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**The Fantastic Identity:
De/constructing the Feminine Hero
in Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass***

Science fiction and fantasy constitute literary genres which introduce the readers to a novum or some sort of defamiliarization. Contemporary science fiction is often considered in connection to postmodern and feminist criticism, where there is a focus on deconstruction, especially on that of binary oppositions. The fantastic genre has developed from the tradition of myth and legend; thus in a sense avoided the scrutiny of deconstructionists. One can draw from this a notion that science fiction introduces us to more modern ideas, whereas fantasy fiction often reinforces binary oppositions and stereotypes. Philip Pullman's novel *The Golden Compass* makes up the first book of the trilogy *His Dark Materials*, constituting what can be called a hybrid between science fiction and fantasy. The universe we are introduced to resembles our own, though containing a somewhat archaic quality. However, the world we are thrown into, echoing both the worlds of Harry Potter and Narnia, have certain features which distinguish it clearly from our own. Philip Pullman elegantly twists certain reader expectations; Genesis and Christianity are modified to fit Pullman's plot; gender and gender roles are played with in different ways, and the notion of what a human being is, is questioned and literally deconstructed.

A trait which distinguishes fantasy from science fiction, is the idea of the hero's role. Science fiction tends to rely less on a chosen individual to save the world, whereas in fantasy, the plot often evolves around the hero and how the hero comes into being. From myths and legends, we know great heroes such as Aeneas and Odysseus; derived from heroes such as these, the norm of the fantastic hero has been established. Women have not been absent from these texts, but their role has been that of "the object of a

quest or adventure, not the subject” (Curti, 1998, 35). In contemporary fantasy fiction, however, we find an increasing number of texts where females are at least not rendered *only* as a prize for the male hero, but unfortunately, even today, the number of fantasy novels where a female fills the space of the fantasy hero are few. Lyra, the heroine of *The Golden Compass*, has been praised as “the first believable little girl since Alice” (Hunt, Lenz, 2003, 152). Both rejecting and fulfilling the expectations towards her; this in terms of both being a constructed hero, as well as a character, is at the centre of the action and makes the foundation of her contradictory nature. In this essay I will explore how constructing identity works together with making an own identity, and how this relates to Lyra as a female hero. Further, I will see how Lyra fits into the paradigm of the fantastic hero, and how this is in some ways deconstructed.

What's in a name?

As stated in my introduction, fantastic fiction derives from a tradition of myth and legend; due to this it has developed certain traits that remain strong within the genre. One of these is the notion that naming is significant. As we know from fairy-tales, a name often gives an indication of a character's traits and qualities. In Robin Hobb's *The Farseer Trilogy* we find literal examples of this in characters like Lady Patience, King Shrewd, Prince Verity and the like. Other fantasy writers are more subtle, but names of central characters often have connotations or meanings that can be important to the plot. A notion of naming also relates to the idea of construction. When the author gives his hero a name which already has a certain weight, he manipulates the reader into getting specific expectations towards the character, or to reading the text in a decided manner. Thus the naming of fantastic heroes contributes both to enrich the reading experience, as well as limiting its interpretations. Deconstructionist critic, J. Hillis Miller puts it in the following way: “...the effect of etymological retracing is not to ground the word solidly but to render it unstable, equivocal, wavering, groundless. All etymology is false etymology, in the sense that some bend or discontinuity always

breaks up the etymological line” (Miller, 1996, 288). In Lyra's name we find several interpretative suggestions. The number of names connected to her, contributes to making the text richer, but as Miller states, there will always be uncertainty connected to interpretation.

