

His Dark Materials Assignment

Read the following excerpts from *The Amber Spyglass* and on a separate page (typed) write what Gnostic or mystery religion elements you notice in the excerpts. For each excerpt focus on the categories of God, creation, man, problem, solution, Jesus, and afterlife.

Plot

The story takes place in a world that is similar to ours with some differences. In this world the reformation never took place but the Catholic Church was overthrown and replaced with a Protestant hierarchy. The Magisterium (Church) controls most things in this world and tells people what to believe. The Magisterium represents the Authority who is the God of the Old Testament.

There are multiple other worlds, one of which is our own, that the characters are able to step between like passing through a curtain. In the main world people's souls are attached to them externally and are portrayed as an animal that represents their personality. They are called Dæmons and can only travel so many feet away from the person before both the person and the Dæmon feel tremendous pain. These Dæmons can talk and serve as the person's conscience.

The main problem is a dust that no one can see without special technology that gathers around people and increases, as they get older. The dust is original sin and the Church is trying to learn about it by kidnapping children and separating them from their Dæmons in order to see what will happen to the dust around them in an attempt to do away with original sin.

The conflict is between the Magisterium, which is trying to do away with original sin and the republic of heaven, which is an army of humans from many worlds in the desire to overthrow the Authority. They desire to allow dust to freely flow so that they can be free from all authority and rule their own lives in peace. They are aided by the fallen angels who failed to do this long ago, but now that they have the help of humans they are sure to win.

Characters

Lyra Belacqua is a twelve-year-old girl who is praised for her ability to lie and ignore adults and authority figures. She has the gift of using the golden compass that will reveal the truth of any question that she asks. She uses it by blanking out her mind so that the compass can talk to her. The book makes it very clear that fallen angels are the ones that control the compass and speak to her.

Will Parry is a twelve-year-old boy who has the ability to use the subtle knife. The subtle knife is used to cut open doorways to other worlds like a slit in a curtain.

Lord Asriel is the father of Lyra and is establishing the Republic of Heaven to rival The Authority's Kingdom. He raises an arm from all the multiple worlds in order to kill the Authority and his general Metatron in order to bring peace to all the worlds.

Marisa Coulter is the highly manipulative mother of Lyra and former lover of Lord Asriel. She serves the Church in kidnapping children for research into the nature of Dust and separating them from their Dæmons.

The Authority is the god of the Old Testament but not the original creator God. He is evil and dominating. He has gone into retirement where he is now a naïve, withered, senile being.

Metatron was the human Enoch who the Authority made into an angel. He took the throne when the Authority retreated into retirement and established monotheistic religions in all the worlds. He uses this religion to enslave humans to his will.

Excerpts from The Amber Spyglass

1. Two fallen angels (Balthamos and Baruch) are talking to Will about what they know about the Authority and Metatron that has been kept a secret from humans for so many ages.

“Who was that?” said Will, trembling, facing the two angels.

“That was Metatron,” said Balthamos. “You should have...”

“Metatron? Who’s he? Why did he attack? And don’t lie to me.”

“We must tell him,” said Baruch to his companion. “You should have done so already.”

“Yes, I should have,” Balthamos agreed, “but I was cross with him, and anxious for you.”

“Tell me now, then,” said Will. “And remember, it’s no good telling me what I should do—none of it matters to me, none. Only Lyra matters, and my mother. And that,” he added to Balthamos, “is the point of all this metaphysical speculation, as you called it.”

Baruch said, “I think we should tell you our information. Will, this is why we two have been seeking you, and why we must take you to Lord Asriel. We discovered a secret of the Kingdom--of the Authority’s world--and we must share it with him. Are we safe here?” he added, looking around. “There is no way through?”

“This is a different world. A different universe.”

The sand they stood on was soft, and the slope of the dune nearby was inviting. They could see for miles in the moonlight; they were utterly alone.

