophecy of an oracular destiny, and above all a mission – the quest – to accomplish. (See Lenz, 2001:152). Lyra embodies some of these motifs, even though such heroic quests are generally undertaken by male characters, who must resist dramatic temptations – like the members of the Fellowship of the Ring – to accomplish their task. On the contrary, Lyra must yield to temptation to fulfil her fate.

The myth of the Fall is then crucial also in *His Dark Materials,* in which the young Lyra embodies the new Eve. However, the biblical Eve has traditionally been assigned the archetypal role of the temptress and the main cause of all evil, toil, and death that humanity has suffered after the expulsion from Paradise. Lyra instead subverts this notion. She is the true heroine of the story, and only through her "sin" humanity will be saved. The witches had prophesised her oracular destiny, and the members of the Magisterium torture them to discover this startling prophecy. The first sign is certainly the circumstances of her birth. Asriel and Mrs Coulter conceive her out of wedlock, which is something the Church explicitly condemns. Then, Lyra is the only one who can read an instrument called *Alethiometer.* This is a golden compass-like device that reveals the truth, as the name itself suggests: a combination of the Greek word *Aletheia* (truth), and *ometer* (measuring device). The Masters of Jordan College and the Magisterium require years of study and volumes of ancient books to learn how to read it. Instead, Lyra can read it by using her own intuition, as it works through the influence of Dust, thus, consciousness.

In the process of torturing witches, the Magisterium finds out the truth about Lyra's destiny:

The child, then, is in the position of Eve, the wife of Adam, the mother of us all, and the cause of all sin (…) if it comes about that the child is tempted, as Eve

was, then she is likely to fall (…) and if this temptation does take place, and if the child gives in, then Dust and sin will triumph. (AS, 71).

The Church is extremely obsessed by Dust, which they believe to be the evidence of original sin. Therefore – almost like Macbeth, who is driven to madness and murder by the prophecies of the witches – the Magisterium above all else fears the prophecy about Lyra, in that she could cause a second Fall and general ruin. They are therefore determined to kill her, before her sin lets Dust completely flow into the universe, and thus destroy its equilibrium.

Yet the witches, and the other outlaws, adversaries of the Church, consider the coming of a new Eve as liberating. The new Fall will paradoxically breathe new life into the universe by reinforcing its animating principle. Unlike the Church, they believe Dust to be the source of consciousness, freedom and intellect. In this framework, the witch Serafina Pekkala explains the nature of Lyra's fate:

We are all subject to the fates. But we must all act as if we are not (…) there is a curios prophecy about this child: she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing (…) if she's told what she must do, it will all fail (…) the universes will all become nothing more than interlocking machines, blind and empty of thought, feeling, life… (NL, 310).

The external agents like the witches cannot inform Lyra about her destiny, which can fulfil itself only if Lyra resorts to her own freedom in making decisions. Pullman here clearly alludes to the acquirement of free will, which is authentic only if brought about by Dust. If Lyra betrayed her free will, she would let Dust vanish forever, and so she would let the oppression of the Authority and the Church prevail upon human freedom. (See Freitas & King, 2007:97-99). If Dust were to drain away, all creatures would become like parasites; dehumanised and deprived of their consciousness.[40]

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[40] The notion of the Fall as discovery of consciousness is already supported by William Blake, whose anticlericalism is the main element he shares with Pullman. In particular, Blake regards the Church as the enemy of maturity and experience, since they inappropriately label the passage to consciousness as original sin. In doing so, it coerces humanity into remaining in a perpetual state or ignorance. (See Houghton, 2004:88).

In *His Dark Materials,* Lyra and Will re-enact the myth of the garden of Eden. Interestingly, even though the traditional plot of Adam and Eve endures, its main details slightly differ. In Pullman's world, everyone has a D*aemon*, which is the external physical manifestation of the human soul and psyche, under the form of an animal.[41] Before the age of puberty, daemons can shift shape as they represent the fluidity and mutability of the child's nature. On the other hand, with puberty, daemons achieve their fixed form, in conjunction with the physical and psychical maturity of human beings. In a way, they may be related with what Jung calls "anima," or "animus," that is: the opposite sexual energy in the male and female psyches, respectively.[42] (See Lenz, 2001:139). Just as all creatures, daemons attract Dust. In *Northern Lights,* Pullman clearly rewrites the story of the biblical Fall. As Asriel narrates to Lyra:

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: "For God doth know that is the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and your daemons shall assume their true forms, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (…) "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw the true form of their daemons, and spoke with them. But when the man and the woman knew their own daemons, they knew that a great change had come upon them, for until that moment it had seemed that they were at one with all the creatures of the earth and the air. (NL, 372).