Some of the meanings Lyra's name evokes are intertextual. Lyra is the name of a star constellation (Hunt, Lenz, 152), which in itself suggests several significations. Stars are often connected to fate and destiny, and the plot of the story evolves around the mystery of other worlds in the sky. At the end of the novel, Lyra decides to follow her father into these other worlds. Looking at the etymology of the star constellation, we find the myth of the lyre of Orpheus. Orpheus' lyre had the ability to enthrall those who heard it, and as we shall see later, Lyra too has this ability through her story-telling. It is clear that Pullman has been very conscious about this link in names, as the parallels do not end with that. In the third book of the trilogy, Lyra enters the underworld to liberate the dead through her story-telling. Similarly, Orpheus goes on a quest to free his love Eurydice from Hades. Other connotations when considering a lyre, is that it is an *instrument*. Often in fantasy, the hero is considered to be at the mercy of fate, thus he is in some ways played upon against his will. Further, we often find a reluctance in the hero; he does not want to be heroic, but wants to lead a peaceful life at home. However, forces outside of his control prevent this, thus compelling the hero to act. In Lyra we do not find a strong unwillingness to play the hero, but she is also the victim of forces she has no control over. The notion of instrument also reflects Lyra's ability to tell stories and play parts, which I will talk about in more detail later.

Another obvious intertextual name-reference Pullman makes use of is William Blake's “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found” from *Songs of Experience* (Squires, 2003, 20). The little girl lost and found is named Lyca, and the narrator opens the first poem with stating that what is to come is something which he prophesies; he then tells the story of little Lyca who has been separated from her parents and is alone in the wild. She is found and taken care of by the king of lions and other predatory animals.

The other poem follows the parents as they search for her, until they too meet the lion king, who is described as “a spirit armed in gold” (Blake, 1991), which resembles the 'panserbjørne' in the novel. As the reader knows, Lyra is in fact separated from her parents, believing they are dead, but the truth is revealed to her by John Faa. Blake's poem “A Little Girl Lost” from the same collection, also seems to have thematic connections with the plot of the story, and Lyra's inevitable destiny. “Introduction”, the first poem of the collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* connects further the notion of destiny and storytelling:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, & Future sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word

The romantic poets considered themselves as having the ability to see what was yet unseen. The role of the bard was to sing or recite the praise of heroes, often accompanied by a lyre or another string instrument. Seeing Pullman as the bard of this story, Lyra is indeed the lyre upon which he plays, and also the hero whose song he sings. Thus the constructedness of the novel is yet again reinforced.

Lyra carries her father's surname, which is Belacqua. Strangely incongruous with her character, it is only part of her identity until Iorek Byrnison renames her. The notion of “beautiful water” does not suggest anything in line with Lyra's character, other than holding the link between herself and her father. Iorek Byrnison's recognition of the contradiction between Lyra's last name and her nature, incites him to rename her 'Lyra Silvertongue' (305). This move later proves symbolic, predicting Lyra's later rejection of her father in favour of Iorek: “You en't human, Lord Asriel. You en't my *father*. I love an armoured bear more'n I love my father. And I bet Iorek loves me more'n you do” (323). The symbolism of renaming her thus becomes a process of connecting Lyra's identity to Iorek, rather than her father. Names manifest where a person belongs, and her new surname makes her

independent of her father. Furthermore, her name is also an acknowledgment of Lyra's identity, as her stories and lies have proved to have the ability to deceive even a bear, who according to Iorek can “see tricks and deceit as plain as arms and legs” (199).

The audible play on the word 'liar' is pointed out in the second book of *His Dark Materials*, but several times in *The Golden Compass* we get references to Lyra lying and telling stories to her own advantage (Squires, 57). Early in the text people talk of her as the betrayer (Pullman, 29); later she is described by Ma Costa as having “witch-oil in her soul”, and being “deceptive” (100). This gives the reader certain expectations towards the plot and to Lyra's character. The hero in fantasy tends to be close to flawless, making Lyra look like an anti-hero of sorts. However, we also get to know that this deception and betrayal is a good thing, perhaps suggesting the importance of story-telling abilities, as well as creating a red line throughout the narrative leading up to Lyra's destiny. I will discuss this in more detail later. Lyra's lying is not presented as a negative trait, in fact, her skillful lying not only helps her out of compromising situations, it also prevents her from worrying too much about how things will be solved. The narrator explains this by pointing out how “being a practiced liar doesn't mean you have a powerful imagination. Many good liars have no imagination at all; it's that which gives their lies such wide-eyed conviction” (217). The suggestion is not that Lyra has no imagination; it seems that what the narrator is trying to say is that Lyra's lies are not formed by some previously planned design, but rather that it comes spontaneously to her when she needs it, which contributes to making her more believable. Through this skill, Lyra can move in and out of character easily, without premeditation.