“Tell me, then,” said Will. “Tell me about Metatron, and what this secret is. Why did that angel call him Regent? And what is the Authority? Is he God?”

He sat down, and the two angels, their forms clearer in the moonlight than he had ever seen them before, sat with him.

Balthamos said quietly, “The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty—those were all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves—the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself. Matter loves matter. It seeks to know more about itself, and Dust is formed. The first angels condensed out of Dust, and the Authority was the first of all. He told those who came after him that he had created them, but it was a lie. One of those who came later was wiser than he was, and she found out the truth, so he banished her. We serve her still. And the Authority still reigns in the Kingdom, and Metatron is his Regent.

“But as for what we discovered in the Clouded Mountain, we can’t tell you the heart of it. We swore to each other that the first to hear should be Lord Asriel himself.”

“Then tell me what you can. Don’t keep me in the dark.”

“We found our way into the Clouded Mountain,” said Baruch, and at once went on: “I’m sorry; we use these terms too easily. It’s sometimes called the Chariot. It’s not fixed, you see; it moves from place to place. Wherever it goes, there is the heart of the Kingdom, his citadel, his palace. When the Authority was young, it wasn’t surrounded by clouds, but as time passed, he gathered them around him more and more thickly. No one has seen the summit for thousands of years. So his citadel is known now as the Clouded Mountain.”

“What did you find there?”

“The Authority himself dwells in a chamber at the heart of the Mountain. We couldn’t get close, although we saw him. His power...”

“He has delegated much of his power,” Balthamos interrupted, “to Metatron. You’ve seen what he’s like. We escaped from him before, and now he’s seen us again, and what is more, he’s seen you, and he’s seen the knife. I did say--”

“Balthamos,” said Baruch gently, “don’t chide Will. We need his help, and he can’t be blamed for not knowing what it took us so long to find out.”

Balthamos looked away.

Will said, “So you’re not going to tell me this secret of yours? All right. Tell me this, instead: what happens when we die?”

Balthamos looked back, in surprise.

Baruch said, “Well, there is a world of the dead. Where it is, and what happens there, no one knows. My ghost, thanks to Balthamos, never went there; I am what was once the ghost of Baruch. The world of the dead is just dark to us.”

“It is a prison camp,” said Balthamos. “The Authority established it in the early ages. Why do you want to know? You will see it in time.”

“My father has just died, that’s why. He would have told me all he knew, if he hadn’t been killed. You say it’s a world--do you mean a world like this one, another universe?”

Balthamos looked at Baruch, who shrugged.

“And what happens in the world of the dead?” Will went on.

“It’s impossible to say,” said Baruch. “Everything about it is secret. Even the churches don’t know; they tell their believers that they’ll live in Heaven, but that’s a lie. If people really knew...”

“And my father’s ghost has gone there.”

“Without a doubt, and so have the countless millions who died before him.”

2. Baruch, one of the fallen angels, is telling Lord Asriel about the Authority and Metatron

“We learned the truth about the Authority. We learned that he has retired to a chamber of crystal deep within the Clouded Mountain, and that he no longer runs the daily affairs of the Kingdom. Instead, he contemplates deeper mysteries. In his place, ruling on his behalf, there is an angel called Metatron. I have reason to know that angel well, though when I knew him...”

Baruch’s voice faded. Lord Asriel’s eyes were blazing, but he held his tongue and waited for Baruch to continue.

“Metatron is proud,” Baruch went on when he had recovered a little strength, “and his ambition is limitless. The Authority chose him four thousand years ago to be his Regent, and they laid their plans together. They have a new plan, which my companion and I were able to discover. The Authority considers that conscious beings of every kind have become dangerously independent, so Metatron is going to intervene much more actively in human affairs. They intend to move the Authority secretly away from the Clouded Mountain, to a permanent citadel somewhere else, and turn the mountain into an engine of war. The churches in every world are corrupt and weak, he thinks, they compromise too readily...He wants to set up a permanent inquisition in every world, run directly from the Kingdom. And his first campaign will be to destroy your Republic...”