When Pullman's Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, they then acquire the so dreaded consciousness. Therefore, Pullman's maniacal Church decide that daemons must be separated from children before they reach puberty, so as to prevent original sin from further blighting the order of the universe. Again, the antagonist, the Church attempts to deprive human beings of their freedom and consciousness, and so of the full union with the divine force of the universe: Dust.

Another very important character in the trilogy is represented by the scientist Mary Malone. If Will and Lyra represent the new Adam and Eve,

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[41] Pullman's invention of Daemons reminds us of another archetypal characters of fantasy fiction: the helpers, which are often in the form of an animal guide. Let us think for example to the beavers that help the main characters to understand their identity and purpose, in Lewis' Narnia. (See Lenz, 2001:152).
[42] Lyra's daemon for instance, whose name is Pantalaimon, belongs to male gender.

Mary inevitably embodies the new Serpent, who is actually a good Serpent. She is initially presented as an ex-nun, who has left the Church since she wants to enjoy physical experiences and the bodily pleasure of falling in love. Moreover, as a physicist, she begins to deepen her studies on dark matter by discovering that it is directly related with Dust, thus with consciousness. Again, a character belonging to the scientific world suits well into Pullman's post-enlightenment pantheon of heroes.

In Pullman's counter-myth, just as Asriel is the heroic version of Satan, Mary Malone becomes the positive version of the Serpent, since through her temptation, Lyra and Will fulfil their redemptive mission. When Mary tells them the story of her first falling in love with a man, in a way she sets a peculiar mechanism into motion, which serves as a catalyst for the arousal of sexual awareness in Lyra and Will. Therefore, they begin to understand their mutual love and how to act on it. They get to know each other bodily, in sexual union.

In the re-enacted scene of the "garden of Eden," Lyra and Will are in a wood for a picnic. Symbolically, she offers him some red fruits, which clearly allude to the apple of the tree of knowledge:

And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth. She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak (…) they were confused; they were brimming with happiness (…) The word *love* set his nerves ablaze. All his body thrilled with it, and he answered her in the same words, kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body (…) her sweet moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit. (AS, 492).

The prophecy is then accomplished. Remarkably, Pullman rewrites the Edenic scene with blissful sensuality, through which he accentuates the importance of the body in the act of love. Indeed, what marks Lyra's and Will's "fall" into consciousness is the enactment of erotic love, thanks to which they reach maturity and consciousness, thus, experience. In this sense, sexual awareness also marks the overcoming of the taboo of sexuality, which is something that naturally belongs to innocence. (See Lenz, 2001:136-7).

Of course, the erotic union of Lyra and Will – as new Adam and Eve – allows Dust to flow back into the world of conscious beings. Dust is indeed the divine force that is part – not a separate entity as is God – of the universe. In other words, it is as if Dust and universe were united by mutual love. In like manner, the love between Lyra and Will reinforces this divine intimacy, and the strong bond between the universe and its creatures. It is only through the spiritual and bodily experiences that human beings understand the world.

However, even though the bodily union between Lyra and Will has made Dust fall again into the universe, their forced separation at the end of the trilogy is its most controversial aspect; perhaps even more terrible than the death of God. As they belong to different worlds, their several journey across them cause some rifts into the delicate fabric of the universe. After all, Dust is also a vulnerable force, which is generated by thought, freedom and passion. In order to repair this fabric, and so to restore the harmony between the worlds, Lyra and Will are asked to fulfil the final task of their mission. They have to give up their mutual love, in favour of the more ultimate love of the divine, of Dust. Interestingly, this a peculiar ending for Pullman, which seems to remind us of the possible "religious atheism" that we mentioned. Unlike Adam and Eve, who has let their mutual love prevail upon the love for God, Lyra and Will accept their destiny by giving up their newly discovered love for the love of Dust, the love of consciousness and knowledge. In both cases, anyway, love seems to be the driving force of the universe. This love – which in Pullman's counter-myth is more tilted towards knowledge and consciousness – always requires sacrifice – the Christian concept of renunciation – to maintain the balance of the universe.