In certain passages in the story, Lyra takes on another name when telling a lie. Taking on another name when acting the part of someone else shows how closely names are linked to a notion of identity. After escaping in the middle of the night from Mrs Coulter, Lyra is contacted by a gentleman who buys her a coffee and a sandwich. Instead of telling him her real name, Lyra introduces herself as Alice, perhaps echoing Lewis Carroll's

classic female protagonist. She further tells him a wild story of how she is going to meet her father who is in fact a murderer, to provide him with fresh clothes in exchange from his blood-stained ones. When the man suggests Lyra is joking, she solemnly assures him that she “en’t”. Later, when taken captive at Bolvanger by the Gobblers, she tells them her name is Lizzie Brooks, which in turn is a name that does not stand out much. Acting the part of Lizzie, Lyra “decided to play slow and dim-witted and reluctant” as well as “shy and nervous and insignificant” (208-209), something she would not be able to do owing up to her real name. Here we can see how carefully Lyra constructs her characters, and how aware she is about the importance of characterization when deceiving, or telling a story. Connecting this to deconstructionist criticism, this relates to how everything is supposedly devoid of meaning; there can be no unified truth, only a number of truths or meanings which for instance the reader constitutes in the reading process. Similarly, Lyra reads the “character” Lizzie Brooks or Alice, and play out their truth.

That which makes Lyra complete, is her dæmon Pantalaimon. I will look more closely at the significance of dæmons later, but his name also bears some interesting meanings. Lyra often uses the nickname 'Pan', which is also the name of a Greek nature god, whose body was that of half man and half goat. In the world of the novel, dæmons have the ability of shape-shifting as long as their 'human' counterpart is still a child. In myth, Pan is also known for his pan flutes, and again we find a reference to an instrument, just like with Lyra. The word 'pan' means 'all', which relates to wholeness and unity, suggesting that he constitutes Lyra as a whole. Further, his whole name closely resembles the Greek version of Saint Pantaleon: Panteleimon, which means 'all-compassionate', who was known as a healer and a martyr (www.wikipedia.com: saint pantaleon). The name might suggest something about his qualities when later in the trilogy Lyra and Pantalaimon's bond is being tested.

Since I am looking at Lyra's identity and characterization in the light of her being a female hero in a canon dominated by male heroes, I would like to mention how naming relates to feminist

thought. As I have been getting at earlier, naming relates to an idea of constructing identity. Through the act of naming, the naming subject asserts power over the object being named. Feminist criticism emphasizes the manner in which women have been oppressed through male literary discourse. According to Robin Roberts, “feminist science fiction emphasize “the power of speech and naming” ” (Roberts, 1993, 138), and works such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *She Unnames Them* has a central role in promoting the feminist project. We can thus see a notion of renaming in relation to this. In *The Golden Compass*, Lyra does not name herself, but she rejects her father's name, and I would like to argue that she develops from a point where she allows the name of her uncle/father to define her, to a point where she makes her own name. At the beginning of the novel, she is so proud to be able to identify with her mysterious and heroic uncle/ father, but as the novel progresses, she leaves this behind, and becomes considerably independent of this. When Iorek finally gives her the name Silvertongue, he is only stating what she herself has already established.

