"TEMPTATION TO TRANSGRESS": PHILLIP PULLMAN'S RE-ENACTMENT AND REVERSAL OF THE FALL OF MAN IN HIS DARK MATERIALS

"TENTAÇÃO DE TRANSGREDIR": REENCENAÇÃO E REVERSÃO DA QUEDA DO HOMEM DE PHILLIP PULLMAN EM *HIS DARK MATERIALS*

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ABSTRACT: This research investigates how the trilogy *His Dark Materials* re-enacts and reverses the fall of man presented in *Paradise Lost*. We analyse how Philip Pullman's main characters are modelled after the images of Eve, Adam and Satan in view of Georg Lukács' ideas (1983) and consider the importance of fantasy to their representation based on the works of Rosemary Jackson (1981) and of Peter Hunt and Milicent Lenz (2003). We argue that Pullman's recreation of John Milton's story acquires epic proportions and that his choice for fantasy is meaningful, since the mode facilitates the subversion of previously established ideas.Keywords: *His Dark Materials*; *Paradise Lost*; epic.

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa investiga como a trilogia *Fronteiras do Universo* recria e subverte a imagem da queda do homem representada em *Paraíso Perdido*. Analisamos a relação entre os protagonistas da trilogia com as personagens Eva, Adão e Lúcifer tendo em vista as ideias de Georg Lukács (1983) sobre o gênero romance e considerando também a importância da fantasia para a concepção da trilogia de acordo com estudos de Rosemary Jackson (1981) e de Peter Hunt e Milicent Lenz (2003). Nosso argumento é o de que a recriação que Pullman faz da história de John Milton adquire proporções épicas, e que sua escolha pela fantasia se dá pelo potencial de subversão de ideias preestabelecidas que é próprio desse modo.
Palavras-chave: *Fronteiras do Universo*; *O Paraíso Perdido*; épico.

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1. A LONG AND COMPLEX DIALOGUE

Ranked second on a list of books banned in the United States (PILKINTON, 2009), Phillip Pullman's fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* (henceforth *HDM*) is caught in a heated religious controversy. Recognized by prestigious awards such as the Carnegie Medal and the Order of the British Empire, author and books have been attacked for being atheist and anti-Christian, claims that Pullman himself disconcertingly confirms. The controversial reaction that the trilogy has provoked since its appearance in 1995 is well exemplified by an article in which Christian author Stephen Ross states that "Pullman's unholy fantasy ensnared me and nearly swallowed me whole. Only by God's grace [...] did I emerge from the experience without doubting the truth of the Christian worldview" (ROSS, 2007).

If nothing else, the paper attests Pullman's eloquence in *HDM*, with its author, a stern critic of the trilogy, claiming that Pullman "has accomplished something extraordinary in his novels" (ROSS, 2007). The present work is not concerned with determining the worth of the religious ethos in Pullman's trilogy. Instead, this work aims at promoting a discussion of how it accomplishes something that we also consider extraordinary: the literary re-enactment and reversal of one of Western culture's most important foundational myths, that is, man's fall from paradise. The Biblical origin of the theme allows it to pass from religion to literature and vice-versa somewhat easily and, while it seems legitimate that religious scholars would show interest in Pullman's treatment of the theme, it seems equally appropriate that it should be examined from the point of view of literary studies.

From such perspective, Pullman's trilogy is seen here as a point of convergence for some of the writer's most important literary influences. The first to be noticed is that of William Blake, whose presence in *HDM* is clear to the informed reader: the

concepts of innocence and experience, the two-three-or-fourfold nature of the world and the image of the Authority as a decaying deity, for instance, are all derived from Blake's works (1988; 1994). Moreover, through Blake comes another major work that is paramount to the conception of *HDM*: that of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1820) (henceforth *PL*).

The influence of these literary works in *HDM* is often emphasized by Pullman himself. Accordingly, Peter Hunt and Milicent Lenz, in their study about contemporary fantasy, state that three main "sources have fed his imagination: *On the Marionette* [Puppet] *Theatre* by Heinrich von Kleist; John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and the works of William Blake. All of these are [...] woven into the tissue of the three novels" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 123). The interrelations between Pullman's and Kleist's work remain outside the scope of our study.

