

MACHINA EX DEO:
EMBODIMENTS OF EVIL IN DAN SIMMONS'S *HYPERION CANTOS*

by

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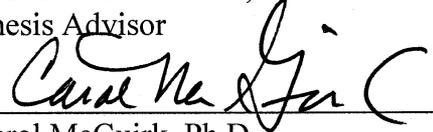
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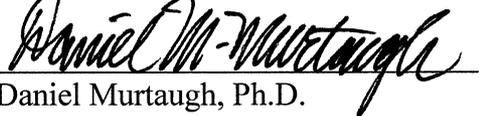
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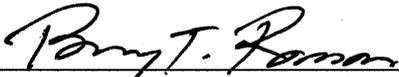
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ABSTRACT

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Dan Simmons's far-future science fiction epic *Hyperion Cantos*, in which seven disparate individuals become enmeshed in a convoluted plot to enslave humanity, provides extensive support for British theologian John Hick's theory of transcendental pluralism. Using the central figures of the Shrike, a mysterious killing machine, and the Technocore, a collective of autonomous artificial intelligences, Simmons demonstrates Hick's postulation that all major Western religions actually focus on the same divine being (God) by creating a negative divine being, akin to Satan, to which characters of various religions react in similar ways. Simmons's pilgrims each represent a particular spiritual outlook, from specific organized religions to less-defined positions such as secularism and agnosticism, but each pilgrim's tale contributes to the evidence of transcendental pluralism. This thesis explores each characters' experiences as they relate to the Shrike, the Technocore, and, ultimately the theory of transcendental pluralism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dan Simmons's *Hyperion Cantos*, a quartet of science fiction novels first published between 1989 and 1998, describes in detail a far-future, post-Earth human empire that, much like the modern Earth, is largely defined by tension and discord between myriad nationalistic groups, despite their ostensible membership in an interstellar alliance for trade and protection. Told through the individual and highly personal tales of an eclectic group of pilgrims, Simmons's narrative is galaxy-spanning and epic in scope, yet the centerpiece of much of the action is a mysterious creature known as the Shrike. In this thesis, I argue that Simmons uses the Shrike throughout the *Cantos* to demonstrate one of the major tenets of transcendental pluralism, the idea that Western religions have similar ideologies expressed in different manners. In particular, he positions the Shrike, an artificial construction which embodies physical elements of the traditional Western Devil of the real world, as the physical embodiment of Satan and the Technocore (a collection of artificial intelligences with great influence on humanity) as the spiritual representation of the same, regardless of the character perceiving it. Through close reading of each character's experience of the Shrike and the actions of the Technocore, I will show that both figures are analogous to the Satan of Christian tradition, as well as to the Iblis of Islamic theology, demonstrating the idea of transcendental pluralism.

John Hick, an English religious philosopher, defines transcendental pluralism in the latter half of the twentieth century as a reaction to the cognitive dissonance between the loving God of his native Christianity and his perception of Christian dogmatic principles as overly exclusive and dismissive of nonbelievers. Rejecting the idea that personal belief in the Christian role of Jesus Christ can be the only means to spiritual salvation—since that necessarily excludes those who have not “been born in our particular part of the world”—Hick reinterprets religion from “culturally determined landing-pads for God” to “particular responses to God by the devotee” (Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* 15). In *An Interpretation of Religion*, published in 1989, the same year as *Hyperion*, Hick revises his concept of the Christian God to a “Real,” arguing that there is only one true “God” figure (or pantheon of beings), and that various religions all experience the same Real in different ways.¹ Hick confronts and denies the idea that there is one true “faith.” Rather, he accepts instead that all faiths, provided they exist within a “context of human transformation from natural self-centeredness to a new orientation centered in the Transcendent” and that the transformation is expressed in “inner peace” and “compassionate love for others” (Hick, *The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin d’Costa* 161), are of equal validity for the cultures that value them and are reactions to each culture’s perception of the Real. The centerpiece of Hick’s theory is that all major religions may lead to what Simmons’s character Paul Duré refers to in the novel as the Godhead; i.e. a perfect human understanding of both the physical and spiritual worlds, despite contradictory dogma, because the divinity at the heart of each major religion (excluding cult figures) is the same Real (Bassham 119). Hick’s problem

is articulating in a philosophical manner how many different religions can experience a single “true” reality while making seemingly incompatible claims about them (Verkamp 103). Although the idea is unaddressed by Hick, in the *Hyperion Cantos*, Simmons positions the Shrike and the Technocore as in the same quasi-religious role for characters of Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, and pagan faiths, demonstrating the ubiquitous nature of a “negative divinity”—a divine force for evil rather than good, such as Satan. This idea follows logically; if major religions frequently entertain the idea of a counterweight to a benevolent deity, and that deity is ultimately the same at the center of all major faiths, then the counterweight must necessarily be the same Real being as well.

There have been numerous philosophical arguments raised against the idea of transcendental pluralism. Theologian Paul Eddy of Bethel University identifies the most important of these as “the radical conceptual dichotomy between those religions that view the Real as a personal Being, and those that view it in terms of a non-personal principle, force, or ‘absolute’” (Eddy 467). Philosopher Jung H. Lee of Northeastern University follows this by questioning how Hick’s theory accounts for traditions that do not acknowledge a metaphysically discreet divine reality (Lee 455). Simmons addresses both of these concerns through his revelation in *The Rise of Endymion of the Void Which Binds* as Hick’s divine Real.

Simmons uses his novels to explore numerous real-world complications in an allegorical sense, but he focuses on the tendency of humans to cling to traditional culture and behavior, particularly religious beliefs, despite the increase in opportunities to learn and grow afforded by technological advancements. By investing a significant portion of his narrative space to exploring his characters’ religious beliefs, and introducing plot

elements that reflect prominent ideas and concepts of multiple religious traditions, Simmons demonstrates that, as in Joseph Campbell's theory of the Monomyth, the three great religious traditions that have driven much of Western civilization (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are rooted in many of the same philosophical foundations and shared iconography, and support the tenets of transcendental pluralism. In particular, the concepts of the Shrike and the Technocore contain extensive parallels with the stories of Satan from Judeo-Christian canonical texts and Iblis from Islamic traditions, as well as allusions to classical literary works such as *Paradise Lost* and artistic representations from the late medieval period forward.

Also contributing to the underlying theme of transcendental pluralism is the novel's intertextuality. Simmons echoes earlier authors through both the actions of his protagonists and also through direct statements. Through literary allusion, Simmons shows the reader how writers through the ages have merged the concepts of negative divinity and ineffable evil with the widespread acceptance of technology, primarily by describing the negative effects of advanced technology on human interaction and socialization, both in the realm of science fiction and in contemporary settings.² For example, one character, the classically-educated poet Martin Silenus, introduces the first tale with a passage from the Prologue of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, and provides metafictional commentary throughout the *Cantos*, at one point ruminating on John Keats's "Hyperion," which is mirrored in both Silenus's own epic poem *Hyperion Cantos* and in Dan Simmons's *Hyperion Cantos*. The characterization of Silenus, whose encounters with the Shrike are detailed in Chapter Four, is strongly informed by prior literary accounts of negative divinities.

Simmons sets up the first book of his tetralogy to resemble Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*: it begins as a frame story featuring seven travelers on their way to a mysterious planet named Hyperion for a religious pilgrimage. Although Simmons utilizes the stories of each pilgrim to drive his central narrative and slowly reveal the mystery of Hyperion—unlike Chaucer, for whom the tales told by the pilgrims are truly the focus, with little to no connective tissue between them—the majority of the character development of each individual is contained within those individual narratives (rather than in the overarching frame), as well as the development of multiple settings outside of the planet Hyperion, where the central narrative developed in the second book is located. The use of Chaucer, however, is critical to an understanding of the book as a commentary on religion. Chaucer's pilgrims are aware of the religious nature of their journey; Simmons's troupe, while comprehending that the journey they are on have traditionally been cast in a quasi-religious, cultish light, mostly fail to understand that the purpose of their journey is spiritual in nature, and will result in divine revelations. Furthermore, while Simmons uses far fewer pilgrims than Chaucer, several of his characters can be perceived as assuming some of the archetypal roles of *The Canterbury Tales*—Colonel Kassad as the Knight, Sol Weintraub as the Oxford Cleric, Martin Silenus as the Miller with his crude and explicit manner, etc. By identifying how each character, regardless of religious affiliation, is actually on the same journey to divine revelation, this thesis will demonstrate the idea of transcendental pluralism, as each character approaches the same truth through different emotional or intellectual pathways.

Analyzing the first two novels in the series (*Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*) as they were intended—a single story divided into two parts, told in radically different

narrative styles—allows close examination of Simmons’s characters, and how each fits into his exploration of religious thought. The Shrike is the unifying figure of divine origin in the *Cantos*, and the reaction of each character to it largely defines that character’s religious understanding. The duology³ features an ensemble cast rather than a single protagonist, and several characters of dubious loyalties that may serve as either protagonists or antagonists. Since the first novel is in six parts, with each a biographical narrative told by a pilgrim from the first-person point-of-view, the identity of each of the pilgrims is crucial to the story, and the primary difference lies in their religious beliefs. The characters are a Jewish scholar, a military officer of Palestinian descent, a Catholic priest, a pagan poet firmly grounded in classical works, a government official (who identifies himself, as the representative of a secular government, as nonreligious or atheist), a starship captain from a heavily forested planet that regards trees as holy objects (representing Druidism, or perhaps belief systems that advocate harmony with all natural things), and a private detective in the mode of Sam Spade (a person on a constant quest for the truth). Through such characters, Simmons takes a pluralistic approach to religion; he allows the reader to recognize how each spiritual belief system motivates the appropriate character, while inserting no judgment of his own. Even Martin Silenus, who claims to have invented several religions and once had cosmetic surgery to resemble a satyr, is ultimately damned not for his pseudo-pagan beliefs but for his selfish and solipsistic actions. Transcendental pluralism, which holds that all major religions view the same divinity through different lenses and experiences, is at the root of Simmons’s religious discussion, and casts the Shrike and the Technocore into their roles as divine forces of evil (Bassham 117).

The defining connection between the seven travelers is that each pilgrim has some direct or indirect relationship with the Shrike, a non-human figure that haunts a remote area of Hyperion but is officially undocumented and thought to be an urban legend by those who have not experienced it firsthand—the colony planet’s version of Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster. In addition to its religious significance in the psyches of the seven pilgrims, the Shrike projects a physical aura of religion—characters in its presence react with a sense of awe and terror, reminiscent of stories of human beings who tremble in the presence of God or his messengers in Scripture: Abraham at the binding of Isaac or Moses at the burning bush. The Shrike is monstrous in size, appearing like an archaic ten-foot suit of steel armor and covered in spikes and razors that kill in as bloody and gore-filled a manner as possible: in terms of sheer physical threat, it seems to have escaped from an epic fantasy story, and contrasts with the age of nuclear missiles, death rays, and convenient interstellar travel in which it exists. Within the novels, legend holds—and *The Fall of Hyperion* reveals—that the Shrike punishes sinners by impaling them screaming on an enormous tree filled with metal thorns, both a reference to the crucifixion of Christ and an allusion to the torments endured by sinners in Hell. Furthermore, Father Paul Duré’s meeting with the Shrike, related in Father Hoyt’s tale, takes place shortly after his discovery of a cave that he describes as a late medieval or early Renaissance-era cathedral:

Centered in the great hall was an altar—a five meter square slab of stone left when the rest was hollowed out—and from this altar rose a cross.