Through the Scope of the Fantastic Hero

This essay has already looked at how names are important in the construction of the hero in fantasy fiction. I will now look at some other traits that often constitute the fantasy hero. As mentioned in my introduction, the fantastic hero derives from the epic hero of myth and legend. Maria Nikolajeva talks about the influences myth has had on children's literature. In her analysis, she states that the mythical hero, who is male, moves from separation – initiation – return, or home – away – homecoming (Nikolajeva, 2002, 28). Elaborating on these points, she uses a “rite of passage” as a starting point, which leads to the hero's removal from his home. Following this, the hero receives a special task he must do, but in order to fulfill this, the hero must cross a threshold of some kind. The hero faces several trials, and alongside his outer quest, there is also an inner quest for identity. Then we find the subjugation and conquering of a female character, which allows the male to assert his power, before the hero is returned to the

point of departure. At this point, if the hero is still a child, there is a “promise of further adventure”, where he can “cross the boundaries between the ordinary and the magical world” (30). The perimeters shown here can all be linked to Lyra's identity as a hero, with the exception of the subjugation of woman. However, Hunt and Lenz proposes a more detailed model which covers most of the points discussed by Nikolajeva, and I will discuss their points in more detail later. Regardless, it is still interesting to note the influences the romantic hero has had on children's literature. Nikolajeva discusses the high-born hero, who according to her is the same we find in most fantasy and fairy tales (30). The romantic hero can “travel through space and time, by possessing magical objects or by being assisted by magical helpers” (*ibid*). This is visible in Lyra's alethiometer, which I will discuss in more depth in relation to Hunt and Lenz' paradigm. Nikolajeva continues talking about how the romantic hero lacks complexity, and is rarely individualized, inhibiting a set of standard traits. Though the latter might be true for Lyra, she is indisputably a character of great complexity and depth. The argument that the child hero's innocence equips him or her to fight evil, however, suits perfectly with Lyra. As we saw with the mythical hero, we also find a return to an ordered society here. Further, the “magical object is irretrievably lost or loses its magical power” (31), which is realized in *The Amber Spyglass* when Lyra is no longer able to read the alethiometer. Nikolajeva finally states that in contemporary fiction, the influences from the mythical and the romantic hero have been deconstructed, playing with the role of the hero in different ways (32).

A trait often found in fantasy fiction is the hero as an orphan, or having a background that is concealed, even from the hero himself. In myths, we often find a high born hero, and in the stories where there is an orphan motif, the hero often turns out to be of high birth. In contemporary fantasy, it is still common to reveal the hero of a simple background to be of high birth after all, offering some kind of redemption for what the hero has had to suffer as a child. Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz states that the orphan is a tradition found in children's literature and folklore, and

that employing this device appeals to readers due to the paradox between loneliness and the character's possibility to reinvent him or herself (152). The reinvention of a character reflects a notion of change and agency. Change relates to the hero's aforementioned reluctance to be a hero. The change represents the process the hero goes through from being "normal", to embracing his destiny that ultimately sets him apart. Often, the orphaned background equips the hero mentally for the dangers and obstacles lying in his path. Lyra believes herself to be an orphan for the first eleven years of her life. When she learns the truth about her parentage, she "had to adjust to her new sense of her own story, and that couldn't be done in a day" (Pullman, 115). But slowly, Lyra constructs the story about her birth through the details she learns from Ma Costa, which she weaves into "a mental tapestry even clearer and sharper than the stories she made up" (117), relating story, identity and truth to each other. Through hearing the story of her birth, Lyra reconstructs her own notion of identity, and adds the parts that have been obstructed from her memory into her notion of self: "by the end of the fourth repetition of the story Lyra was perfectly convinced she did remember it" (*ibid*). The realization that she has parents does not change much for Lyra, however. Her distaste for Mrs Coulter, who turned out to be her mother, does not diminish, and Lyra's project to help and/or rescue Lord Asriel remains the same. When she finally reaches him, Lyra is not biased in favour of him for being her father, and upon being all but rejected, Lyra disowns him.