The relation among *HDM*, Blakean imagery and *PL* helps us understand much of the conception of Pullman's trilogy. The author came to believe, after Blake, that "single vision would not do. I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (BLAKE, 1988, p. 153). In *HDM*, he set out to create a story that would elaborate his own understanding of the Biblical/Miltonic story of the fall of man, thus reworking and reinterpreting what he had read in the Bible, in Blake, and in Milton. As Hunt and Lenz pointed out, "by this rich borrowing from *Paradise Lost*, Pullman sets the scene for a drama of cosmic scope: the destinies of entire worlds hang in the balance" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 123). Hence, the trilogy achieves epic proportions and takes part in a long and complex dialogue with literary tradition.

Not only Willian Blake and John Milton, but also Georg Lukács (1983), Rosemary Jackson (1981), and Hunt and Lenz (2003) work as mediators in our discussion of how *HDM* recreates the story of the fall of man to a contemporary audience. In this process of interpretation, we claim, much of the imagery and significance of the Miltonic rendition of the Genesis is reversed in *HDM*. We propose to look at how the characters

Lyra Bellacqua, Will Parry, and Mary Malone are modelled after Milton's Eve, Adam, and Satan and how their trajectory and characterization in the trilogy transgress images and ideas previously established in *PL*.

By analysing each character's role in both stories, we resort to Lukács' study of the relation between epic literature and the novel to support our idea that the presence of *PL* as a subtext which underlies *HDM* invests the trilogy's characters with an epic intent. While transposing the story from Milton's poem into his trilogy, Pullman does not only address thematic, religious issues. He also exposes the complex relationship between the epic and the novel forms, thus indirectly attesting the relevance of the latter to contemporary literature as well as of Lukács' century-old claim for the "genuinely artistic nature of the novel" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 73).

Pullman's choice of the mode of fantasy to mediate such a relationship is also relevant. Its importance, however, in the conception of *HDM* can only be properly estimated if the claim that fantasy fiction is "escapist" is abandoned in favour of an understanding that it "has an inevitable role as commentary on, or counterpart to, reality and realism" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 08). For that purpose, the difficulties in defining fantasy must be accepted rather than used to dismiss it. This is what Jackson does when she claims that the mode's value "has seemed to reside in precisely this resistance to definition" (1981, p. 01). The fact that fantasy consistently defies attempts of categorisation becomes itself an enduring feature of this versatile literary mode.

> A characteristic most frequently associated with literary fantasy has been its obdurate refusal of prevailing definitions of the "real" or "possible", a refusal amounting at times to violent opposition. (…) *Such violation of dominant assumptions* threatens to *subvert* (overturn, upset, undermine) rules and conventions taken to be normative (JACKSON, 1981, p. 23, our italics).

The proposition, although revealing, needs to be handled carefully. Jackson proceeds to warn her readers that "it would be naïve to equate fantasy with either

anarchic or revolutionary politics" (1981, p. 23). The use of the fantastic mode per se does not imply artistic or ideological transgression such as the kind we argue to take place in *HDM*. What fantasy does is to provide a framework for questioning "dominant assumptions". It is this framework, which originates in the mode's freedom from certain of the conventions of texts we would usually deem realistic, that spawns artistic and/or ideological revisions of well-established forms and ideas.

In spite of its relative freedom of conventions (and we are aware of the paradox in this statement), fantasy is a highly formulaic mode, with a "restricted number of recurrent motifs and elements" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 03). In at least one of these elements — the hero's journey — fantasy has often been inexcusably conservative, with many of its stories still revolving around the adventures of a male hero enacting conventional male roles. In *HDM*, so we wish to argue, Pullman has been able to apply fantasy's potential power of subversion to the mode itself precisely (although not exclusively) by disrupting traditional gender roles in his portrayal of Lyra and Will and thus, also, subverting representations of gender in *PL*.

2. SATAN, ADAM AND EVE

Just like the book of Genesis is the model for *PL*, Milton's epic poem seems to be the model for the general conception of *HDM*. This kind of dialogue, quite common in literature, often intends to re-interpret, re-signify or re-evaluate a tradition or set of beliefs in terms of a new or different sociohistoric context. This is how a contemporary literary work adds new layers of understanding to literary works from the past. Many of the issues and a good deal of the imagery presented in *HDM* are already present in Milton's poem. Based on this idea, we look at how the story unfolds to let Will and Lyra re-enact the roles of Adam and Eve, and how Dr. Mary Malone, in turn, seems to play the part of Satan.