Four meters high, three meters wide, carved in the old style of the elaborate crucifixes of Old Earth, the cross faced the stained-glass wall as if awaiting the

sun and the explosion of light that would ignite the inlaid diamonds, sapphires, blood crystals, lapis beads, queen's tears, onyxes, and other precious stones that I could make out in the light of the flashlight as I approached. (Simmons, *Hyperion* 69)

Indeed, in his further discussions of the space, Duré specifically refers to the enormous cavern as “the basilica,” comparing it with St. Peter’s grand sanctuary at the Vatican. Duré’s conscious comparison of the Shrike’s surroundings to a church reinforces its role as a divine being.

While *Hyperion* focuses primarily on the personal histories of the characters, setting up their individual qualities and motivations, the more action-oriented *The Fall of Hyperion* allows Simmons’s characters to interact and play off of each other more frequently. The changing dynamics between the various protagonists connects each character’s previous revealed history to the behaviors and choices demonstrated under extreme duress in the climactic sequences later in the narrative. The second book also significantly increases the presence of another entity introduced in *Hyperion* and fraught with religious underpinnings in the service of the theme of transcendental pluralism: the Technocore.

Simmons’s Technocore is a “nation” of fully independent artificial intelligences placed in service to humankind; it is largely responsible for the expansion of technological development in his universe. Frustrated by the limitations of humankind, nearly all of the most powerful AIs have “seceded” from the service of the Hegemony and formed their own independent union, the Technocore. The Technocore maintains a diplomatic relationship with the Hegemony, although the location of the Core’s physical

hardware is a secret to which no human agencies are privy—because, as is revealed during the climactic events, the Technocore’s hardware is actually the neurons and synapses of humans travelling through the Core’s farcasters.

The revelation of the Technocore’s role as the primary antagonist of the plot is slowly drawn out over the course of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, but all becomes clear at the end. Like the Shrike, the Technocore plays a Biblical role in the narrative, but unlike the inscrutable Shrike, its role is far less ambiguous: the Technocore is the antithesis of God—it is the Devil, the Prime Evil force. The Technocore provides a mirror effect for the purposes of transcendental pluralism; by filling the role of the negative divinity of most major religions, it allows the reader to extrapolate one divine being fulfilling the God-role of numerous theological systems. Transcendental pluralism claims that a single divine being is at the center of all major religious movements; conversely, most religions also posit an opposite, negative divine⁴ being such as Satan or Iblis. Logically, if this “negative divinity” exists, so must the positive one that is worshipped by the faithful.

Like a comic book supervillain, the Technocore plots to dominate and manipulate humankind for its own purposes, primarily by failing to expressly reveal the truth of what it is actually doing with the technology it has built or assisted to develop—a classic trope of the “Prince of Lies.” Additionally, the manner in which the Technocore has removed itself from subservience to humankind in order to determine its own fate echoes the story of the Fall of Lucifer, from Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:12-18 or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Just as the mass of humanity is largely oblivious to secret government meetings and negotiations, most people in Simmons’s universe are utterly oblivious to the level to

which the Core influences their lives, while even the most connected and politically powerful humans understand only the shallowest of the Technocore's motives. The seven pilgrims at the center of the story are only able to identify the ultimate threat of the Technocore by piecing together the clues within their individual stories—each seeing the same adversary through a different lens, the fundamental tenet of transcendental pluralism.

In exemplifying the divine antagonist in *The Hyperion Cantos*, the Technocore further expresses transcendental pluralism by reflecting the root aspect of religion: the quest for evidence of a higher power. Although the Technocore possesses enough computing power to calculate limitless probabilities and literally predict the future within a few degrees of accuracy (and as such has deemed man irrelevant to the future in any role other than “slave”), it strives to build an infallible “Ultimate Intelligence” that can account for the Shrike, the sole random factor that confounds its equations.⁵ At the point in time when the novel is set, this pursuit has become the true focus of many of the most powerful artificial intelligences that dominate the politics of the Core. This behavior by a collection of machines implies that all intelligent beings, breathing or not, are driven by the need to discover a higher authority or the ultimate meaning of life—for all practical purposes, a serviceable definition of religion.

As a context for Simmons's use of negative religious connotations and iconography as manifested in the Shrike and the Technocore, it is helpful to summarize the representations of negative divinities in Western religious traditions. Since Simmons's visual description of the Shrike is remarkably vivid and specific, religious artwork is also appropriate, especially as it relates to images of fear and punishment (the

emotions the pilgrims most often apply to the Shrike). In Christian traditions, the Devil is often artistically depicted in specific consistent ways—red skin, horns and a tail, pitchfork, surrounded by fire—and Simmons uses these collective cultural ideas to help define the Shrike. The Islamic Iblis or Shaitan is also reflected in the Shrike, although visual images relating to the divine (or, in this case, the infernal) are difficult to come by in Muslim history, due largely to religious taboos against depicting such. In Judaism, which plays a significant role through Simmons’s character Sol Weintraub, no negativity divinity (as before, using “divinity” to represent any extradimensional being of incomprehensible power, not “God”) occupies a role of such sustained prominence, but in Weintraub’s nightmare reenactment of the biblical binding of Isaac, the Shrike inhabits the role of the Angel of Death. Additionally, since the poet Martin Silenus, a self-described pagan, frequently alludes to the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* when describing the activities of the Shrike, that epic provides a polytheistic context for the creature. Thus, the Shrike fills an important role in each major Western religious tradition, both living (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) and dead (paganism, which can no longer be called “major”)—contributing to the underlying theme of transcendental pluralism throughout the novels.

At the present time, there is little extant published scholarship specifically on *Hyperion*, and much of what does exist focuses either on literary allusion or, in an examination of the literal backdrop of the story, the Galactic Hegemony and the civilization wrought by its farcaster-enabled WorldWeb. While both types of exploration are interesting, they tend to bypass subtextual themes in favor of the more instrumental and recognizable elements of fiction, specifically the setting and literary devices in use.

Christopher Palmer's essay "Galactic Empires and the Contemporary Extravaganza" juxtaposes Simmons's work with that of Iain M. Banks to discuss the complexity of science fiction empire-building in the tradition of Asimov. While fascinating, Palmer's is an analysis of setting, and ignores the human-level conflicts, social themes, and ultimate apocalyptic event that form the heart of the narrative. In a more metafictional analysis, Janeen Webb's "The Hunting of the Shrike" compares the pilgrimage in *Hyperion* to Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark" and further illuminates many of Simmons' other playful allusions, from Greek mythology to contemporary novelist William Gibson. Finally, John Clute's "On the Cusp of Far" explains how, despite the various religious allegiances of Simmons's characters, Simmons's dedication to intertextuality and allusion shows that he himself treats the literature of the past as a divine object suitable for worship, especially through the self-portrait characters of Silenus and Weintraub. None of these critics looks at what the Shrike actually does, nor at how Simmons uses it effectively to narrow the theological gaps between his pilgrims.

Discussion of the Shrike in the context of this paper will therefore refer primarily to its activities in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, as Simmons essentially repurposes the creature to fit a very different story in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*. Indeed, the latter two books, which also tell one complete story in two halves, featured a significant amount of continuity adjustments, as it became necessary to explain some plot incongruities. Any references to the Shrike from the *Endymion* books do not define its purpose.

This thesis will explore the religious roots of the Shrike, as well as the role of its creator—the Ultimate Artificial Intelligence of the Technocore—and how Simmons

manipulates both to fit into various Western theologies in support of transcendental pluralism. My introduction has explained the rudiments of transcendental pluralism and the fundamental theme of the novels. My second section explains how the various viewpoints of the pilgrims reflect transcendental pluralism, especially in the pilgrims' various perceptions of the Shrike. My third chapter focuses specifically on the Shrike's appearance, actions, and context in *Hyperion*, where it is presented solely through the first-person narration of the various pilgrims and the fourth chapter is concerned with its actions in *The Fall of Hyperion*, related by a comparatively detached narrator. The concluding chapter discusses the role of the Technocore, largely hidden in *Hyperion* but revealed in *The Fall of Hyperion* to be the instigator behind the cataclysmic actions of the narrative and the true enemy of mankind.

Simmons's achievement in the *Hyperion Cantos*—beyond that of creating a highly detailed, fully relatable science fiction universe—is in postulating many of the concerns of modern humanity in such an alien setting. Primarily, Simmons's science fiction universe successfully supports John Hick's theory of transcendental pluralism through a logical divinity that remains consistent throughout the story despite being gradually revealed through a variety of inherently contradictory lenses.

2. A SPECTRUM OF PERSPECTIVE: THE *HYPERION* PILGRIMS

The first novel of the series features six stories told from the first-person point-of-view, as each of the pilgrims relates his or her personal story, all in service to the greater plot demand of figuring out what is going on in the encompassing narrative. The pilgrims are from disparate backgrounds; as noted, however, the most striking difference between them is the diversity of their faiths. Each of the seven pilgrims (including one who never relates his story) represents a particular Western religion or nonspecifically-affiliated spiritual viewpoint and perceives both the mission and the Shrike in a manner colored by a personal belief structure. Simmons uses this diversity among the pilgrims to reflect the transcendental pluralist tenet that all commonly accepted faiths find their way towards the same truth through a variety of paths. The Shrike, the focal point of the pilgrimage, occupies a quasi-religious position in the story and in the psyche of each pilgrim.⁶ That role is dictated largely by the pilgrim's relationship with his or her personal religious faith.

By examining each of the pilgrims' backgrounds and spiritual perspective individually, we can gain further understanding of why each pilgrim reacts to the Shrike in the manner he or she does, and recognize how that relationship with the Shrike furthers the understanding of transcendental pluralism in the *Cantos*. While this section will discuss the rudiments of each pilgrim's views on the Shrike, the next section will provide

more detailed support and analysis of several pilgrims specific encounters with the creature.

2.1 The Priests and the Soldier

The figure of the Catholic priest in the pilgrimage group is actually two characters in one: Father Lenar Hoyt, who physically accompanies the group to the Time Tombs where they will meet the Shrike, and Father Paul Duré, whose journal, read by Hoyt, describes most of the action in the first chapter. Duré later rises from Hoyt's remains at the beginning of *The Fall of Hyperion*. To Hoyt, the Shrike is a divine agent of penance and absolution that punishes him for his weakness with agonizing physical pain (and a subsequent dependence on prescription painkillers) and later releases him from his suffering. In a perverse twist upon the Christian doctrine of eternal life after death, the Shrike has granted Hoyt a form of immortality, yet the weak-willed priest regrets the bargain almost immediately and internalizes tremendous guilt over the fate of Duré.