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Conclusion

One of the main purposes of this thesis has been the study of a very peculiar category of literary fantasy, which is generally called Christian Fantasy, and which reached the peak of success between the XIX and the XX century. In particular, throughout this study we have seen that, despite the reputation of mere escapist literature that has always impended on it, fantasy can offer numerous possibilities of exploring and reviving complex and sophisticated issues, for instance religion and the flaws of society. However, the stable element that strengthens the richness and complexity of fantasy is myth. Myths are, first of all, stories, which represent the main historical and literary legacy of a culture.

In particular, the authors belonging to Christian Fantasy focus their attention on the deep-rooted bond that exists between fantasy and the main biblical myths, as both express the secular and endless relationship between the individual and the numinous. Like fantasy fiction, biblical myths are infused with extraordinary elements and events, which are mostly prodigies worked by divine power. Therefore, what fantasy and religion share is the fact that they demand beliefs in other worlds and supernatural happenings, by recognising the metaphysical that operates within the universe.

The literary experiments of Christian Fantasy writers are intensely imbued with biblical allusions and themes, for they consider the Bible as the repository of ultimate truth, and claim its authority not only in faith, but above all in literary matters. We have seen that they revive some crucial Christian myths, in order to create the so-called Christian Mythopoesis, and so to celebrate the wonders of Christianity. The Bible represents indeed one of the purest examples of how different accounts, once they are all tied together, can create a mythology, but above all it has often been believed to be the ultimate source for the archetypes, imagery and themes of Western literatures.

In particular, this study focusses on the reinterpretation of three crucial myths of Christianity, which are theologically known as Creation, War in Heaven and the Fall. These myths traditionally follow a linear path, which intends to illustrate the passage from an initial blissful state of the universe and its creatures to its consequent and perpetual state of damnation, caused by the intrusion of evil and sin. In like manner, Christian writers revive these myths by resorting to a sequence of cyclical phases, which proceeds from Creation, the myth of origin and beginning, to the account of the first disruption of divine order with the heavenly war, and finally to the alienation myth of the Fall.

To illustrate this mythopoetic process I have taken into examination three important authors: John Milton and his epic poem *Paradise Lost,* J. R. R. Tolkien, with his rich and complex mythology of Middle-earth, and Philip Pullman, with his highly controversial trilogy *His Dark Materials.* As we have explained, even though it would prove impossible to define Milton as a fantasy author, his poem is indeed considered as a foundational text for many Christian fantasies, since he resorts to his own imagination and unorthodoxy to imbue traditional Christian characters with great fantastic imagery.

Tolkien is believed to be the greatest of all mythmakers, as he infuses the material of ancient Scandinavian, Greek and Celtic myths he has studied as a scholar and philologist into the deep Christian qualities of his Catholic faith he intends to celebrate and defend. Therefore, the two works that I have examined – *The Silmarillion* and the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* – are not conceived as explicitly Christian, since Tolkien hides the Christian message behind symbolism.

On the contrary, Pullman revives these myths in a more anti-orthodox spirit, which is derivative of anti-clericalism. His trilogy *His Dark Materials* is indeed an open investigation on Christianity and its truths. Unlike Tolkien, he believes that Christianity has often provided obstacles to human development, therefore he intends to rewrite the Christian truth on the basis of a more scientific

ground. He then creates a counter-myth in order to celebrate the marvels and discoveries of science, and the development of human consciousness.

These three writers revive these important Christian myths to shed light on some fundamental themes of human existence. In particular, as both Christians, Milton and Tolkien take an optimistic view on Creation, considered as the golden age of the universe, whereas they take a more pessimistic view on the Fall, which precipitates the world into darkness and despair. However, Milton already begins to see the Fall as something inevitable, or comprehensible, in the sense that it embraces the consequences of human curiosity, the constant desire to know more. This desire resides in the human lack of experience. Human curiosity and knowledge are indeed the driving forces of Pullman's optimistic view of the Fall as bearer of wisdom and maturity, thus, as something necessary in the human process of growing up.

However, we have the overall feeling that, in choosing to retell these myths, all these three authors are aware of the fallen and imperfect condition of the world. Indeed, to oppose human creativity, freedom and knowledge, there is the constant threat of evil and its cruelty, harshness and deception. Therefore, they make the common assumption that wisdom, love, cooperation and kindness are the human essential attributes in the never-ending struggle against evil. In other words, we can assume that they give us the desire to think about the meaning and reality of human existence, in order to suggest some way of behaving that would be constructive rather than destructive.

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