Naturally, none of these characters is a direct representation of their counterpart in *PL*. Will, Lyra and Mary Malone are individual characters in their own storylines. However, modelling them after Milton's characters brings clear residues of the epic form into *HDM*. We know from Lukács that "the epic hero is, strictly speaking, never an individual" and that his fate does not concern "a personal destiny but the destiny of a community" (1983, p. 66). Pullman's protagonists occupy a middle ground as novel characters with an epic intent: it is through their affiliation to Milton's characters that they acquire their deepest significance both as novelistic individuals and as prominent members of their community. As we hope to demonstrate from the analysis below, these three characters are, as Lukács claims the novel hero must be, seekers. And it is precisely in their search for adventure that the form of the novel meets the mode of fantasy.

2.1 EVE/LYRA

Lyra is an orphan girl who lives in Oxford at Jordan College, where she is raised mostly by scholars. Without the supervision and care of real parents, Lyra grows up in a scholarly atmosphere that excites her curiosity whereas it lets her develop a certain disdain for rules of behaviour. She plays freely with Roger, the kitchen boy, with the gyptian children and with "young servants and the children of servants" (PULLMAN, 2001, p. 36), and often gets involved in fights and wanders about in dirty clothes and hands. Far from being a typical girl, Lyra is "a coarse and greedy little savage, for the most part" (p. 37) and obtaining obedience from her was not an easy task. She would often have "to be caught by the most agile Scholar and brought to the Housekeeper to be washed and dressed in a clean frock (p. 37). Lyra also deliberately lies to conceal her adventures from Lord Asriel and from the scholars in Jordan College, thus demonstrating her inherent temptation to transgress.

The opening scene in *Northern Lights* is revealing of the girl's inclination to disobedience. Lyra knows she must not be in the Retiring Room but, moved by her curiosity, she hides in the oak wardrobe to see what she knows would be forbidden to her. Similarly, Eve is led by curiosity and temptation to transgress in *PL*. The day Satan decides to act against the creation of God is the first day in which Eve decides to work alone and be by herself in the Garden of Eden. When Satan comes to tempt her, he is excited to find her alone. In Book IX, when he tells her about the mysterious tree, her curiosity is aroused.

> Serpent, thy overpraising leaves in doubt
> The virtue of that fruit, in thee first proved:
> But say, where grows the tree, from hence how far?
> For many are the trees of God that grow
> In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
> To us [...]
> (MILTON, 2005, p. 264).

When Eve realizes what God's interdiction entails, she rationalizes its meaning and concludes its incoherence:

> Thy praise he also who forbids thy use,
> Conceals not from us, naming thee the tree
> Of knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil;
> Forbids us then to taste, but his forbidding
> Commends thee more, while it infers the good
> By thee communicated, and our want:
> For good unknown, sure is not had, or had
> And yet unknown, is as not had at all.
> In plain then, what forbids he but to know,
> Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
> Such prohibitions bind not [...]
> (MILTON, 2005, p. 268).

Satan's temptation seems to have succeeded due to the rationality of his claims and to the incoherence of God's prohibition, out of which Eve's curiosity seems to spring. She reflects on Satan's proposition and, instigated by it, questions the

interdiction. When she logically concludes that "such prohibitions binde not" (MILTON, 2005, p. 268), her temptation to transgress becomes well-grounded. She is initially moved by curiosity, but ultimately it is the combination of this with reasonable logic that impels her to take practical action.

Like Eve, Lyra "didn't mean to be nosy but she couldn't help being curious" (PULLMAN, 2001, p. 172). She also jumps into action motivated by a mixture of curiosity and reasoning. In the first chapter, when Lyra admits to Lord Asriel that she deliberately disregarded the Master's orders, she recognizes: "I know I shouldn't have" (PULLMAN, 2001, p. 12-13). However, she justifies her actions to Pantalaimon by arguing that she has a moral duty: "I can't sit in here and watch them give him poison" (PULLMAN, 2001, p. 08).

