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Innocence vs. Experience: A Conflict Revealed through Storytelling

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Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy contains a critique of religion and theology that is unique insofar as it is directed not at Christianity as its primary audience, but instead to young readers of science fiction and fantasy. He criticizes the Church for its idealization of innocence and passivity, proposing instead that there is nothing to be lost in a fall from grace and everything to gain in a new world of experience in which one constantly engages in active understanding. The ongoing conflict between innocence and experience persists through the trilogy's entirety. In this, Pullman's books react against C. S. Lewis's Narnia series, wherein, according to Pullman, the importance of innocence is a central theme. Directing his trilogy to the same audiences as Lewis, Pullman insinuates that he too has a religious truth to share: that humanity is shaped by experience, and these experiences make people unique. Through experience people recognize the agency of which they are capable, that not everything is predetermined, that they have a responsibility to the world and to themselves. By utilizing a fantastic narrative, Pullman effectively communicates his human truths, for stories have been and always will be interpreted through the experience of the reader. Thus, Pullman draws the reader into the hard choices of experience and, by extension, into his polemic: that validating innocence in the world would eliminate much of human agency and choice. As Lyra, Pullman's main character, learns the true nature of the worlds existing within this trilogy, so too does the reader. As Lyra grows into her experience, so too does the reader. With *His Dark Materials*, Pullman analyzes the nature of innocence and experience and concludes that experience is necessary in shaping the human condition.

Information about the Author:

Kate Guidera is a senior English and classics double major. She wrote this paper for a Christ College seminar "The Devil and the Problem of Evil." This project emerged from her interest in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman and her interest in children's literature.

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