Another motif from folklore often found in the 'orphan story', is the 'helper' or 'animal guide' (Hunt, Lenz, 152). This is where Lyra's *dæmon* comes in. A similar motif is also found in the aforementioned *Farseer Trilogy* by Robin Hobb, where the protagonist grows up as an orphan, but is revealed to be the son of the now dead heir to the throne. Being a bastard child, Fitz is not allowed to be raised as a prince, but is rather shaped as a tool to serve the kingdom. From his unknown mother's side, Fitz has inherited a magic called the Wit, which gives him the ability to connect and mind-speak with animals. Fitz finds his 'soul-mate' in the wolf Nighteyes, who he lives in an almost shared existence

with. But where Fitz and Nighteyes can be separated from each other, and survive the death of the other, the dæmon and the person in Pullman's world lives in a much more symbiotic relationship, where the life of one depends upon the life of the other.

The word 'dæmon' must not be confused with 'demon', but refers in Greek mythology to supernatural beings who negotiate between humans and gods, or a guardian angel of sorts who gives advice and warns against dangers; others have through the years referred to the dæmon as something which is part of human nature, and represents its soul ([www.wikipedia.com: dæmon](http://www.wikipedia.com:dæmon)). Pullman seems to have derived his concept from these, and linked it especially close to the latter part. There is indeed a close link between the person and the dæmon. However, even if the dæmon is presented as a person's soul, it is clear that the person and its dæmon, though often similar, are not identical. We learn that the dæmons of servants always are dogs, and that dæmons of dull people necessarily are dull also, but disregarding those stereotypes, the dæmon and its person are different. Early in the story, Lyra says "you're a coward, Pan", to which he responds, "certainly I am. May I ask what you intend to do?/ What did you have in mind?" (Pullman, 8). This shows that they do not think the same thoughts nor have the same qualities. Later, we learn that Lyra and Pan can share thoughts too, but it seems that this must be done with intent, rather than that they can read each other's mind. An inconsistency that stands out is that if Lyra and Pan have the ability to share thoughts, they would not speak aloud at all. As early as the beginning of the story, we learn that Pantalaimon whispers when they are sneaking about. One then has to wonder if Pullman was a little unsure himself of where to draw the boundary when he constructed the concept.

Despite these inconsistencies, if we may call them that, the dæmon is referred to as the person's soul: "For a second or so more, he was still her own dear soul" (243), and it is also made clear that dæmons are "what makes us different from animals" (277). Thus they can be seen as an extension of the person. It is difficult to pin-point exactly how the dæmons are meant to be

regarded. Since the dæmon has its own ideas and qualities, it seems contradictory to see it as a person's soul. This suggests a distinction between the person and its soul. For it to be a helper, it ought to be a being outside the self, and the dæmon is indeed presented as such in some instances, whereas in others it is seen as a part of the whole. This ambiguity is present throughout the text, but certain rules always accompany the dæmons. Firstly, there are a number of taboos regulating people's interaction with dæmons, such as that a person must not touch a dæmon not his/her own. Further, the dæmon and its person develop closely together, so that when the person reaches maturity, the dæmon must take a "settled" form. This form reflects what kind of person the 'human' is. Naturally, using the term 'human' also takes on an ambiguous quality, since the combination of the person and the dæmon is what makes up the human, and not just the person itself. Thus we can see how the dæmon contributes to establishing a person's identity. If the person and his/her dæmon are severed from one another, they can never be one again

Heroes in fantasy fiction are often adolescents, and Hunt and Lenz place Lyra into that perimeter, stating that she is "seeking identity and purpose" (153). Thus we can see that fantasy fiction shares some traits with the *bildungsroman*. Finding an own identity relates to becoming an adult, and spurs a character into action. On Lyra's part, we can see how there is a doubleness in relation to her search for identity and purpose; Lyra's desire to become a hero makes her unknowingly fulfill her destiny and become one. This is perhaps most clearly seen in the several repetitions of her resolve to save this or that person:

"I want to come north," Lyra said so they could all hear it. "I want to come and help rescue the kids. That's what I set out to do when I run away from Mrs. Coulter. And before that, even, I meant to rescue my friend Roger the kitchen boy from Jordan who was took. I want to come and help./ You'd be sorry if you got up there and then found you needed me and found you'd left me behind. And like that woman said, you

might need women to play a part – well, you might need kids too.” (Pullman, 123)

This example reveals Lyra's agency as well as her determination to be allowed to play a part. Again we find the desire to act, which perhaps suggests that Lyra wants to write a part for herself, -if no one else will. The whole paradox of her fulfilling her destiny without knowing about it, is stated several times in the book: “she must fulfill this destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved” (154). I will discuss the role of destiny in more detail later in this essay.