When Satan has successfully compelled Eve to act against God's prohibition, his

> [...] words replete with guile
> Into her heart too easy entrance won:
> Fixed on the fruit she gazed, which to behold
> Might tempt alone
> (MILTON, 2005, p. 268).

It is not, however, only Eve's natural temptation to transgress that offers "easy entrance" to Satan's words into her heart and makes her fall inevitable. Even Milton's text, in its intent to "justify the ways of God to men" (MILTON, 2005, p. 18), recognizes that the fruit "might tempt alone". And not only that, as we have mentioned before, Satan's "persuasive words" come to her "[...] impregned / With reason, to her seeming, and with truth" (MILTON, 2005, p. 268).

Eve's reason fails, however, precisely because it was excited by curiosity. It fails in detecting the Serpent's deceit and in observing that whereas "good unknown, sure is not had", so is evil not had as long as it remains unknown. However, as we shall consider more thoughtfully below, whereas Eve's bite of the forbidden fruit causes her

to fall from the grace of God into suffering, shame and submission, Lyra experiences quite different consequences.

2.2 ADAM/WILL

While similarities can be observed in the characterisation of Eve and Lyra, Will Parry resembles Milton's Adam in a much more indirect way. Similarities between the two characters' actions or personalities are not easy to point out and, in many cases, Will even acts in stark opposition to Adam's attitudes. However, let us consider a scene from Book XI of *PL*: two celestial angels, Raphael and Michael, come to Adam to tell him about the grace and mercy of the creator. When Archangel Michael goes to Eden to show Adam the future of humankind, Eve is put under a sleep state:

> [...] Ascend
> This hill; let Eve (for I have drenched her eyes)
> Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak'st,
> As once thou slept'st, while she to life was formed
> (MILTON, 2005, p. 331).

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mrs Coulter puts Lyra under a sleep state, as do the angels to Eve in *PL*. While Will is alone, the fallen angels Baruch and Balthamos come to accompany him.

If, on the one hand, it is hard to ascertain whether Pullman deliberately modelled Lyra's sleep after this particular scene, on the other hand, a comparison between the actions of Adam and Will during Eve's and Lyra's sleep reveals important aspects of the revision of *PL* perpetrated in *HDM*. The main trait that relates Will Parry to Adam is not so much intrinsic to these characters but is in the fact that Will is Lyra's companion, just as Adam is Eve's. However, the way the male characters behave towards their female partners in each story is an important aspect of the rationale of the relationship between *PL* and *HDM*.

When Eve is put to sleep, Adam is told to "ascend this hill" while Eve sleeps "below" so that he can wake "to foresight". In response to Michael's invitation, "[...] Adam gratefully replied. / Ascend, I follow thee, safe guide [...]" (MILTON, 2005, p. 331), thus demonstrating his satisfaction to ascend by himself. Will also welcomes Balthamos' guidance: "I'll take the way I think it is and you can guide me if I go wrong" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 13). However, as soon as he finds himself alone, he decides to "go back down the mountain" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 13) in search of Lyra. So, while Adam ascends without Eve and guided by prestigious and powerful angels, Will descends with fallen angels, making his command to them clear: "help me find Lyra. I don't care how long it takes, I'll find her first" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 11).

In terms of imagery, Will's descent can be seen as a simple inversion of Adam's ascent. In terms of characterisation, it establishes Will Parry as an essential piece in the reversal of the ethos of *PL* that we claim *HDM* to effect. In Milton's epic, when Eve offered Adam the forbidden fruit, "[...] he scrupled not to eat / Against his better knowledge, not deceived, / But fondly overcome with female charm" (MILTON, 2005, p. 275). The passage implies not only that Adam knew better than Eve but that she charmed him into eating as if charm were a stronger attribute in her than reason. Even when Adam himself admits that "Much pleasure we have lost, while we abstained / From this delightful fruit [...]" (MILTON, 2005, p. 276), the responsibility for their troubles seems to lie more strongly in Eve, although Adam knew better. After they have both tasted the fruit, Adam does not refrain from observing Eve's error: "O Eve, in evil hour thou didst give ear / To that fake worm [...] (MILTON, 2005, p. 277). Will Parry, in contrast, after receiving the red fruit from Lyra remarks that "you know straight away when you like someone" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 466).