3. Mrs. Coulter after deciding that she no longer wants to serve the Magisterium and wants to join the rebellion against the Authority tells Lord Asriel her thoughts on the Authority.

“I assume he’s after that knife. You know it has a name? The cliff-ghasts of the north call it the god-destroyer,” he went on, crossing to the window and looking down over the cloisters. “That’s what Asriel is aiming to do, isn’t it? Destroy the Authority? There are some people who claim that God is dead already. Presumably, Asriel is not one of those, if he retains the ambition to kill him.”

“Well, where is God,” said Mrs. Coulter, “if he’s alive? And why doesn’t he speak anymore? At the beginning of the world, God walked in the Garden and spoke with Adam and Eve. Then he began to withdraw, and he forbade Moses to look at his face. Later, in the time of Daniel, he was aged--he was the Ancient of Days. Where is he now? Is he still alive, at some inconceivable age, decrepit and demented, unable to think or act or speak and unable to die, a rotten hulk? And if that is his condition, wouldn’t it be the most merciful thing, the truest proof of our love for God, to seek him out and give him the gift of death?”

4. Lyra and Will after a long adventure through the many worlds finally meet the Authority in order to do away with him.

She was gazing into the crystal litter. It was unbroken, although the crystal was stained and smeared with mud and the blood from what the cliff-ghasts had been eating before they found it. It lay tilted crazily among the rocks, and inside it—

“Oh, Will, he’s still alive! But--the poor thing...”

Will saw her hands pressing against the crystal, trying to reach in to the angel and comfort him; because he was so old, and he was terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner.

“He must be so old--I’ve never seen anyone suffering like that--oh, Will, can’t we let him out?”

Will cut through the crystal in one movement and reached in to help the angel out. Demented and powerless, the aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery, and he shrank away from what seemed like yet another threat.

“It’s all right,” Will said, “we can help you hide, at least. Come on, we won’t hurt you.”

The shaking hand seized his and feebly held on. The old one was uttering a wordless groaning whimper that went on and on, and grinding his teeth, and compulsively plucking at himself with his free hand; but as Lyra reached in, too, to help him out, he tried to smile, and to bow, and his ancient eyes deep in their wrinkles blinked at her with innocent wonder.

Between them they helped the ancient of days out of his crystal cell; it wasn’t hard, for he was as light as paper, and he would have followed them anywhere, having no will of his own, and responding to simple kindness like a flower to the sun. But in the open air there was nothing to stop the wind from damaging him, and to their dismay his form began to loosen and dissolve. Only a few moments later he had vanished completely, and their last impression was of those eyes, blinking in wonder, and a sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief.

Then he was gone: a mystery dissolving in mystery. It had all taken less than a minute, and Will turned back at once to the fallen Chevalier.

5. Lyra and Will are in the world of the after life talking to dead spirits about the truth of what the after life and heaven are and why the Authority created it. They are not dead themselves; they arrived to the world of the afterlife through the use of the subtle knife.

But before they could begin, a voice cried out, as loudly as a whisper could cry. It was the ghost of a thin man with an angry, passionate face, and he cried:

“What will happen? When we leave the world of the dead, will we live again? Or will we vanish as our like our daemons did? Brothers, sisters, we shouldn’t follow this child anywhere till we know what’s going to happen to us!”

Others took up the question: “Yes, tell us where we’re going! Tell us what to expect! We won’t go unless we know what’ll happen to us!”

Lyra turned to Will in despair, but he said, “Tell them the truth. Ask the alethiometer, and tell them what it says.”

“All right,” she said.

She took out the golden instrument. The answer came at once. She put it away and stood up.