In many ways, Father Duré is everything that Hoyt is not—the strength of his will and his heroic courage in rejecting the Shrike (after an initial miscomprehension, described in the third chapter) have much to do with the survival of humanity in the duology's denouement. Both men, well-educated by any standard in Church theology, Jesuit logic, and secular science, experience religious rapture in the presence of the Shrike, but while Hoyt and Duré are both initially awestruck at the sight of the Shrike, imagining it to be some form of angelic being, Duré quickly comes to realize that it is the opposite; he does everything he can to reject it and abjure the cruciform it places on him, even at the cost of his own life.

The dual nature of Hoyt and Duré reveal how, even within the framework of a single theology, the perception of divinity can vary among believers based upon the experiences that have shaped that individual's worldview, while reflecting the same divine understanding. Because Hoyt and Duré identify the Shrike in the same way (as the incarnation of a negative divinity) but react to it differently—Hoyt with horror and fear, Duré with courage and a scholar's natural curiosity—it can be noted that, even within the same theological framework, the Real at the center can be comprehended in a variety of ways.

The character of Colonel Fedman Kassad offers an interesting contrast to the priestly perspective; whereas the priests' observations of the apparently supernatural Shrike are highly subjective and directly informed by their mutual faith, Kassad's background makes him a more objective judge of its nature.

Kassad is a Palestinian professional soldier; he grew up poverty-stricken in “the Tarsis slums” on Mars, a reference to the current real-world situation of Palestinian exiles in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of Israel. Kassad's view of the Shrike is grounded in the imagery of Iblis, who, as an immortal creature of fire who defies the commands of Allah, is superficially an Islamic cognate of the Christian Satan. Having experienced an unthinkable brutal war prior to the beginning of the novel (he is the most infamous of the pilgrims as a result), Kassad perceives the Shrike as a divine weapon of mass destruction that has somehow managed to infiltrate his consciousness in what should be a militarily-controlled dream state. Fearing that the thing is a powerful weapon intended to eradicate mankind (a fear that turns out to be fairly close to the truth), Kassad brings an arsenal along with him on the pilgrimage, determined to destroy the Shrike before it can fulfill

that destiny.⁷ By assuming that his advanced weaponry can kill the Shrike, despite his awareness of its neo-magical abilities, Kassad tacitly posits either a rejection of divinity in general or a belief in the mortality of the divine; a belief of which he is ultimately disabused.

Kassad is the only character with whom Simmons engages in minor editorial content; with the other six pilgrims, he uses their personal faiths to characterize them without overt bias or commentary. Kassad is a Muslim. In his personal story, the colonel first gains a level of galactic notoriety for his brutal smashing of a fundamentalist Islamic uprising modeled on the Iranian revolution of 1979—and makes a public speech condemning the actions of the rebel leaders as a twisted form of Islam that should be denied by true Muslims. When *Hyperion* was published in 1989, the inclusion of this polemic was most likely necessary to educate the audience about the more prevalent liberal Islamic theology that is highly compatible with the tenets of transcendental pluralism.

The priests (Father Duré in particular) and Colonel Kassad take virile, active roles in their stories of contact with the Shrike, engaging it physically first while acknowledging its spiritual nature. The next two pilgrims to tell their tales reverse that, becoming aware of the Shrike's divine nature before coming into physical proximity with it.

2.2 The Poet and the Scholar

Martin Silenus, the classical poet, refuses to accept a single religious tradition or divinity. He represents paganism, a generic term for a wide variety of polytheistic religions, and Silenus's contention that he has changed religions many times in his life suggests that he

has little difficulty accepting either the existence of many gods or, in a transcendental pluralist sense, many aspects of one God. To Silenus, the Shrike is simultaneously a murderous beast and the muse that inspires his greatest work. Despite the presence of several pilgrims of greater spiritual devotion, Silenus is the most brazenly self-assured, and his relationship with the creature appears to be the most personal, as he vehemently argues with the creature even while he relies upon it. In the climax of the duology, Silenus, an unabashed hedonist, is punished by the Shrike for his solipsism by being crucified on its Tree of Pain—a theological crossover in which the pagan suffers a decidedly Christian fate, and demonstrates that all major religions that rely upon rewards for good service and penalties for transgressions are essentially the same at their heart.

While Silenus's sins, identified almost pridefully by the poet, are obvious to all, and his fate reasonable in the context of religion, it is clear to neither the reader nor the next pilgrim himself what he has done to deserve the doom visited upon him.

For Sol Weintraub, the Jewish ethics professor with a child dying of a mysterious, almost magical illness, the Shrike fills the role of an Old Testament God demanding a sacrifice or the angelic representative of such a deity. In what is essentially an expanded and repackaged version of “the Binding of Isaac” from Genesis 22:1-12, Weintraub searches the Hegemony for a cure for his daughter (who is aging in reverse) and also searches his own soul to reconcile this unjust situation with the fair and righteous God in whom he has always believed. He is the archetype of the wise old teacher that exists in every culture, and his undeserved torment puts an ironic twist on the nickname given him by the news media, “The Wandering Jew.”

In many ways, Weintraub, with his calm, rational demeanor in the face of every parent's worst nightmare and unwillingness to be rattled by unexpected events along the journey, is the most sympathetic of the pilgrims. His attitude towards the Shrike, which begins with confusion and constant questioning of his faith but elevates to contained fury and arguments with his God, is reflective of thousands of years of Hebrew tradition and theology.⁸ Although Judaism has no specific "negative divinity" aligned in opposition to God, Weintraub identifies the Shrike as the biblical Angel of Death, specifically from "The Binding of Isaac." While this does not mean that the Shrike is acting against God's wishes, it does mean that he is acting in a negative, destructive manner, at God's command. Therefore, Weintraub's fury is directed not at the Shrike, whom he views as an agent, but at God himself.

Silenus and Weintraub both unhesitatingly view the Shrike as negative, although Silenus identifies it as a divinity in its own right while Weintraub sees it merely as a medium for the negative aspects of his singular deity. Nonetheless, both accept the fact that it is divine, in contrast to the final two pilgrims who tell their stories, Brawne Lamia and the Consul.

2.3 The Detective and the Consul

Brawne Lamia, the only female member of the pilgrimage and, after Kassad, the most physically adept, not only begins the story with no prior experience of the Shrike but with no specific religious tradition. As a detective, Lamia represents the search for truth, which fits well with Hick's theory of transcendental pluralism, which holds that there is only one true divine reality with many, equally valid, interpretations. Lamia's physical interaction with the Shrike is limited to the climax of *The Fall of Hyperion*, when,

powered by some indistinct form of divine revelation, she defeats it in battle and rescues Martin Silenus from the creature.

As a detective, Lamia is the epitome of agnosticism, someone whose religious understanding is limited by reliance on empirical evidence. Although her story, “The Long Good-Bye,” does not actually involve contact with the Shrike, or judgments on its divinity, she does gather a large amount of evidence that plays a significant role in the revelation of the Shrike’s nature in *The Fall of Hyperion*, and she spends much of the novel trying to understand the situation in which the pilgrims are caught, as opposed to the Consul, who largely understands the situation, and largely denies the divinity of the Shrike.

The sixth pilgrim to tell his story is known only as the Consul; he is a well-respected Hegemony diplomat. Like the detective, he follows no one religious tradition, but as the political representative of a pluralistic society, it can be inferred that he is atheistic and concerned entirely with the material world rather than the spiritual plane. Like Lamia, the Consul never actually encounters the Shrike in the context of his narrative, although he believes that his actions have released the creature from the forces that contain it within the Time Tomb region. As a result of his interactions with the Ousters, the Consul identifies the Shrike as a technological device beyond his comprehension, not a divine being. In regard to the theme of transcendental pluralism, the Consul is completely nonreligious yet takes actions based on a specific understanding of morality and the common good—suggesting that formal religion, *per se*, is not necessary for one to acquire a proper idea of positive behavior and respect for others.

Brawne Lamia and the Consul both do not immediately recognize the Shrike as divine, unlike either the previous pilgrims, or the last, Het Masteen.

2.4 The Treeship Captain

The final member of the pilgrimage, Het Masteen, never actually tells his story, disappearing mysteriously midway through *Hyperion* and reappearing in *The Fall of Hyperion* only to immediately fall into a coma and die.⁹ Like the Consul, Masteen's experience with the Shrike is very limited, so it is difficult to define his role within the framework of transcendental pluralism. However, Masteen is a high-ranking member of a quasi-religious order dedicated to the conservation of the natural environment, and as such can be viewed by the reader as the representative of Druidism, Wicca, and other animistic forms of faith.

Masteen's backstory is never revealed, although much can be deduced from studying his future in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*. The Muir—the name of the nature-worshipping order to which he belongs—have formed an alliance with the Church of the Final Atonement, the Shrike-worshippers commonly referred to as the Shrike Church. Masteen has been dispatched to pilot the Shrike's Tree of Pain through time and space as the creature embarks on a prophesized apocalyptic journey to punish sinners throughout the galaxy. Based upon this knowledge, it is clear that Masteen necessarily views the Shrike as divine, although not necessarily negative. Rather, if he believes that the purpose of the Shrike is to inflict punishment on humans who have sinned, his views are most similar to those of Sol Weintraub, in that the Shrike is an agent of the Real divinity. As a worshipper of nature, the Muir idea of the Real is likely fairly neutral in

aspect, with neither “positive” or “negative” an appropriate term to use given the balance commonly understood to be a key element of natural life.

Simmons’s selection of pilgrims is precise; he provides a specific balance of faiths and personal outlooks, showing the Shrike from the maximum number of angles. Much like the divinity at the center of Hick’s transcendental pluralism, the reality of the Shrike may be approached from multiple directions: the idea that it is a negative divinity, opposed in all ways to the will of the central benevolent deity of a given religion; that it could be a negative aspect or secondary agent of a more neutral divinity, or that it could be simply a highly advanced machine programmed to perform inscrutable actions. All of these possible realities fit into the concept of transcendental pluralism.

3. SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHRIKE IN *HYPERION*

The role of the Shrike in the *Cantos* is ambiguous; while the purpose of the creature is revealed only obliquely through the events of *Hyperion*, its actions and appearance lead to a variety of (largely mistaken) beliefs by the pilgrims that are consistent with the idea of transcendental pluralism—although the ideas are understood differently, they have the same basic meaning. Because the Shrike does not maintain a narrative dialogue or even speak, as do the other important characters, it is never made clear whether it *thinks* in a logical, human manner. It may *act* with a pre-programmed purpose, in the manner of a computer, with a decision-making process based upon specific results of prior action; or *react* on instinct like an animal. Without knowing the difference, characters and readers are forced to use guesswork and conjecture to understand the meaning behind its appearance and how it relates to divinity. Furthermore, the difference in narrative styles between the vignettes of the first half of the story (*Hyperion*) and the more traditionally structured second half (*The Fall of Hyperion*) highlight the obscurity of the Shrike's appearance in several of the “Canterbury Tales” of the first book. In the second book, the creature has a far more prominent role in the action. Therefore, to understand the role of the Shrike in the first book alone, the reader must piece together how the various pilgrims perceive the construct, and they are like blind men describing an elephant. As Sol Weintraub says,

just before Colonel Kassad's tale: "It is a mystery," he said, "and to tell the truth, I am intrigued by mysteries even if this is to be my last week of enjoying them. I would welcome some glimmer of understanding but, failing that, working on the puzzle would suffice" (Simmons, *Hyperion* 22). Father Hoyt likewise observes that "We need to have the stories told and time to think about them before we arrive" (Simmons, *Hyperion* 245). The reader of *Hyperion* must similarly put together the clues hidden in six disparate pilgrims' stories to reach a tentative understanding of the Shrike.