Whereas in *PL*, "Earth trembled from her entrails" (MILTON, 2005, p. 275) after the couple ate, in *The Amber Spyglass*, we see Will "kissing her hot face over and over again, drinking in with adoration the scent of her body and her warm, honey-fragrant

hair and her sweet, moist mouth that tasted of the little red fruit" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 466). For Will and Lyra, eating the fruit is an act of transgression and independence. When they eat it, "the voyage is completed: the way begins" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 73).

2.3 THE HERO TALE

Pullman's dislike for the most popular works of Tolkien and C. S. Lewis is no secret. He has criticised both authors' religious views harshly and openly several times. But in a 2015 interview, he said something that is directly relevant to our discussion of the hero's journey in fantasy. When speaking about *The Lord of the Rings*, Pullman declared that "the books are wholly male-oriented" (WALDMAN, 2015, w/p). One could argue that such a statement could be explained away as the prejudice of a younger author against a giant of literary tradition, but Pullman is actually giving a practical example of the more generic diagnosis that, in many works of fantasy, "the hero tale, still the staple of contemporary fantasy, has been essentially a male preserve" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 03).

It is possible to take this diagnosis as far as *PL*, a work with a clear degree of fantasy and a typical portrayal of gender roles. The reversal of imagery in the representations of Adam and Will that we pointed out in the previous section is a crucial step in Pullman's reversal of the image of the fall, which, in its Miltonic rendition, is also sexist: Eve's weakness and frivolous curiosity were fertile ground for Satan's temptation and her charms, in their turn, tempted Adam. Both were punished with the loss of paradise but only Eve was sentenced to become submissive.

Pullman challenges "the hero tale" as it traditionally appears in fantasy not only by giving his trilogy a heroine, but also by giving his heroine a male partner to whom she is an equal. The heroic (and therefore epic) quest in *HDM* is neither undertaken by a male hero nor by an unrealistic all-powerful female protagonist, but by "a sort of

androgynous blend of the male and female" (HUNT; LENZ, 2003, p. 154). That is to say that his literary transgression has reached the very structures of his novels.

2.4 SATAN/MARY MALONE

In the end of Chapter 6 of *The Amber Spyglass*, the Magisterium, aware that Lyra will be tempted to sin, hires Father Gomez to kill her with clear instructions: "follow the tempter […]. This woman is travelling, guided by the powers of evil, to a place where she may, eventually, meet the child in time to tempt her" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 76).

By turning the page into Chapter 7, the reader finds the curious title of "Mary, Alone" and a first sentence that leaves no doubt as to the identity of the tempter: "Almost at the same time, the tempter whom Father Gomez was setting out to follow was being tempted herself" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 79). It is thus clear that Mary Malone is, at least to a certain degree, related to Milton's Satan. It is not by coincidence that she undertakes the journey towards Lyra on her own. In that, she recalls Satan's equally lonely journey towards the Garden of Eden.

Like Satan, Malone also used to be a faithful follower of God. "She had been brought up as a Catholic […], she had once been a nun" (PULLMAN, 2002a, p. 249), but like Satan, she had lost her faith in daring to exercise her free will. By the end of *HDM*, she eventually concludes her re-enactment of Satan's role of tempter in two separate but related steps. First, by telling Lyra how she fell in love for the first time as a young girl, she tempts her into womanhood. The marzipan story provides Lyra with an experience that will later prove essential to prepare her to fall in love herself. The doctor's second step is to provide Will and Lyra with the fruit Lyra will later raise to Will's lips: "Mary took some flat bread and cheese and some sweet, thirst-quenching red fruits, wrapped them in a cloth, and tied a cord around it for one of them to carry

over a shoulder" (PULLMAN, 2002a, p. 456). She thus plays the part of the Serpent, as the angels had told her she must do in Chapter 12 of *The Subtle Knife*.

3. THE FALL

By the end of the trilogy, Lyra and Will fall into Malone's temptation by eating red fruits just as Adam and Eve do in Book IX of *PL*. In both stories, the moment of the fall is not an isolated event, but the result of a process in which Lyra and Eve were tempted to transgress. In this section, we aim to argue that, although Lyra is modelled after Eve and their actions follow a similar pattern, the nature of each woman's fall differs considerably.

