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ביתן חן

ת.ז 037264173

מנחה: פרופ' וויליאם קולברנר

Bar-Ilan University

Literature and Linguistic Department of English

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Literature

Bitan Chen

037264173

Supervisor: Prof. William Kolbrener

Table of Contents

Aims and Descriptions.....	1
Critical Background.....	2
Chapters Outlines.....	8
Bibliography.....	10

Aims and Descriptions

Sights of woe, sorrow, no peace and rest, torture without end, death and loss are all descriptions of hell in *Paradise Lost* and likewise, for Milton, the experiences of the hell man must endure on earth. Milton, however, ventures to make the existence of these experiences compatible with God's perfect nature in his theodicy, justifying God's ways to man. In my reading, Milton successfully accomplishes his goal by offering a theodicy which not only answers the question of "evil whence?" (IV, 99), but also provides hope for his imagined readers. By extension, Milton argues that notwithstanding God's foreknowledge, man is free to choose, as he is not blindly subservient, nor does God want him to be. Man, therefore, exercises what Milton calls 'right reason', a God given faculty by which man may stand firm in the face of evil and those who choose to obey reason, receive the comfort of endured suffering on earth with the final promise of Christ's redemption .

My thesis proposal adapts the contours of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a template for judging Philip Pullman's contemporary epic fantasy, *His Dark Materials*. The relation between Milton's poem and Pullman's epic is a didactic one along with a thematic. What I mean is that both offer a theodicy of free will and redemption, each using a different pedagogical method. Milton, for whom "the end of learning is to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright" (*Of Education*), addresses the reader through a Socratic method of argumentation. Hence, a close examination of the various viewpoints argued in the poem, leads to a complete and unified reading. My reading will not only convey Milton's explanation of the existence of evil in the world in light of an omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent and omnibenevolent God, but will also reveal what, according to Milton, we should do to be worthy of redemption. Milton teaches us how to behave and act as we are all

tainted by evil, that is, how we should exercise virtue and practice morality as a redemptive process, a process that redeems us from sin. Pullman, who applies the pedagogical approach of storytelling yet along with soliloquies and internal debates, achieves the same end. In his attempt to rewrite the fall in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Pullman's characters and their discussions and internal debates exemplify Miltonic ideas of free will and redemption.

Although both Milton and Pullman endeavor to make sense of a world in which evil persists, the context in which each writes dictates a different approach. Pullman's secular context, which generates a story delivered to a non-religious audience, seems to make sense of a world without a God, one whose corporeal existence evaporates as Pullman details in his fantasy. Milton's God, of course, is clearly present. Yet, there nonetheless remains a consistency between the two works. My reading of *His Dark Materials* will show, in fact, the presence of a God in Pullman's world, though not in Milton's more conventionally theological way. That is, Pullman in his works adapts Miltonic theodicy and presents it in an intelligible and meaningful way to accommodate it to the contemporary reader

Critical Background

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?" asked the Greek Philosopher, Epicurus. "Then he is not omnipotent", he concluded and continued: "Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" The problem of evil dates back, as we can see, even before monotheistic religion and has been dealt with throughout the centuries. In the seventeenth century, John Milton, a religious poet had resolved to tackle the problem by finding a way to reconcile all principles of God's

omniscience, omnipotence and omni-benevolence with the persistence of evil in the world. While the Calvinist reading of scripture has accounted God responsible for man's actions in its doctrine of predestination of the "elected", assuring them the gift of grace and redemption, Milton gives a contrasting Arminian account of his different interpretation in his own Christian Doctrine. For Milton, the "elected" are those who choose to believe in God. The key word for Milton is 'choose' as he manifests his understanding of the concept of free will and redemption in his theodicy in *Paradise Lost*.

In order to ask questions about Milton's theodicy, this study is especially interested in the works of scholars that address the conflict of man's free will and God's nature in *Paradise Lost*. William Kolbrener distinguishes between inevitability and probability when speaking of God's foreknowledge not necessitating the Fall. Hence, according to Kolbrener, Milton shifts the cause of the fall from God to man and thereupon, maintains God's decree and man's freedom. Similarly, Thomas Corns argues, "divine foreknowledge has no effect on human freedom and that "from the concept of freedom, all idea of necessity must be removed" (334). Kolbrener and Corns continue their argument on the value of free will in the exercise of right reason, thus setting the grounds for William Walker, Raymond B. Waddington and Harold P. Maltz' discussions on its effect on man's moral development.

