

Her Dark Materials: Milton, Pullman, Fanfiction, and the Anxiety of Author(ity)

Although many scholars think of fanfiction as existing only in the dark corners of the internet, oftentimes literature engages in the same work as fanfiction by reimagining other texts. In children's literature, for example, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* revises Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which in itself could be considered fanfiction of the Bible. Furthermore, Pullman's trilogy and Milton's poem are also, in some ways, *about* fanfiction, addressing a central question in fan scholarship: do fans have the authority to retell/revise another author's story? For Milton and Pullman, God is the Author(ity), and various characters worship or rebel against that Author's "story" in the same way fans worship (fangirl over) and rebel against (transform) their favorite texts.

Because these two texts are closely aligned with the processes and themes of fanfiction, my project approaches both texts using fan studies to explore the idea of authority. Building on the work of fan scholars like Henry Jenkins and Kristina Busse, I demonstrate a central paradox of fanfiction: the very existence of fanfiction simultaneously affirms the authority of its source texts and challenges that authority through transformation. I show that this paradox plays out in the narratives of *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials*, as well as in the "lineage" between the Bible and these two texts. This close reading and intertextual analysis reveal that there is no worship without at least a little challenge to authority, and no rebellion without at least a little affirmation of that authority.

The literary theorist Harold Bloom, when confronted with a similar paradox, uses the Oedipal myth to say that we must kill our literary fathers, misreading and revising their earlier works in order to say something *new*. A fan-centered reading of *His Dark Materials*, however, points to a different way forward: I argue that we must, like the Neolithic goddesses of old, dismember our gods and scatter their bodies to fertilize the earth, an act which is both affirmational and transformational, worshipful and rebellious. Only in dismantling our literary gods, our authoritative canons, can we prepare the ground for future story creation and growth of meaning.