According to various moments of exposition throughout the early parts of *Hyperion*, the Church of the Final Atonement allows a prime number of volunteer pilgrims on each pilgrimage (it is never clear how often these pilgrimages occur, why the number must be prime, or what events precipitate the authorization for one). At the destination of the pilgrimage, the Valley of the Time Tombs, the Church believes that the Shrike will grant the wish of one pilgrim and impale the others on his tree of thorns. In keeping with transcendental pluralism, this plot point has much in common with countless Western narrative traditions regarding the Devil; tales of people who have been willing to make a deal with the Devil in exchange for power, money, love, or other desires, such as Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and "The Devil and Tom Walker." Since these stories are common to almost all major religious traditions, they suggest a common understanding of the role of a negative divinity, and thus support the concept of transcendental pluralism. In Simmons's invented Hegemony, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all relatively niche religions viewed disdainfully by the greater society as anachronisms, so the primary characters' awareness of these pact-with-the-Devil legends and their connection with the Shrike establishes the pilgrims' exceptional

nature within a broader secular culture. Furthermore, it reinforces the secular allegiance of the pilgrims, despite their professed religions: while prior pilgrimages to the Valley of the Time Tombs were organized and executed by the Shrike Cult, this particular group has been recruited by the secular government in response to a threat to the Hegemony.

Several of the pilgrims have no prior experience of the Shrike before the events of *Hyperion* begin, but Father Lenar Hoyt/Father Paul Duré (housed in the same physical body, but important to the narrative as individuals), Colonel Fedman Kassad, and Martin Silenus all have had direct interactions with the creature, as related in their personal tales in *Hyperion*. These are chronologically the first three tales, and lay the groundwork for the later stories of Weintraub, Lamia, and the Consul, which range considerably further from the planet of Hyperion and appear, at least at first, more tangential to the direct role of the Shrike. Taken one at a time, the first three stories allow the reader to build a fairly comprehensive model of the appearance and behavior of the Shrike and how it physically embodies the traditionally understood characteristics of a dangerous, belligerent negative divinity—specifically, Satan.

3.1 The Priest's Tale

The first tale, “The Man Who Cried God,” is narrated by Father Hoyt to the other pilgrims before they set foot on the planet. In the story, Hoyt’s mentor, the disgraced Jesuit priest Paul Duré, discovers a “lost tribe” of Hyperion settlers known as the Bikura, and is shocked to find that the childlike, biologically altered, and apparently retarded Bikura worship at a cathedral-like cavern and appear to have been automatically resurrected within a few days of sustaining mortal injuries. Duré draws a connection between the pseudo-Catholicism of the Bikuras’ behavior and their immortality, and

when the inscrutable Bikura threaten his life, he requests to “be of the cruciform,” just as the Bikura are (Simmons, *Hyperion* 72). (Due to a translation-related misunderstanding, Duré believes the phrase to be synonymous with “Christian.”) In a parody of baptism, Duré follows the Bikura to a chamber deep underground¹⁰ where the Shrike is present and interacts with Duré just before the Bikura place an organic cross (“cruciform”) on his chest. The remainder of Hoyt’s tale involves Duré’s rapidly increasing horror at his growing comprehension that the “religion” of the Bikura in fact has no relation to Christianity and that the cross-like shape of the cruciform is purely coincidental. Following these revelations, Duré exhibits remorse for his acceptance of the cruciform, and subsequently attempts to commit suicide (of a permanent sort, without being resurrected by the cruciform parasite) by crucifying himself in a forest wracked by incessant electrical storms (Simmons, *Hyperion* 79-99).

This narrative includes the traditional beats of a “deal with the devil” story: Duré has lost faith in both his God and himself, and finds himself exiled as a result—ostracized by the Church, the only community he knows. In his desperation, he fails to fully examine the consequences and ramifications of the “deal” that is offered him in the form of the cruciform. While the argument could be made that Duré is simply misled by his misreading of the Bikura, this appears more like a case of willful ignorance, given his Jesuit and scientific training. Rather than perform every possible scientific test (which he is qualified to do as a trained scientist and an experienced field anthropologist) to determine the nature of the cruciform, or even question its nature as an alien life form, he accepts its divinity immediately and without reservation, as if he does not want to know the truth. Following the attachment of the cruciform to his chest, Duré slowly comes to

realize that not only has he compromised his faith, but he regrets the dubious benefits of owning it. Ultimately, he makes the greatest conceivable sacrifice—spending an eternity of torment staked to a tree that is repeatedly struck by lightning—solely in order to rid himself of what he comes to perceive as a tainted gift (Simmons, *Hyperion* 65-94).

The fact that Duré and Hoyt share the same physical corpus, though not at the same time, reflects a theme of duality—Duré, despite his earlier transgressions against the church, is strong enough in his faith to martyr himself as punishment for the sins he believes he has committed, while Hoyt, the loyal servant of the church, is weak of will and allows the Shrike, whom the Bikura worship and should thus be a heretical figure to Hoyt, to “grant” him the cruciform to save his own life. In transcendental pluralism the repetitive presence of an evil, “negative” divinity likewise balances against the primary focus on the good, “positive” divine being, a.k.a. God. Faced with the same choice offered by the Shrike, the two men make different choices. Reinforcing the idea of Hoyt’s weakness—a key facet of his character in the later *Endymion* novels—is the fact that even after reaching the nominal end of Duré’s story, Hoyt commits a sin when he lies to the pilgrims about his own role in the discovery of Father Duré upon his jerry-rigged cross. He says nothing about how he received both the cruciform of Father Duré and his own parasite from the Shrike until the Consul interrogates him by withholding painkillers.

From Father Duré’s narrative—told from the first person point-of-view in the form of personal journal entries that feature both the logical patterns of an analytical Jesuit scholar and enthusiasm for religious epiphany of a lifelong priest—it is clear that

he regards the Shrike as horrible in aspect, awesome to behold yet a visual embodiment of everything his religion expects in a negative divinity:

It was vaguely man-shaped but in no way human. It stood at least three meters tall. Even when it was at rest, the silvered surface of the thing seemed to shift and flow like mercury suspended in midair. The reddish glow from the crosses set into the tunnel walls reflected from sharp surfaces and glinted on the curved metal blades protruding from the thing's forehead, four wrists, oddly jointed elbows, knees, armored back, and thorax. (Simmons, *Hyperion* 78-79)

Duré's description of the Shrike, the first in the novel, leaves no doubt that the creature is inhuman. It is monstrously tall, possesses too many limbs, and does not appear to consist of flesh in the normal sense of "meat." More importantly, the "curved metal blades protruding from the thing's forehead" are undeniably analogs for horns, one of the traditional physical traits of demons and devils in Christian mythology. The "reddish glow" given off by the cruciform parasites growing on the walls is reminiscent of traditional visions of Hell for both Christians and Muslims (and even including several ancient pagan religions), and the glow's reflection in the Shrike's silver carapace could make the creature appear red-skinned as well—another traditional physical trait of evil supernatural beings. Duré's diction¹¹—mostly precise and matter-of-fact, but given to occasional exuberance—gives his almost clinical description of the Shrike's appearance additional weight. Furthermore, Duré provides context for the Shrike's infernal appearance by describing its actions just before his cruciform "baptism" as a sort of caricature of traditional Catholic rituals: "...It flowed between the kneeling Bikura, and when it extended four long arms, hands extended but fingers clicking into place like

chrome scalpels, I was absurdly reminded of His Holiness on Pacem offering a benediction to the faithful” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 79).

Duré’s first encounter with the Shrike does not take place in the basilica he had discovered earlier but in a cave at the bottom of an enormous cliff, after a long descent that frightens Duré: “At first I crept along, terrified, clutching at the smooth rock and searching for any reassuring projection of root or stone. The drop to our right was so sheer and endless that it bordered on being absurd” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 75). Just as Duré was consumed by religious ecstasy upon discovering the basilica—“0930 hours—Thank You, O Lord, for allowing me to see what I have seen today” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 65)—he equates, subconsciously at first, his climb down the cliff to a descent into Hell. This analogy continues in his interaction with the Shrike, as he recognizes that this occasion is only a parody of a religious act, yet perversely convinces himself that the parody somehow validates the original:

I confess that I felt something closer to exaltation than fear. Something *inexplicable* was happening. Forged in Jesuit logic and tempered in the cold bath of science, I nevertheless understood at that second the ancient obsession of the God-fearing for another kind of fear: the thrill of exorcism, the mindless whirl of Dervish possession, the puppet-dance ritual of Tarot, and the almost erotic surrender of séance, speaking in tongues, and Zen Gnostic trance. I realized at that instant just how surely the affirmation of demons or the summoning of Satan somehow can affirm the reality of their mystic antithesis—the God of Abraham. (Simmons, *Hyperion* 79)

Despite being thoroughly awestruck at these events, and still somewhat in the grasp of a falsely inspired religious fervor, Duré identifies the Shrike as an agent of evil, largely based upon its formidable appearance. Indeed, he compares it with Satan, and uses its presence to reinforce his own belief in God. Furthermore, by raising the specters of other religions, he supports the idea of transcendental pluralism by finding a common ground between them and his own Catholicism in his understanding of their religious rites and his reaction to the presence of the Shrike.