The creation of moral or virtuous individuals, a result of the exercise of 'right reason,' for Milton, constitutes an ideal and 'moral society' as William G. Armstrong calls it. Miltonists, including Dennis Danielson, Nancy Rochelle Bradley and John C. Ulrich, also discuss the rigorous exercise of right reason in its moral aspect. They lay emphasis on the fall as fortunate in relation to the prospect for future redemption – both in this world with man "happier far," or within a society deserving Christ's

salvation. The fall then becomes a stage in the evolution of man, in which man experiences evil and vice and responds with virtue towards redemption and grace . For these critics, Milton's vision of a grand plan makes suffering endurable and intelligible, beginning in Genesis and ending in redemption. On the ability to look at the grand picture of original sin and the redemptive process of man, I will turn to the works of Frank Kermode and his conception of man's necessary "sense of an ending" as a frame for the arguments and conceptions of Corns and John Rogers, who also discuss the concept of time in *Paradise Lost* in light of Milton's theodicy .

The question of how Milton presents his theodicy cannot be left unattended. Milton represents himself as the Minister of God, the prophet-poet, the divine *vates*, as John T. Shawcross argues (2). Shawcross goes on to suggest the means by which the strategy of Milton's epic strategy may be evaluated. For Shawcross, the Miltonist, three considerations are necessary: the specific aim or intention, the means of achieving that aim and the primary medium through which the intention is channeled. My close reading of *Paradise Lost* will illustrate how through the means of narrative argumentation, Milton achieves his didactic end, that is to justify God's ways to men and assert his providence, thus letting his readers know God aright by arguing for free will and right reason in the promotion of good moral choices. Parallel to this, I will also look at Miltonic theodicy through the lens of Stanley Fish's *Surprised by Sin*, which, like Shawcross, focuses on both the means and medium of theodicy. Fish argues for a pedagogical aim in *Paradise Lost*, inviting a reader's experience of the fall as he reaches "a better understanding of his sinful nature and is encouraged to participate in his own reformation" (Preface X). Fish, followed by Shawcross and Murray W. Bundy focus on the moral value of knowledge through experience, which is at the core of Milton's theodicy in *Paradise Lost* .

In simple terms, theodicy, in the Miltonic terms which I have outlined, means making sense of a world in which evil persists, giving the reader a meaningful place in God's grand plan. Yet, perhaps paradoxically, theodicy has been adopted for a contemporary culture, helping the secular reader make sense of a world in which the church has lost its relevance and God is presumably 'dead.' To explore the nature of this secular theodicy, I will look into the works of the philosopher Emilie Oskenberg Rorty and the theologians Karen Armstrong and Peter Berger who speak of the need to find alternative sources detached from Christianity in order to answer the questions raised by the presence of evil. They argue that when religion, which makes order out of chaos loses its relevance, man confronts chaos again and seeks to put chaos out of order. Since religion loses its effect on the individual's conception of himself in the world and on the social order, there needs to be another means to provide meaning and order to the world – in a way that is apprehensible to man. Interestingly, all three, in justifying the place for secular theodicy, speak of a divinity in man, which allows the exercise of reason in the process of choice making, in the process creating a meaningful experience in the world in which man comes to terms with himself and others. This philosophical enterprise, I will argue, is adopting the aims of Miltonic theodicy, but for a secular audience.

While philosophers articulate similar goals to those articulated in Milton theodicy, it is fantasy epic, a genre largely for children, which provides the means through which theodicy, is embodied in the modern world. As few scholars have remarked on the pedagogical aspect of fantasy, especially in relationship to educating children to becoming moral and responsible human beings in a world with evil, I turn to diverse disciplines as critical background for my study. The theologian Vigen Guroian writes of the epic fantasy embedding a moral message for children, just as

the traditional fairy tale did in the past. Guroian argues for stories to be "an irreplaceable medium for this kind of moral education" (20) in a secular world. The reader's engagement of identification with the hero who acts virtuously in the face of evil, adds the psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, is that which teaches morality. By extension, identifying with the virtuous hero or heroine, leading to virtuous imitative behavior, transforms the reader's moral sense. According to Robert Crossley, the reader enters the fantasy world, one similar to his own (despite the fantastic elements), and then returns to his reality transformed. For Lucy Marie Cuthew, reading a fantasy allows a child to struggle for meaning in a world with evil, precipitating a moral struggle within, leading to an internal world, parallel to Milton, 'happier far.' Thus fantasy, like conventional Miltonic theodicy, not only explains the existence of evil in the world, but teaches the individual how to behave in such a world in such a way that he may redeem himself.

Likewise, Pullman in *His Dark Materials*, offers his theodicy of free will and redemption, leaving children with a moral message that will allow them to create a 'republic on earth'. The basic element in *His Dark Materials* is the externalization of what he calls man's inner 'daemons,' or as Karen D. Robinson says, man's 'Satan within'. Robinson argues for the need to recognize man's dual nature as prerequisite to growth and virtue, echoing Milton's theodicy, stressing the need for education to temper desire by right reason and free choice. While Anne Marie Bard, argues for a dual nature to man, but views 'dust', 'matter' and 'daemon' as comprising soul, I will argue that Pullman puts forth a more traditional understanding of the word 'daemon', that is man's evil inclination within .