“This is what’ll happen,” she said, “and it’s true, perfectly true. When you go out of here, all the particles that make you up will loosen and float apart, just like your daemons did. If you’ve seen people dying, you know what that looks like. But your daemons weren’t just nothing now; they’re part of everything. All the atoms that were them, they’ve gone into the air and the wind and the trees and the earth and all the living things. They’ll never vanish. They’re just part of

everything. And that's exactly what'll happen to you, I swear to you, I promise on my honor. You'll drift apart, it's true, but you'll be out in the open, part of everything alive again."

No one spoke. Those who had seen how daemons dissolved were remembering it, and those who hadn't were imagining it, and no one spoke until a young woman came forward. She had died as a martyr centuries before. She looked around and said to the other ghosts:

"When we were alive, they told us that when we died we'd go to Heaven. And they said that Heaven was a place of joy and glory and we would spend eternity in the company of saints and angels praising the Almighty, in a state of bliss. That's what they said. And that's what led some of us to give our lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around us and we never knew.

"Because the land of the dead isn't a place of reward or a place of punishment. It's a place of nothing. The good come here as well as the wicked, and all of us languish in this gloom forever, with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep, or rest, or peace.

"But now this child has come offering us a way out and I'm going to follow her. Even if it means oblivion, friends, I'll welcome it, because it won't be nothing. We'll be alive again in a thousand blades of grass, and a million leaves; we'll be falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze; we'll be glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world, which is our true home and always was.

"So I urge you: come with the child out to the sky!"

But her ghost was thrust aside by the ghost of a man who looked like a monk: thin and pale, with dark, zealous eyes even in his death. He crossed himself and murmured a prayer, and then he said:

"This is a bitter message, a sad and cruel joke. Can't you see the truth? This is not a child. This is an agent of the Evil One himself! The world we lived in was a vale of corruption and tears. Nothing there could satisfy us. But the Almighty has granted us this blessed place for all eternity, this paradise, which to the fallen soul seems bleak and barren, but which the eyes of faith see as it is, overflowing with milk and honey and resounding with the sweet hymns of the angels. This is Heaven, truly! What this evil girl promises is nothing but lies. She wants to lead you to Hell! Go with her at your peril. My companions and I of the true faith will remain here in our blessed paradise, and spend eternity singing the praises of the Almighty, who has given us the judgment to tell the false from the true."

6. Lyria and Will help the dead spirits escape the prison of the afterlife in order to dissolve into the universe, which is a much better state than still existing.

Will and Lyra exchanged a look. Then he cut a window, and it was the sweetest thing they had ever seen.

The night air filled their lungs, fresh and clean and cool; their eyes took in a canopy of dazzling stars, and the shine of water somewhere below, and here and there groves of great trees, as high as castles, dotting the wide savanna.

Will enlarged the window as wide as he could, moving across the grass to left and right, making it big enough for six, seven, eight to walk through abreast, out of the land of the dead.

The first ghosts trembled with hope, and their excitement passed back like a ripple over the long line behind them, young children and aged parents alike looking up and ahead with delight and wonder as the first stars they had seen for centuries shone through into their poor starved eyes.

The first ghost to leave the world of the dead was Roger. He took a step forward, and turned to look back at Lyra, and laughed in surprise as he found himself turning into the night, the starlight, the air...and then he was gone, leaving behind such a vivid little burst of happiness that Will was reminded of the bubbles in a glass of champagne.

The other ghosts followed Roger, and Will and Lyra fell exhausted on the dew-laden grass, every nerve in their bodies blessing the sweetness of the good soil, the night air, the stars.

Out of the little grove, away from the baffled Specters, out of the valley, past the mighty form of his old companion the armor-clad bear, the last little scrap of the consciousness that had been the aeronaut Lee Scoresby floated upward, just as his great balloon had done so many times. Untroubled by the flares and the bursting shells, deaf to the explosions and the shouts and cries of anger and warning and pain, conscious only of his movement upward, the last of Lee Scoresby passed through the heavy clouds and came out under the brilliant stars, where the atoms of his beloved daemon, Hester, were waiting for him.