Hunt and Lenz list certain characteristics often found in relation to the traditional masculine fantasy hero:

...a humble birth; orphan status; being the subject of a mysterious prophecy; exceptionality – a special gift; being apprenticed to a teacher or mentor with magical powers (who may bestow upon the neophyte a new name); being endowed with a weapon of supernatural prowess; committing an act of disobedience or hubris which brings on disaster, for which the hero must seek cure or remedy; suffering a dramatic temptation, which he may either resist or succumb to, but which he ultimately overcomes; waging a battle against a dragon, or some similar supernatural opponent; winning a victory over the evil adversary; and finally returning to his community with a boon or gift, ultimately restoring the society to wholeness. (153).

Some of the features mentioned in the passage above have already been discussed. Since this essay only focuses on the first book of the trilogy, all the characteristics cannot be fulfilled, thus the latter points will not be discussed in any detail. However, some points are more central than others. The notion of prophecy has already come up in this essay several times, and is very strongly linked to the fantastic hero. Prophecies often demand sacrifices from the hero, thus we often find stories where he attempts to work against his destiny. Lyra, however, is not informed of what she is meant to

do, but the little she knows about her fate does not make her reluctant. The idea of prophecy is one of the most important traits in fantasy fiction, and *The Golden Compass* is no exception of this. From different sources, we get to know that a special child (i.e. Lyra) has been expected. John Faa tells Lyra that “Farder Coram here, he's a wise man. He's a seer./ ...he's been a follering you./ ...we knew about you from a child. From a baby”” (Pullman, 106-107). Further, the witch's consul informs Farder Coram that the witches “have spoken of a child such as this, who has a great destiny that can only be fulfilled elsewhere – not in this world, but far beyond” (154). Lyra, on the other hand, believes her destiny is to bring her father the alethiometer and possibly rescue him. This might signify that she sees herself in terms of being female: as only a contributor to the greater schemes of things.

The alethiometer brings us to Hunt and Lenz' next point, relating to having a special gift. The alethiometer is a rare and uncommon device resembling a compass that enables its reader to discern the truth through posing questions. When Lyra first receives it, she does not even know what its function is, but later, without much guidance, she develops the skill to read the different symbols on it. This point further connects us to the next point on the list; the mentor. If a hero has a certain gift, it is often perfected by the aid of a mentor. Farder Coram enlightens Lyra on the uses of the alethiometer, which ultimately enables her to read it, even if Farder Coram cannot: “You got to know all the meanings, first, and there must be a thousand or more. Then you got to be able to hold 'em in your mind without fretting or pushing for an answer...” (112). When Lyra finally masters the skill of reading the alethiometer, she, like a lot of other fantastic heroes, realizes the burden of her knowledge and that with great power comes great responsibility: “she was not pleased nor proud to be able to read the alethiometer –she was afraid” (130). That which Lyra until now has seen as a game has become something serious, and she is entering the process of becoming more mature and being more responsible.

J. Hillis Miller's deconstructionist theory about line in narrative can be related to the image of the alethiometer. Farder

Coram stated that to read the alethiometer, you needed to be able to hold all the signifiers of the signs in your head. Miller argues that when reading literature, this is close to impossible for the reader; there is an “inability of the mind to reach the center of narrative's maze” (292). “No one thread can be followed to a central point where it provides a means of overseeing, controlling, and understanding the whole” (*ibid.*). This reading suggests that even if the alethiometer holds all the truths, Lyra will never be able to understand or see them all. As we shall see later, the true purpose of her mission to Svalbard and her father is obstructed from her view.