Following Cuthew and David Gooderham, I will argue that free will and redemption are the prominent themes in Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. Cuthew

focuses on choice and man's necessity to act on his own, while Gooderham shows how Pullman dismantles the Christian narrative and replaces it with emancipation. Both scholars value free will in *His Dark Materials*, as beneficial to the individual and his society, that is, through man's free will and right reason, he 'emancipates' himself. As Alan Jalkowitz rightly puts it, he 'redeems himself', resulting in a society whose individuals do good. In the service of this argument, I will trace the moral progress of Lyra and Will, the main characters in *His Dark Materials*, who struggle in the face of evil as part of a grand plan in the novel that ends with redemption. It is, in fact, a redemptive process, echoing that achieved by Adam and Eve in Milton's epic, through which man practices virtue towards a greater good .

Of course, maintaining the category of 'theodicy' in relation to Pullman's *His Dark Materials* may seem difficult – especially in so far that Pullman 'kills off God'. Pullman's advocates, who refuse as I do, to view his work as heresy, have been suggesting different interpretations of the God he displays. Following Jonathan Padley and Kenneth Padley, I argue that Pullman avoids heresy, and that the God who in fact, dies in his works is Satan, not the all good and powerful God we know. For Pullman, I argue further, death allows for man's redemption, liberating him from sin. Further, in *His Dark Materials*, liberty from sin is a result of choosing right. Other critics such as Edward Higgins and Tom Johnson, as well as Donna Freitas and Jason King, argue against the idea that the death in *His Dark Materials* is of a real God. For them, the Church Pullman represents is not the real Christian church; indeed the real Christian God cannot be depicted corporeally. All of these interpretations assert, in one way another, a non-visible divine, suggesting, as I argue, a God within man, a divine spirit manifested by reason. I will assert that Pullman's epic fantasy does not omit religion, but rather creates a new one relevant to an age of skepticism. The

divine persists for Pullman, but a God, which is not an external force: for him the pedagogical aim is not the turn towards heaven, but rather to the divine within, and to a form of right reason beneficial for one's self and others .

Chapters Outline

Introduction:

In order to set the grounds for my argument upon a relationship between Milton's theodicy in *Paradise lost* and the contemporary epic fantasy, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, I elaborate how Pullman employs the genre of fantasy literature, secularizing theodicy, for the purpose of his own distinctive pedagogy (and theology). I discuss the function of fantasy literature in a secular world addressed to children less familiar with Christianity, aiming at the education of a theodicy, thus making sense of a world with evil .

Chapter 1: From Milton and On

In this chapter, I will offer a reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a theodicy- emphasizing both free will and redemption. Through close textual readings of specific passages in *Paradise Lost*, I will show how Milton negotiates the seemingly contradictory perspectives of God' foreknowledge (and predestination) and the assertion of free will. I will illustrate his didactic argumentative means by which he offers his theodicy. I will also describe the structure of time in *Paradise Lost*- to help explain the epic's promise of redemption as an indivisible part of his theodicy. I will then show how Milton's free will theodicy and redemption has been understood in contemporary culture. Preparing the ground for the chapter that follows on Pullman, I will introduce the idea of a 'secular theodicy' catered to the education of children with a Miltonic purpose "to gain God aright." With this background, I show how

contemporary fantasy literature offers its own version of theodicy, eliciting the direct connection between Milton's Christian epic and Pullman's fantasy – united in their pedagogical purpose.

Chapter 2: Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials

By first turning to the critical reception of the novel and the assertion of the so-called 'death of God', I will argue against the critical orthodoxy, and that in fact Pullman asserts his own free will theodicy. I will show how Pullman's conception of free will leads, like in *Paradise Lost* to redemption, just as it does for Milton. In order to do this I will scrutinize Pullman's emphasis on the matter of free will in his narrative, showing his goal in teaching and guiding towards right choice. In the attempt to show the internal struggle of choice between good and evil, that is right reason and Original sin, I will examine the nature of 'dust' and the function of daemons in the novel. I will also focus on Pullman's depiction of his characters' Fall together with its consequences in order to explain his later idea in the novel of redemption which is both similar to and different from Milton's. As I will illustrate, Pullman's idea of redemption is compatible with the pedagogical purpose of contemporary fantasy literature in its teaching of morality and the way he offers it is through the means of storytelling and arguments will take me back to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and his argumentative method. Hence, I will show how Milton and Pullman offer a free will theodicy with the promise of future redemption, each in its own different context and own didactic way.

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