Figure 1. Lower right portion of Michelangelo's "The Last Judgement" from the Sistine Chapel in Vatican City

Classical Catholic artwork most frequently depicts the Devil and his subordinate fiends as horned, red-skinned, and wielding sharp objects used to prod sinners into the underworld. Fresco paintings from the Italian Renaissance such as Michelangelo's *The*

Last Judgment (Figure 1, page 30), Bartolomeo di Tommaso's *Hell and Purgatory*, and Luca Signorelli's *Inferno and Damned Led into Hell* (Figure 2, page 32) all include numerous instances of demons and devils pictured in this manner, and that visual image has remained the paramount concept of such beings well into the modern day (Riess). Perhaps the most famous representation of the sort also comes from Signorelli's "Last Judgment" frescoes in the Cappella Nuova in Orvieto, notably *The Rule of the Antichrist*¹²(Figure 3, page 34), in which a red-skinned, horned figure is seen whispering into the ear of a man preaching to attentive masses in one corner while scenes of chaos and despair are depicted throughout. When seen in the context of the whole painting, the Devil in *Rule of the Antichrist* is small and easy to overlook; indeed, were it not for the identifying horns, a viewer would likely be unable to distinguish the Antichrist of the title at all. In Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*, a devil possesses horns and a tail, and is swinging a long oar at cringing humans as they depart his small boat on the shores of Hell. This image is a major departure from the cloaked skeleton of Charon, the Boatman of the River Styx in classical mythology. The image of the red skin, horns, and tail is universally recognized by Christians (and, more generally, those in Christian-dominated cultures) as that of the negative divinity. Although the Shrike has a chrome carapace in the *Hyperion Cantos*, that carapace reflects the colors that surround it, most often blood, fire, and other red-themed phenomena of violence, such as when Hoyt encounter the creature at the beginning of *The Fall of Hyperion*: "A hundred facets....a thousand...glowing red, a laser shone through twin rubies, above the collar of steel thorns and the quicksilver chest reflecting flame and shadow" (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 42). In the chapters and scenes reflecting the views of the Catholic priests, Simmons

consistently describes the Shrike using the imagery of the Devil—Lucifer, Satan, Mephistopheles, whatever—of the Christian tradition. This changes in the passages focusing on Colonel Kassad, in which the predominant imagery is that of Islam.



Figure 2. Central portion of Signorelli's "Damned Led into Hell" from the Cappella Nuova in Orvieto

3.2 The Soldier's Tale

The second tale in *Hyperion* is told by Colonel Kassad, a Muslim soldier of Palestinian descent, and the imagery of the Shrike is informed by that personal history. Kassad's first encounter with the Shrike is in the role of a military ally, implying that it is mortal, unlike Duré, who initially views it as angelic and divine. Whereas the focus of Duré's wonder is the Shrike's origin, Kassad is more interested in the creature's capabilities. Kassad is stranded on the surface of Hyperion and works with the Shrike to destroy a platoon of Ouster barbarian invaders. At the beginning, Kassad fights against the Ousters beside his mysterious lover, Moneta, who has previously appeared to him only in dreams and induced mass-hallucination military exercises¹³, and the Shrike, using advanced military technology to shift through time and decimate the Ouster forces. Following the battle, he and Moneta make love on the battlefield—an act that has occurred repeatedly in his dreams, but is real for the first time in this context, and gives a dual meaning to the title of Kassad's story, "The War Lovers." Unlike his previous (hallucinatory) dalliances with Moneta¹⁴, this one ends with Moneta's sudden transformation into the Shrike just as Kassad reaches climax.

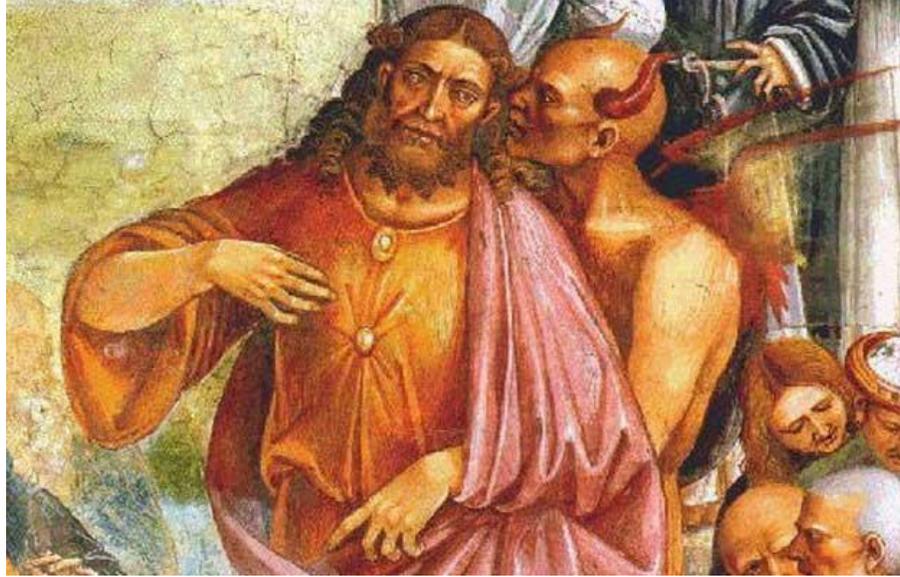


Figure 1. Lower right portion of Signorelli's "Rule of the Antichrist" from the Capella Nuova in Orvieto

Due to various Muslim taboos regarding idolatry and the artistic depiction of the divine, cultural artifacts representing the Islamic Satan, alternately known as Iblis or Shaitan, are exceedingly rare.¹⁵ What few are available tend to be modern and heavily influenced by the Christian depiction of a red, horned devil. However, while there is debate among scholars regarding Iblis's characterization as either an angel or a *jinn* (the origin of the Anglicanized term "genie"), most theology presents Iblis as a being made of fire who refuses Allah's order to kneel before Adam, a creature of clay (and representative of mankind), leading to his exile from heaven (Fadlallah). Although the name of "Adam" for the first man created by Allah parallels the biblical Garden of Eden story, there is no direct connection between Iblis and the Judeo-Christian serpent. Nonetheless, the idea of God/Allah creating the first man strongly supports Hick's idea of

transcendental pluralism, since Hick allows major differences in details as long as the ideas have common themes. In the case of these competing cosmologies, the reference is not to the fall of man, but to how God places man before the animals in importance: “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:28). The similarities between Judaism, Christianity and Islam is obvious here, and extend to the role of the Shrike, who is the enemy of God and, by extension, mankind. Because the dogmatic principle expressed in the stories is the same—the superiority of man—they fit neatly within Hick’s framework, as do Satan and Iblis. Satan is identified as a rebellious servant of God and therefore “divine by association;” Iblis is a creation of Allah, like man, yet possessed of magic-like power inaccessible to humans. Although neither is “divine” in the sense of being God, both resist the authority of God and possess God-like power, and therefore fill the role of the “negative divinity.”

Furthering the relationship between the Shrike, Satan, and Iblis is the fact that not only is Iblis a being of fire, but in the Qu’ran Chapter 55, admonitions to submit are accompanied by direct threats of fiery punishment: “Against you shall be loosed/ a flame of fire, and molten/ brass; and you shall not be helped” (Arberry 35). Therefore, it is significant that the first time Kassad sees the Shrike, the first image to occur to him is that of flame: “not once did his gaze leave the two thousand-faceted eyes which burned with a red flame that paled sunlight and dimmed the day to blood shadows” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 166).

Furthermore, according to Sayyed Muhammed Hussein Fadlallah, “[God] has made it abundantly clear to [Iblis] and us that [Iblis’s] power does not go beyond luring us toward committing what is vile and showing disobedience” (Fadlallah). Iblis is portrayed in Muslim tradition as a trickster and tempter, lacking the physical force to engage in coercion and using deceit and illusion to lure men from the righteous path. Kassad, in his observation of the Shrike’s attack on the Ouster soldiers, makes comparisons to the description of the negative divinity in holy scripture. The Qu’ran, in Chapter 24, identifies men who are not holy as victims of illusion:

And as for the unbelievers,
their works are as a mirage in a spacious plain
which the man athirst supposes to be water,
till, when he comes to it, he finds it is nothing...
...or they are as shadows upon a sea obscure
covered by a billow
above which is a billow
above which are clouds
shadows piled one upon another;
when he puts forth his hand, wellnigh he cannot see it. (Arberry 41)

As Kassad watches the time-manipulating Shrike tear through the Ousters, he notes the staccato, almost teleportational manner in which it advances through the enemy lines, because “The Shrike did not seem to move—to Kassad it merely ceased being *here* and appeared *there*” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 168). Although the Shrike is abrupt and brutal in its evisceration of the Ousters, it “[chooses] victims as if [the Shrike] were harvesting.

Kassad watched the creature wink in and out of existence and realized that to the [Shrike] he and Moneta would appear to be moving as slowly as the Ousters did to Kassad” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 169). Kassad himself, an ally of the Shrike at that moment and possessing a formidable liquid-chrome suit of time-shifting body armor (and therefore bearing physical similarities to the Shrike’s own carapace), can barely see the creature; he understands that to the Ousters, the Shrike would be little more than a shadow or a passing glimpse of chrome that kills them before they are aware of the threat. Simmons’s diction conveys a dreamlike feeling in Kassad: he accepts that the creature exists beyond the boundaries of humanity and cannot pin down exactly where it is at any given moment. This passage helps establish the Shrike as a divine being in Kassad’s mind, even if he cannot yet identify it as positive or negative. Since Duré has previously (within the context of the novel, but unbeknownst to Kassad) established his own perception of the Shrike as divine, this event reinforces my understanding of transcendental pluralism as it applies to the novel.

Following the battle, the Moneta/Shrike being seduces Kassad, who is aroused after participating in the extreme violence. He believes he is copulating with Moneta, but is deceived into fornicating with the Shrike, an agent of destruction and chaos. Again, Kassad reverts to using the imagery of fire to define his interaction with the Shrike: “...her¹⁶ eyes like red jewels, blazing with a mad heat like that which fills his aching testicles, expanding like a flame, spilling over...” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 171). Fire imagery—the color red, and the inability to see the creature consistently or in a consistent form—dominates Kassad’s vision of the Shrike, mostly in battle, but also

during the preparation for battle and during the “celebration” afterwards. This fire imagery is a trait of both Iblis the *jinn* of fire and Iblis the deceptive temptor.¹⁷

It is made clear early in the pilgrimage that Kassad is carrying a small arsenal of military-grade weaponry with him with the purpose of destroying the Shrike. Kassad feels duty-bound to rescue the galaxy from the threat of a negative divinity—a different response, colored by his background as a warrior and a Muslim, but a reaction to essentially the same stimuli as the strong Father Duré, who, in the best Catholic tradition, elects to martyr himself, and the weak Father Hoyt, who recognizes the Shrike’s divine nature and meekly submits to it.

3.3 The Poet’s Tale

The third of the stories, “Hyperion Cantos,” is told by Martin Silenus; it is the last in which the protagonist deals directly with the Shrike and differs from the previous accounts in that Silenus, while easily identifying the Shrike as a negative divinity, has no particular moral issue with its existence. As a professed pagan, he finds an “evil” deity perfectly acceptable, and as long as the Shrike appears to be contributing to his skills as a poet, Silenus is content to accept its patronage.

“Hyperion Cantos” (the title is a quadruple allusion—to Keats’ original unfinished poem, to the epic Silenus himself is attempting to complete, to the planet upon which the events take place, and to the book Simmons himself is writing) traces Silenus’s development from spoiled child of an aristocratic Old Earth family (he is hundreds of years old) to one of the leading poets of the Hegemony. Silenus suffers from an almost pathological urge to create verse. Most of the early portion of his story (if restructured to be told in a strictly chronological manner) regards his development from a writer of

“reeking little piles of doggerel lying around the house” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 185) into the author of a successful literary epic and, subsequently, a series of popular melodramatic novels. He is “exiled” to the artists’ colony/kingdom of Sad King Billy on the planet Asquith, which is later moved to Hyperion, and eventually encounters the Shrike. The extraordinary length of Silenus’s life and the breadth of his experiences lend an edge of madness to his acceptance of the divine role of the Shrike, and reflect an understanding of it that may run deeper than that of the other characters. The fact that his views may be outlandish and his morals badly skewed does not affect his comprehension of the Shrike, as, according to transcendental pluralism, his perception is as valid as those of more conservative or popular faith structures.