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra recalls a dream she had had the previous night in which Pantalaimon showed his final form. In the morning, she discovers herself naked, an image that recalls Adam and Eve's prelapsarian nakedness. Lyra then considers that "she happily used to swim naked in the river Cherwell with all the other Oxford children, but it would be quite different with Will, and she blushed even to think of it" (PULLMAN, 2002b, p. 434).

The symbolic images of being naked, self-aware and with a settled daemon represent Lyra's sexual awakening. She has been prepared for the moment of the fall as Eve had been when Satan influenced her dreams. However, differently from Eve, Lyra becomes aware of her nakedness before she eats the fruit. Not by coincidence does Lyra wear Malone's clothes: it is not only into curiosity that the doctor has been tempting her, but, as pointed out in the previous section, into womanhood and into the discovery of her own sexuality.

Already in the second book of the trilogy, Malone gradually starts tempting them (without exactly knowing) by explaining how she had fallen in love for the first time "in a garden […] at the end of a long table under a lemon tree" (PULLMAN, 2002a, p.

394). Through the marzipan story, which recalls the Biblical scenery, Malone explains to Lyra and Will how her own sexual awakening occurred and what it felt like.

At hearing this story, "Lyra felt something strange happen to her body. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a great house she hadn't known was there" (PULLMAN, 2002a, p. 444). Lyra finds the key to this great house in a similar way and for a reason similar to the one that drives Eve to ask the Serpent for directions to the tree in Book IX of *PL*. Both women are, at this point of their developments, ready to pluck the fruit and offer it to their partners. Mary's persuasion, differently from the Serpent's, has been subtle.

On the day after they eat the red fruit, Lyra and Will go out seeking for their dæmons, from whom they had been separated since they had gone into the World of the Dead. They knew that they were close, but they could not find them. So, Lyra and Will go to the forest and this is the moment when the fall is re-enacted:

> "I'm hungry," Will said. "Me too," said Lyra, though she was also feeling more than that, something subdued and pressing and half-happy and half-painful [...]. Then Lyra took one of those little red fruits. With a fast-beating heart, she turned to him and said, "Will..." And she lifted the fruit gently to his mouth. She could see from his eyes that he knew at once what she meant, and that he was too joyful to speak. Her fingers were still at his lips, and he felt them tremble, and he put his own hand up to hold hers there, and then neither of them could look; they were confused; they were brimming with happiness. [...] "Like Mary said," he whispered, "you know straight away when you like someone [...]" (PULLMAN, 2002a, p. 416-417).

Differently from *PL*, in which the one who first desires the fruit is Eve, in *HDM*, both William and Lyra are hungry. When she gives him the red fruits, this is the fulfilment of the prophecy that had been announced in the first book of the trilogy. Lyra did it without realizing it, as was required.

The fact that Will and Lyra eat the fruit together is instrumental in establishing that their fall (a rendition of the theological concept of *felix culpa*) is of an essentially

different nature from the one portrayed in *PL*. In Milton's story, Eve first eats the fruit by herself and her act of transgression is immediately followed by a natural disorder:

> Earth felt the wound, and nature from her seat
> Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe,
> That all was lost [...]
> (MILTON, 2005, p. 269).

After that, Eve needs to persuade Adam to eat as well, differently from Lyra who does not need to offer her companion any explanations. It is not harmonious and egalitarian companionship that makes Adam eat, but Eve's charming influence.

At this point, it becomes clear that the ethos of each story is different. While the eating of the fruit is an act of discovery in both stories, in *PL* it is an offence to nature and a source of hostility between the lovers. Adam's knowledge is better; Eve's power is in female charm: their relationship is unequal before they eat and God's punishment intensifies this inequality to painful degrees. Their discovery is of sin and death. Will and Lyra, on the other hand, eat together and learn together. Their discovery is of their inherent sexuality. Their re-enactment of the fall is the first step to attract Dust back into the universe and to preserve life in all worlds. When they eat, nature feels no wound. The same fall which is damnation in *PL* is redemption in *HDM*.