Another important point is Lyra's act of disobedience, which occurs when she is taken captive by the 'panserbjørne' and is in desperate need of a way out. Making up a story to Iofur Raknison, she manages to trick him into challenging Iorek Byrnison to a fight over Lyra as his *dæmon* and securing the kingdom of Svalbard once and for all. Upon seeing the power of Iofur's armour compared to Iorek's, which “was nothing like it”, only protecting “his back and sides”, Lyra suddenly “realized that she had betrayed Iorek” (304). However, as it turns out, Iorek does not consider Lyra's actions as a betrayal, and her deception of Iofur leads to redemption for Iorek. Thus the potential disaster is avoided, and there is no need for Lyra to remedy her actions.

Eventually, though, Lyra fulfills her destiny of betrayer on a micro-level if we consider the rest of the trilogy. After having rescued her friend Roger, and thus fulfilled part of the destiny she has set for herself, she finally arrives at the house where her father resides at Svalbard. Her intention is to bring him the alethiometer, and perhaps also rescue him, completing the heroic plans she has made for herself. However, her father's greeting is anything but kind, until he discovers that her friend Roger is accompanying her. “She had struggled all this way to bring something to Lord Asriel, thinking she knew what he wanted; and it wasn't the alethiometer at all. What he wanted was a child” (334). All along, what she was meant to bring to her father was Roger. This fatal twist ultimately reveals Lord Asriel as no better than the 'Gobblers', as his determination to create a bridge between the worlds causes him to

cut the link between Roger and his dæmon, in order to exploit the great energy which is then released. As Roger is dead, and her parents have gone their separate ways, Lyra's heroic aspirations represent an embrace of the future and her destiny. Realizing that "dust" must not be destroyed, Lyra wants to beat her father to it:

The enormousness of the task silenced them. Lyra looked up at the blazing sky. She was aware of how small they were, she and her dæmon, in comparison with the majesty and vastness of the universe; and of how little they knew, in comparison with the profound mysteries above them./

Behind them lay pain and death and fear; ahead of them lay doubt, and danger, and fathomless mysteries. But they weren't alone.

So Lyra and her dæmon turned away from the world they were born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky (351).

The realization of her own shortcomings enforces the prediction that Lyra's ignorance is a contributing factor in fulfilling her destiny. The final lines show Lyra ready to see through the actions she has set into motion, revealing an agency necessary for a proper hero.

The remaining points made by Hunt and Lenz I cannot go much into, since I am not looking at the final two volumes of the trilogy. However, as stated by them, it is necessary for Lyra to fall into temptation in order to fulfill her destiny, and thus bring restoration to the world. Further, they also look at the aspect of female heroes in fantasy fiction, a paradigm that is much less elaborated upon in literary criticism, revealing that their roles have indeed been limited and the objects of study far between. The "female pattern of initiation" consists of 'enclosure', 'metamorphoses' and 'emergence' (154), and they argue how Lyra's life at Oxford represents the 'enclosure', where she is both enclosed spatially and in terms of being marginalized as a female. In my opinion, Lyra is also enclosed in terms of being ignorant. At this point she is still kept outside of the schemes which she will be

drawn into. The parallel to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, predicts the move from ignorance to knowledge which makes up an important part of the structure and the plot of *His Dark Materials*. The metamorphoses, then, refers to the process of acquiring knowledge and coming into her own, and this is finally realized in the emergence, when the butterfly escapes its pupa, in the trilogy, when innocence is finally converted into experience.

A Female Perspective

As I have stated previously in this essay, there are only a limited number of fantasy texts where a female hero fills the space of a male hero. One can argue that the fact that her dæmon is male, balances the gender issue, but despite Pantalaimon's part in Lyra's character, it is Lyra alone who bears the story and makes it so intriguing. I would like to suggest then, that this novel indeed manages to place a female in the place of a male. However, in the second novel of the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife*, Pullman introduces a male counterpart to Lyra, depriving her of having the stage all to herself, so to speak.