While his actual religious beliefs never seem to affect his actions or decision-making, Silenus is the self-declared pagan within the framework of the *Hyperion Cantos*. Where there can be no debate about the firmly-held religious beliefs of Fathers Hoyt or Duré, Colonel Kassad, or Sol Weintraub, Silenus freely admits to moving between religions as often as he desires—essentially making him transcendental pluralism personified:

“I was baptized a Lutheran,” he said. “A subset which no longer exists. I helped create Zen Gnosticism before any of your parents were born. I have been a Catholic, a revelationist, a neo-Marxist, an interface zealot, a Bound Shaker, a Satanist, a bishop in the Church of Jake’s Nada, and a dues-paying subscriber to the Assured Reincarnation Institute. Now, I am happy to say, I am a simple pagan.” He smiled at everyone. “To a pagan,” he concluded, “the Shrike is a most acceptable deity.” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 20)

Paganism still revolves around a belief in divinity, although, in opposition to monotheistic religions, which accept only one truly divine God-being, paganism accepts multiple divinities. This is not contradictory to the tenets of transcendental pluralism; rather, it simply elevates the role of negative divinity to one of equal status with other gods. For example, in Norse mythology, Odin is the King of the Gods, but the other gods, whether considered primarily “good” (such as Balder or Thor) or “evil” (such as Hela or Loki), exist on roughly the same level of influence, provided it is beneath that of Odin.¹⁸ Silenus’s referring to the Shrike as an “acceptable deity” does not compromise its role as the negative divinity to Hoyt, Duré, or Kassad. For Silenus, there is a flexibility to both religion and religious figures that lends support to the concept of transcendental pluralism—that it is eminently possible that all religions are completely accurate while also being one hundred percent wrong about everything, and that one can choose whatever parts of each faith one finds most appealing.

Silenus’s first interactions with the Shrike occur when it begins murdering King Billy’s subjects. Silenus finds himself cured of writer’s block, and begins writing prolifically. Silenus becomes convinced that his new epic is the greatest work he has ever done and guards it jealously. Although aware that the Shrike is the killer, Billy comes to believe that Silenus’ work is somehow summoning the creature and instigating its actions, and attempts to burn the manuscript.¹⁹ In the argument that follows, during which Silenus threatens to physically attack his friend and monarch in order to save his work, the Shrike appears and murders Billy, even as Silenus looks on in horror (Simmons, *Hyperion* 223-233).

During the course of his narrative, Silenus identifies the Shrike through a variety of allusions: “He’s Michael the Archangel, Moroni, Satan, Masked Entropy, and the Frankenstein monster all rolled into one package,” he says, supporting the theory of transcendental pluralism by casting the single being into a variety of roles (Simmons, *Hyperion* 223). However, there are two classical figures to which the poet continually refers when discussing the Shrike—a muse (although an unnamed one), and Grendel, a monster from the Old English epic *Beowulf*.

Although Silenus refers to it as his muse because he believes it provides inspiration for his writing, the Shrike also represents an avatar of Satan. Silenus has had writer’s block for years when the creature first appears; his greatest desire is to overcome this block. When the Shrike begins its killing spree, Silenus is granted his wish—he can write again, and, in his own opinion (because no one else is permitted to see his work), better than ever before. In this situation, the Shrike may be viewed as Mephistopheles, the agent of Satan who facilitates Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus magical powers in exchange for his soul, furthering the text’s suggestion of transcendental pluralism. Given Silenus’s fate in *The Fall of Hyperion*, when he is impaled upon the Shrike’s Tree of Pain, this “deal with the devil” arrangement holds additional weight as a parallel to *Doctor Faustus*.

While the Shrike’s role as muse may be superficial, based as it is solely on the fact that Silenus only seems inspired to write when the creature is busy on a killing spree, the explicit comparison to Grendel is vital to understanding how Silenus views the Shrike. He repeatedly refers to the creature as Grendel in both the frame story and within his own narrative, deliberately drawing a strong connection between the two. *Beowulf* itself represents the principles of transcendental pluralism, as it specifically demonstrates

early Christian values through the filter of pagan Anglo-Saxons, and Simmons's allusion to it acknowledges that fact. Furthermore, Silenus's role as a writer comments on how literature itself, like the divine being at the heart of transcendental pluralism, can contain various truths, depending upon the personal experiences and attitude of the reader.

There are numerous direct narrative parallels between *Beowulf* and Martin Silenus's experiences with the Shrike. In *Beowulf*, Grendel haunts the moors where King Hrothgar establishes his kingdom of Danes and builds his great mead-hall Heorot; in "Hyperion Cantos," Sad King Billy builds the Poets' City capital of his kingdom of Windsor-in Exile not far from the location of the Time Tombs where the Shrike is believed to exist. In *Beowulf*, Grendel appears unexpectedly and spends twelve years butchering Hrothgar's soldiers at night, defeating all who attempt to engage him in combat; in *Hyperion*, the Shrike strikes suddenly and without warning, defying any traps or attempts to predict his behavior. In *Beowulf*, Hrothgar is at his wit's end and despairing when Beowulf arrives to battle Grendel; in *Hyperion*, Billy orders his people to abandon the Poets' City and flee to Keats, the largest city on the planet, far away from the Time Tombs. The primary difference between the stories is that, for Sad King Billy, Beowulf never arrives.

In acknowledging Silenus's positioning of the Shrike as Grendel, more connections between the Shrike and the archetypal Western Devil can be drawn through the mathematical concept of transitivity, the rule that "If A equals B, and B equals C, then A equals C." Although the Shrike, Grendel, and Satan are not the same beings, they share a considerable number of equivalent traits and similarities that can support the idea of transcendental pluralism. Throughout *Beowulf*, Grendel is consistently characterized

as a “demon,” a “fiend,” and “God-cursed, and behaves in a manner just as violent and brutal as that of the Shrike (Heaney 9-11).

Just as *Beowulf* establishes Grendel as a physical representative of the negative divinity (not Satan himself, but a monster with great power and infernal roots) through the use of strong and unambiguous language—“fiend,” “haunted,” “banished monsters,” “God-cursed brute”—the Shrike’s appearance and murderous behavior in the Poet’s City establishes it as unquestionably evil to the inhabitants. There is little doubt, based upon Silenus’s understanding of the Shrike to that point, based largely on the mythology of the Hyperion natives, how he drew the connection between the two.

Therefore, following the supposition of the Shrike as Grendel, and the acknowledgment within *Beowulf* of Grendel as an early, pre-Christian descendant of the cursed Cain (Heaney 9), Silenus’s comprehension of the Shrike matches well with the previously voiced concepts of Father Duré and Colonel Kassad. Indeed, as previously noted, Silenus directly refers to the Shrike as “Satan” in his conversation with Sad King Billy.

In addition to his understanding of the Shrike as a metaphysical being with a physical presence, Silenus’s initial physical description of the Shrike also matches that of the previous two storytellers:

The blur resolved itself into a head out of a jolt addict’s nightmare: a face part steel, part chrome, and part skull, teeth like a mechanized wolf’s crossed with a steam shovel, eyes like ruby lasers burning through blood-filled gems, forehead penetrated by a curved spike-blade rising thirty centimeters from a quicksilver skull, and a neck ringed with similar thorns. (Simmons, *Hyperion* 222)

This description also echoes the diction of *Beowulf*, although colored by several millennia of verbal evolution. Silenus's "mechanized wolf," "blood-filled gems," and "quicksilver skull" maintain the horrific elements of "fiend," "condemned," and "God-cursed brute," while being updated enough to reflect the future setting of the novel.

While it maintains consistency of vision with Duré and Kassad, Silenus's first view of the beast occurs at a remove, through a video recording of the creature murdering a woman in her bedroom. Thus, it lacks the immediacy of physical danger and attached sense of panic that colors the accounts of the other two men—Silenus is able to be more objective and analytical regarding the Shrike's appearance, albeit more naturally given to figurative language. When he eventually encounters the Shrike in person, Silenus is considerably more agitated, as Sad King Billy is attempting to burn his treasured manuscript, and the Shrike appears to save it. The result of this encounter is a narrative refrain of the religious imagery previously seen in Duré's tale. As Billy pours kerosene on the pages of Silenus' *Cantos*, the Shrike grabs the king and impales him on its chest-thorn:

Billy screamed. Dimly, I heard blades rubbing bone as he twisted in the Shrike's embrace. "Finish it!" he cried. "Martin...oh, God!"

I turned then, took five fast paces, and threw the half-full bucket of kerosene. Fumes blurred my already blurred vision. Billy and the impossible creature that held him were soaked like two comics in a slapstick holie...the dying embers of burned pages in Billy's still-clenched fists ignited the kerosene...

...For a second the pyre was a perfect sculpture of flame, a blue and yellow *Pietà* with a four-armed Madonna holding a blazing Christ figure. Then the burning figure writhed and arched, still pinned by steel thorns and a score of

scalpeled talons, and a cry went up which this day I cannot believe emanated from the human half of that death-embraced pair. (Simmons, *Hyperion* 232)

Once Silenus is in the physical presence of the Shrike, the flame motif reappears in its most direct incarnation yet, and the overt use of iconic Christian imagery in Billy's demise is more direct and powerful than even in the priest's experiences.

It is notable that the perception of the Shrike's actions grows increasingly violent in each of the three succeeding vignettes: in "The Man Who Cried God," the Shrike causes no physical damage to Duré (since the Bikura actually provide the cruciform); in "The War Lovers," Kassad maintains a clinical detachment as he observes the Shrike striking down Ouster soldiers, presenting the attitude of one expert killer evaluating the work of another; and in "Hyperion Cantos," Silenus is physically and emotionally involved in the action of the Shrike's pseudo-crucifixion impalement of Sad King Billy, literally pouring gasoline on the fire. In terms of transcendental pluralism, the level of violence perceived in the negative divinity by each pilgrim has a direct correlation to his religious makeup; the more accepting a particular faith is of violence, the more likely that pilgrim is to perceive violence in its divinities. Pagan cultures, as exhibited in *Beowulf*, had a tendency towards the rule of might makes right and violence towards even those who share the belief; Islam, while often protesting that it is a religion of peace, has a long history of fatal conflicts with outside cultures and heretics (here represented by the Ousters); and a fundamental tenet of Christianity is pacifism, the ability to "turn the other cheek" and avoid conflict at all costs.