Finally, there is one more reason why Pullman's fall in reverse is crucial to our analysis. The moment of the fall in *HDM* is the culmination of the hero/heroine quest that developed throughout the trilogy. As such, it is the moment when Lyra and Will realise all their potential as epic characters. They are, as Lukács says of the epic hero, "not lonely, for [their] destiny connects [them] by indissoluble threads to the community whose fate is crystallised in [their] own" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 67). We can think of the scene as the imaginative centre of the trilogy, one in which fantasy and epic converge into the novel form.

4. TEMPTATION TO TRANSGRESS: FINAL REMARKS

In arguing for "the subversive function of fantastic literature", Jackson explains that it "emerges from *structuralist* rather than from merely *thematic* readings of texts" (1981, p. 102, author's italics). This speaks for the relevance of the convergence mentioned above. In *HDM*, Pullman explores the inherent affinities of fantasy and epic with the novel genre. His choice of literary genre, character portrayal and subject matter are all symptoms of his artistic transgressions. His trilogy proposes, as we argued in the opening of this text, a long and complex dialogue with literary tradition, one that reflects profoundly on the significance of Milton's poem and summons a number of elements from this tradition to re-valuate and update its possible meanings. Pullman translates Satan's, Adam's and Eve's epic disobediences into three novels of fantasy, a genre that many have "dismissed as being rather frivolous or foolish" (JACKSON, 1981, p. 05).

We here endorse the view that Pullman's choice of the fantasy novel to re-enact Milton's story is neither random nor naïve. On the contrary: the fantasy novel is arguably an appropriate genre to re-cast the epic tone of *PL* into modern form. Lukács' famous Hegelian proposition that "the novel is the epic in which [...] the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 56) helps shed light on the coherence of Pullman's choice of genre. Lukács understood that the essential difference between the epic and the novel was not to be found at the fundamental intentions of each genre's authors but in "the given historico-philosophical realities with which the authors were confronted" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 63). An epic story conceived at the close of the twentieth century would then naturally assume the form of a novel whereas its themes are fit material for fantasy.

The story told in *HDM*, with its depiction of numerous universes and of forces that act through them and bind all things together into a cohesive whole, besides its

fantastic tone, is illustrative of the novel genre's attempt to construct a totality of life. The more the readers advance into the story, the more they learn of the grander scheme in which Lyra's and Will's worlds exist. Not only the socio-politico-philosophical layers of the protagonists' worlds are represented in the narrative, but also their interaction and interdependence with other worlds. The trilogy attempts, as novels must according to Lukács, to mirror the totality of its protagonists' world and lives, even if all that it can successfully mirror is a "world gone out of joint" (LUKÁCS, 1983, p. 17).

Whereas the ability of the novel genre to accommodate a story with an epic intent is practically self-evident, the capacity of fantasy to contribute to such an undertaking may have received less critical attention. One might observe that Pullman's choice of fantasy originated in the mode's capacity to facilitate the treatment of complex ideas to young audiences. Whereas this can certainly be the case, such a proposition would limit the understanding of the role fantasy plays in the trilogy.

Not by coincidence, fantasy seems to adapt so naturally to the flexible form of the novel. As heir of the epic, the novel is fertile ground for the re-enactment of a story of such wide cultural significance as that told in *PL*. Fantasy, with its potential to subvert rules and conventions, is also fertile ground for the reversal of the well-established ethos of such a story. Under the light of modern and contemporary ideas, Pullman makes sense of *PL* to twentieth and twenty-first-century readers of all ages. In lukácsian terms, Pullman's trilogy heralds what the novel ultimately achieves as a genre. It posits "the fragile and incomplete nature of the world as ultimate reality: by recognising, consciously and consistently, everything that points outside and beyond the confines of the world" (LUKÁCS, 193, p. 71).

In the end, we argue the case that, regardless of the religious views that might or might not be fostered in *HDM*, the trilogy articulates a number of relevant ideas that

cluster around the image of the fall and that this articulation is given form by the convergence of literary influences (such as those of Blake and Milton) and forms (such as the epic, the novel and fantasy). Finally, Pullman's reversal of the Miltonic story does not need to be seen as a negation of Milton. In the opening of *PL*, the word that occupies the formulaic position of the epic theme is "disobedience". Ultimately, this is what Milton invokes the muse to sing. Rewriting his story in terms of structural and thematic disobediences is also a way of paying homage to the poet and his work. Milton, Blake and Pullman are of the devil's party after all.

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