A trait found in both feminist and postmodern literature is the blurring of boundaries, which according to Robin Roberts "can be used for political ends" (139). Gretchen T. Legler expands upon this idea of boundaries blurred when talking about ecofeminism, showing that it is between "inner and outer landscapes, or the erasing or blurring of self-other (human/nonhuman, I/Thou) distinctions" (Legler, 1997, 230). Thus we can see Lyra and her dæmon as a blurred boundary where the distinction between self and other is indeed difficult to pin-point. As we saw earlier in this essay, it is difficult to say exactly where the line is drawn between Lyra and Pan. This also contributes to the blurring of gender. The relationship between a person and his or her dæmon is usually that of opposite sexes. In this sense, all people consist of a male and female identity, which could possibly contribute to a balance between the sexes. As we shall see, this ideal is not lived up to. Further, we also find blurred boundaries in terms of Lyra's world and the other worlds above the northern lights. Finally, the novel

itself also represents blurred boundaries in reference to genre, being a hybrid between fantasy and science fiction. This also relates to deconstructionist criticism. Jacques Derrida problematizes the idea of genre and suggests that “a text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (Derrida, 1992, 230).

Damien Broderick talks about how the role of science fiction often is to explore and question gender constructions in society (Broderick, 1995, 55). If we look at the society Lyra is brought up in, it strikes us as a very sexist and male chauvinist one, despite the gender balance represented in the person/dæmon relationship. As early as on the second page of the story, the reader is made aware of the strict boundaries between males and females in this society: “She had lived most of her life in the College, but had never seen the Retiring Room before: only Scholars and their guests were allowed in there, and *never females*. Even the maidservants didn't clean in here. That was the Butler's job alone” (Pullman, 4, emphasis added). Quoting feminist critic Sarah Lefanu, Broderick adds that science fiction “offers a means of exploring the myriad ways' in which this social construction of feminine identity is accomplished” (55-56). Talking about female Scholars, Lyra regards these with “a proper Jordan disdain” who “could never be taken more seriously than animals dressed up and acting a play” (Pullman, 59). Thus we can see that the society in which Lyra lives educates women in being inferior to men. What is important about Lyra's character, is that she rejects the identity society attributes to her. She will neither be a boring scholar, nor a coquette like Mrs Coulter and her friends. Lyra's strength and agency thus becomes even more substantial, considering the male-dominated world in which she lives.

Another important factor relating directly to the discussion above, is deconstructing the paradigms of the masculine hero. Lyra may need a 'panserbjørne' to come to her aid every now and then, but male heroes have helpers as well. I have already argued that Lyra fills the space a male hero could have occupied in this

story. This text may not be a feminist text as such, but Pullman employs certain traits which can be linked to both feminism and postmodernism. Choosing a female heroine might not be on idealistic grounds; first and foremost, Pullman has constructed the character which will be the most credible hero for the story he is telling.

Conclusion

To sum up, we have seen how Pullman very carefully has constructed Lyra as the perfect female hero. She fits most of the paradigms designated the traditional male hero, and also rejects the notion that females should be confined to certain roles. Agency is a key element in Lyra's character, and as we have seen, this is also an important feature found in heroes in general. Further, this willingness to act makes Lyra capable of going against the odds and expectations. Thus she becomes a hero as well as a female agent of change, both for the genre itself, and the world in which she lives. Demonstrating that the presence of a female hero actually works, must have been part of Pullman's ambition for the trilogy, and even when she gets a male counterpart in *The Subtle Knife*, there is no doubt that Lyra has the leading part, and not only that of the leading lady. Lyra's agency also relates to the idea of constructed identity versus making your own. Unwilling to wait for rescue or sit on the fence when her friends are in danger, Lyra decides that something must be done, and who better to do it than herself? Knowing that she is the only one who will take her to the stars, so to speak, Lyra seeks it herself, regardless of the advice of others. Her eagerness aside, we must also keep in mind that Lyra is destined to be the hero. Pullman's choice of closing the circle by using a female hero to redeem all of man kind can perhaps be read ironically, since woman mythically have been seen as the cause of the fall itself.

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