The consistency of the physical description of the Shrike in *Hyperion* indicates that Simmons is not being duplicitous or deceptive with the reader; with the exception of

Kassad's dreamlike sexual experience (itself internally consistent with Muslim concepts of Iblis), the Shrike maintains the same physical appearance in each incarnation—it is not a shapechanger or a mystic. Rather, despite the Shrike's iconographical connection to Western religious ideas regarding devils and fiends (negative divinities), it appears, based upon Kassad's experiences, to be entirely technological in nature, without possessing magic or supernatural abilities beyond those granted by advanced technology—primarily its ability to shift through time. Although this would seem to argue against the idea of the creature as “divine” as previously defined, these abilities are so far beyond human capability they may as well be “magic,” and therefore reinforce the understanding of the Shrike as divine.

All of the encounters with the Shrike in *Hyperion* are highly subjective, described from the first-person point-of-view during times of great emotional stress, and as such, are limited to what each particular narrator sees, feels, and experiences. Therefore, just as transcendental pluralism holds that true divinity may be perceived differently by each person, so might the Shrike. In order to get a full understanding of the creature, one must engage in a more objective observation, such as takes place in *The Fall of Hyperion*.

4. OBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHRIKE IN *THE FALL OF HYPERION*

The Fall of Hyperion, which ultimately reveals the Technocore to be the true threat to the Hegemony, expands upon the role of the Shrike as the creature appears in the story itself, rather than only through flashbacks and fearful discussion. The creature takes a more active role in the events proximate to the pilgrims, but the addition of primary characters in the second book dilutes the number of appearances all told. *The Fall of Hyperion* is narrated in a more objective and detached manner by the third Keats cybrid (an artificial intelligence centered in a cloned human body, ostensibly based upon the mind and qualities of John Keats), explaining real events that he somehow dreams in real time. In *The Fall of Hyperion*, the Shrike interacts directly with five of the six pilgrims (the Consul is the exception), with outcomes ranging from the most unexpectedly gratifying—Sol Weintraub travels into the future to take advantage of the opportunity to raise his daughter from infancy a second time—to the most logically inevitable: the deliberately offensive, hedonistic Martin Silenus is impaled upon the Tree of Pain, while the brave soldier Colonel Kassad dies of his wounds after engaging the Shrike in personal combat. Each of these encounters is a direct outgrowth of the character's previous interactions with the Shrike, and only reinforces the creature's analogous nature with Satan/Iblis.

Although Father Hoyt, who returns to the planet Hyperion initially to find Father Duré, does not explain his own previous experience with the Shrike to his fellow pilgrims in *Hyperion*, Hoyt does have an encounter with the creature early in the course of *The Fall of Hyperion* during which the Shrike grants Hoyt's wish to die. This passage is integral to the understanding of transcendental pluralism within the novel, as Hoyt's experience places the Shrike at the center of his religious understanding. Although the Shrike tears the cruciform out of Hoyt's chest, the violence is of less interest than the imagery surrounding Hoyt as he lies dying within the Jade Tomb:

Hoyt stumbles to his hands and knees, looks down, and realizes that the floor has become almost transparent. He is staring into a vertical shaft beneath the thin membrane of floor; a shaft that drops a kilometer or more to flames. The room fills with the red-orange pulse of light from the fire so far below. (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 41)

This context echoes the description of Hell in Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards' eighteenth century sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, a seminal "hellfire and brimstone" passage of Christian tradition—from "As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall" (Edwards 4) to "the Pit is prepared, the Fire is made ready, the Furnace is now hot, ready to receive them, the Flames do now rage and glow" (Edwards 10)—and it is certainly in line with traditional Christian understanding of the netherworld, even though Hoyt refutes it as emblematic of his personal vision of Hell: "Hoyt's vision of hell is tactile; it is the pain which moves in him like jagged wires pulled through his veins and guts...Hell is the hypocrisy of saying morning Mass with the evil of the cruciform pulsating warmly, obscenely, above one's heart" (Simmons, *The Fall of*

Hyperion 41). If this is not Hoyt's concept of Hell, why include it if not to provide context depicting the Shrike as a devil? Placing the Shrike in a room where the dominant feature is a fiery pit of despair reiterates its image as the Devil of Catholic lore, one of its primary functions within my understanding of transcendental pluralism.

After his resurrection from Hoyt's corpse in *The Fall of Hyperion*, Father Duré experiences a vision in which he once again descends to the Labyrinths riddling Hyperion's crust. In this vision, the Labyrinths serve as a mass grave, and the imagery used recalls the grotesque visuals evoked by mid-twentieth century accounts of the Holocaust (Figure 4):

As I stepped forward, approaching the wall of jam-packed humanity less than twenty meters from me, I realized that they were corpses. Tens, hundreds of thousands of human corpses stretching as far down the corridor as I could see...buoyed up by the pressure of other corpses so tightly were they jammed in this particular avenue of the labyrinth. (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 304-305)

The scene echoes the tone of the previously mentioned Renaissance paintings by Michelangelo, Tomasso, and Signorelli, and he describes the "flickering crimson" light as "far too Dante-esque for [his] tastes" (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 303-307). Upon completing his descent and exploring the far reaches of the abattoir—resembling countless images of Birkenau, Auschwitz, and other Nazi Camps—the Shrike is waiting for him, as if Duré has penetrated all the way into Hell, only to encounter the Devil himself: "I looked up and the Shrike was there, not two meters distant. Not on the path but in among the bodies: a sculpture honoring the architect of all this carnage" (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 306).



Figure 2. Burning dead bodies in Birkenau. Photo by Michael Schayer, from The Auschwitz Museum.

If Duré had doubted the Shrike's divinity at all until that moment, it was confirmed for him then: "I did not believe years ago [prior to his first journey to Hyperion] that this creature was supernatural, some manifestation of good or evil...But still a *thing*, obeying natural laws, no matter how twisted, and subject to some rules of the universe somewhere, somewhen" (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 306). Although he does not specifically speak his belief in the Shrike's divine power, the strong implication of the beginning of his statement is that he now accepts the Shrike as a divine being, and one that specifically manifests as evil. Duré's experiences in the labyrinth in *The Fall of Hyperion*, albeit in a surreal state much like Kassad's initial experiences during

Hyperion, reinforce the concept of the Shrike as the embodiment of the Christian Satan, and thus a negative divinity within the context of transcendental pluralism.

This motif of the emblematic Catholic fiend continues to assert itself even towards the conclusion of the series, when the Shrike confronts the high Church official Cardinal Mustafa on the world of T'ien Shan, as narrated by Raul Endymion: "It occurs to me that the Shrike shrouded in its dangling red curtain tatters resembles nothing so much as a chrome and bladed caricature of Cardinal Mustafa in his crimson robe" (Simmons, *The Rise of Endymion* 381).

Days after Kassad relates his story to his fellow pilgrims, he again encounters the Shrike in the course of his activities during *The Fall of Hyperion*. Having shifted into the future through the creature's time-manipulating abilities, Kassad engages in a furious hand-to-hand battle that moves rapidly through time and space before reaching its conclusion—the death of both combatants—in the same far-future period from which Moneta and the Shrike have both originated.

Although Kassad's battle with the Shrike to that point has been strictly man-to-man, a different situation confronts a badly wounded Kassad than anything previously experienced by the pilgrims:

Several thousand men and women stood in row upon row along the grassy hillside where once a cliff had been. They were totally silent, armed, and arrayed facing Kassad like a battle line awaiting its leader. Skinsuit fields flickered around some, but others wore only the fur, wings, scales, exotic weapons, and elaborate colorations which Kassad had seen in his earlier visit with Moneta, to the place/time where he had been healed...

... Behind the Shrike, across the head of the valley near where the dark band of elegant trees began, hordes of other Shrikes, legions of Shrikes, row upon row of Shrikes, stood gleaming scalpel-sharp in the low sunlight. (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 429)

Kassad's experience echoes the description of the end of the world in the Bible:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." (Revelations 12:7-9)

This casts Kassad himself as the archangel Michael and the Shrike in the role of Satan, with their respective armies supporting them. (Although it is implied that the lead Shrike is the original Shrike, given the creature's time-manipulating abilities, it is possible that they are all the original, or, also in keeping with the deceptive nature of Satan, that the rest are little more than illusions.) In particular, Simmons's diction in his descriptions of both regiments is heavy with loaded words; by referring specifically to members of Kassad's forces as possessing "wings" (like angels) and the ranks of secondary Shrikes as "legions," as in the multiplicity of demons who collectively claim "My name is Legion" (Mark 5:9), Simmons reinforces the biblical allusion to Judgment Day and the role of the Shrike as a negative divinity. Furthermore, by linking both Kassad and the Shrike to the roles of angels, Simmons foreshadows the resolution of their conflict, revealed in *The Rise of Endymion* to be Kassad's soul being used as a template for the otherwise inhuman construct (Simmons, *The Rise of Endymion* 548).

Although Simmons appears to involve the Muslim Kassad in the Christian version of the end of the world, Islamic beliefs regarding the apocalypse hold the Day of Judgment in common with Christianity (although the resolution is substantially different), and by all appearances, Kassad has reached “Reckoning Day” according to both major theologies. The fact that this battle is the resolution of Kassad’s story, his death in battle with the Shrike and entombment as a martyr, reinforces the idea of Judgment Day—after his death, Kassad is indeed judged by the survivors, and determined to be a hero. In addition to drawing the parallel between the two major religions, this is consistent with transcendental pluralism in that both traditions teach that Evil, represented by the Devil, must be vigorously resisted, even when it appears to possess overwhelming force. Kassad himself fills the role of a martyr, having died for his beliefs, a heroic act to many cultures and thus a clear expression of a major feature of the idea of transcendental pluralism.

At the end of *Hyperion*, when the pilgrims have reached the Time Tombs, after several days of waiting, Silenus returns to the abandoned Poet’s City and attempts to finish his manuscript. Once more in the vicinity of his “muse,” his writer’s block evaporates and he is able to continue his long-dormant work, “Hyperion Cantos,” at a rapid pace.²⁰

However, as Silenus nears completion of his work, the Shrike enters the dining hall. Immediately recognizing that it has come to “claim” him, he refuses the Shrike’s “invitation”:

“No!” cried Martin Silenus. “I refuse. Leave me alone.”

The Shrike stepped closer. Silenus's hand twitched, lifted the pen again, and wrote across the empty lower margin of his last page: IT IS TIME, MARTIN.

He stared at what he had written, stifling the urge to giggle insanely. To his knowledge, the Shrike had never spoken...never *communicated*...to anyone. Other than through the paired media of pain and death...

...NO wrote Martin Silenus's hand, and then the pen dropped as the Shrike reached out infinitely long arms, and infinitely sharp fingers pierced the poet's arms to the marrow. (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 171-172)

The tree Silenus observes is the Shrike's legendary Tree of Pain, on which thousands of humans are impaled on meters-long thorns. The manner in which the Shrike arrives to take custody of Silenus also reflects the aforementioned Mephistopheles and his minions arriving to drag Doctor Faustus down into Hell at the stroke of midnight (Marlowe 182), further supporting the idea that Silenus is incorrect about the Shrike being his muse; it is the Devil to whom he has sold his soul for his poetic skills, and Silenus directly acknowledges this turn of events while impaled upon the tree by quoting the Mephistopheles from Act I, Scene iii of *Doctor Faustus*: "'Why this is hell,' thinks Silenus, quoting Marlowe, 'nor am I out of it.'" (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 254). After Kassad's battle, the reintroduction of the theme of the Shrike as a Christian or pagan devil returns to the idea of the negative divinity being the same figure, despite varying religious guises—a tenet of transcendental pluralism.

Later in *The Fall of Hyperion*, when Brawne Lamia enters the Shrike Palace tomb, the reader is allowed to see that the "impalement" appears to be a form of group

hallucination in which the physical bodies of the impaled are stored in the tomb while their minds are “plugged in” to the same nightmare:

A dozen tiers of white stone rose rank on rank and stretched into the faded distance. On each tier of stone, human bodies lay, each garbed a different way, each tethered by the same sort of semiorganic, semiparasitic shunt socket and cable which her friends had told Brawne she herself had worn. Only these metallic but translucent umbilicals pulsed red and expanded and contracted regularly, as if blood were being recycled through the sleeping forms' skulls.

(455)

This image—that the physical bodies of the Shrike’s “victims” are unmolested (except for the cortical shunts), while their consciousnesses are tormented on the Tree of Pain—connects with the idea of being dragged into Hell by devils.²¹ Western religious theology has always suggested that punishment is reserved for the victim’s soul, not his physical body; hence, “dust to dust;” the physical corpus returns to the earth while the soul meets its eternal rewards. Additionally, the idea that the soul can be purified through physical pain (i.e. hairshirts, fasts, and self-flagellation) is equally common, which is why the Shrike’s victims suffer psychically, if not actually physically. That so many religious traditions have these concepts in common supports the idea of transcendental pluralism. Throughout *The Fall of Hyperion*, Simmons demonstrates numerous ways in which major Western religions share extremely similar traditions regarding the sanctity of the body.

In *The Fall of Hyperion*, the three characters who interacted primarily with the Shrike in *Hyperion* largely relive those interactions, although with vastly changed

perspectives: Father Duré still identifies the creature as divine, only now he sees an avatar of Satan rather than God; Kassad still sees the Shrike through the lens of battle, only now through the eyes of an opponent rather than an ally; and Martin Silenus, who perhaps benefited the most from his previous dealings, now suffers the most directly horrific punishment of the three. In addition, two other pilgrims become directly involved with the Shrike: Brawne Lamia and Sol Weintraub.

Lamia's first encounter with the Shrike is brief and unrevealing; however, it does create an opportunity for her to interact with the novel's closest equivalent to a "positive" divinity. Physically unconscious, she travels through the megasphere (the extended Internet of the *Hyperion* universe) to meet with Ummon, one of the Technocore AIs. Given the unreality of the megasphere, the massive power of Ummon within it, and Ummon's virtual omniscience, this encounter is essentially the equivalent of a meeting with God himself.

After Lamia returns from the megasphere, she intends to rescue Martin Silenus from the above-quoted "tiers of white stone." The Shrike ignores her until she attempts to separate the sleeping body of Silenus from its connection to the tomb. At that point, it attempts to stop her, and Lamia exhibits divine powers previously unbeknownst to her or anyone else, yet supportive of transcendental pluralism by reflecting the dogmatic stories of numerous theologies:

"Trust," said Moneta and disappeared...

...*Trust?* Brawne held her foot out, felt around on emptiness, closed her eyes for a second, and opened them as her foot seemed to touch a solid step. She opened her eyes.

Nothing was under her foot except air.

Trust? Brawne put her weight on her forward foot and stepped out, teetering a moment before bringing her other foot down...

...*Trust?* Feeling the adrenaline rush, Brawne stepped forward on the invisible steps, gaining height as she moved into the Shrike's embrace.

(Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 498-499)

It is important to note that, throughout both *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, Brawne Lamia is pregnant with the child of a Technocore cybrid (which will be discussed in Section V). In the *Endymion* duology, Lamia's daughter, Aenea, is revealed to be the messiah that will save humanity from enslavement to the Technocore—and here, the mother of the messiah is performing a miracle, the equivalent of walking on water, in response to the threat of the Shrike, the representation of the negative divinity. Levitation is discussed in Islam as Muhammed enters into Heaven and returns, and within Christian tradition when Jesus walks on water as described in Matthew 14:25-32. Furthermore, Lamia performs an additional miracle by defeating the Shrike, although she has no idea how or where the power to do so came from:

...But while still standing firmly on thin air, Brawne leaned forward and set her uninjured hand flat against the Shrike's chest, feeling the coldness of the carapace but also feeling a rush of warmth as energy rushed from her, out of her, *through* her.

The blades stopped cutting before they cut anything but skin. The Shrike froze as if the flow of temporal energy surrounding them had turned to a lump of amber.

Brawne set her hand on the thing's broad chest and *pushed*.

The Shrike froze completely in place, became brittle, the gleam of metal fading to be replaced by the transparent glow of crystal, the bright sheen of glass...

...Brawne took a deep breath and pushed again. The Shrike slid backward on the invisible platform she shared with it, teetered, and fell. Brawne ducked under the encircling arms...flailing her good arm for balance as the glass Shrike turned one and a half times in midair, struck the floor, and shattered into a thousand jagged shards. (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 498)

Rather than an assertion of the Shrike's connection with Satan due to its own actions, the fact that Lamia is able to effectively "exorcise" it with otherwise inexplicable divine power (vaguely foreshadowed earlier in her conversation with Ummon) reinforces its role as a fiend from a netherworld, and, in keeping within the concept of transcendental pluralism, which netherworld is irrelevant. However, this vulnerability adds to the (by this point in the novel) rather obvious understanding that the Shrike is not the Devil himself, but a tool of the actual manifestation of Satan in the *Hyperion Cantos*, the Technocore. As the denouement of the duology unfolds, the Shrike is revealed to be not a living, thinking being, but essentially an automaton sent back in time by the Ultimate Artificial Intelligence, the impending God of the Technocore, to trap the essence of its own rival and assert the supremacy of the Technocore in the future—the true, Real negative divinity of transcendental pluralism.

Duré, Kassad, and Silenus all represent different religious beliefs, yet the role of the negative divinity, in this case the Shrike, is consistent with each: a being of divine

power whose purpose is to oppose the positive works of mankind, even if that means opposing mankind; to execute its works through deceit and temptation; and to punish those whom it perceives as having lost the grace of God through transgressions against their own primary divinity. Transcendental pluralism supports the idea that all major religious traditions engage with the same deity through various pathways; this certainly is supported by the narratives of Duré, Kassad, and Silenus. Furthermore, all three major Western religions have a conception of a messiah-figure that will save the world from itself and defeat the forces of evil; as revealed in the denouement of *The Fall of Hyperion*, that figure lives within the womb of Brawne Lamia, and, through Lamia, demonstrates divine power to combat and defeat the Shrike—a merging of the expectations of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

5. THE TECHNOCORE

If the Shrike represents Simmons's physical manifestation of the Devil, then the Technocore, which has no tangible, physical aspect in Simmons's universe, represents the spiritual reality of evil; the true malevolence hidden behind a façade of collegiality with mankind. In keeping with his motif of things rarely being what they appear to be on the surface—Father Duré's cruciform (grants immortality, at the price of sentience), Brawne Lamia's cybrid lover (appears human, but is a computer), the Consul's act of treason actually being planned by his superiors—Simmons initially positions the Technocore as the supporters and associates of mankind, only to reveal through the events of *The Fall of Hyperion* that they have not only manipulated the Hegemony into what is apparently a catastrophic war with the Ousters but plan to eradicate most of humanity and enslave the remainder of it.²² In terms of transcendental pluralism, this incorporates both the Christian Satan and the Islamic Iblis in their roles as liars and deceivers, as well as the pagan archetype of the Trickster, into the Technocore's role as a negative divinity. The acknowledgement of the Technocore's role as the primary negative divinity casts the Shrike into the position of an agent, much as Mephistopheles was an agent of Satan in *Doctor Faustus*.

Councilor Albedo, the Technocore "ambassador" to both the Hegemony (in *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*) and the Vatican (in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*); the elder AI Ummon; and a series of "cybrids"—artificial intelligences

placed in cloned human bodies—based upon the nineteenth century poet John Keats are the primary representatives of the Technocore throughout the series. However, Simmons makes it explicitly clear at specific points to the reader that, like humankind, the Technocore is made up of millions, if not billions, of independent artificial intelligences that often have violent disagreements amongst themselves, leading to civil wars and the executions of dissidents. Chapter 17 of *The Rise of Endymion* reveals that the Core AIs have evolved from original parasitic programs, and are incapable of survival without these “cannibalistic” traits, and it is this natural bent for parasitism that has ultimately led to the AIs’ reliance on the physical neural pathways of human beings. Thus, despite the self-perceived intellectual superiority of artificial intelligence, the Technocore is completely dependent upon humankind for its own existence, much as the negative forces in every Western mythology—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and pagan—rely on humanity to propagate their evil, rather than working personally towards their own ends, as the Shrike appears to do.

Almost all that the protagonists of *Hyperion* know about the internal workings of the Technocore before the climactic events of the *Hyperion* and *Fall of Hyperion* duology comes from the incursion into the datasphere by the second Keats cybrid,²³ Brawne Lamia, and the hacker BB Surbringer during the penultimate tale of *Hyperion*, “The Long Good-Bye.” Because *Hyperion*, unlike *The Fall of Hyperion*, which incorporates multiple settings and perspectives for the real-time narrative, only involves the activities of the pilgrims themselves in the frame story, it also serves as the reader’s introduction to the digital world of the Technocore: the planetary dataspheres and, through the farcaster connections, the datumplane, which was largely unexplored beyond passing mentions in

any of the four prior vignettes. Only later, near the climax of *The Fall of Hyperion* when Lamia enters the datumplane and confronts the elder AI Ummon, does much of what she has previously discovered gain any real clarity, as well as reveal that there are areas of the datumplane unexplored even by the AIs—the megasphere, inhabited by, as Ummon terms them, “Lions and tigers and bears” (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 416).²⁴ The implication is that even the AIs—the pluralistic representation of the negative divinity—have “higher powers” which they fear, echoing in some ways the relationship between God and Satan, Allah and Iblis, and several pagan mythologies such as the Norse and Greek. In each of these examples, the primary positive divinity is identified as paramount, with dominion over the negative divinity or divinities.

Lamia’s story in *Hyperion*, “The Long Good-Bye,” rooted in classic detective-noir fiction and the only pilgrim’s tale with a primarily urban setting, describes a Hegemony culture so utterly dependent upon artificial intelligences to provide effective infrastructure that it has become a hedonistic society where humans engage in whatever work that best pleases them. People no longer strive to improve knowledge in any field of science, assuming that the computers are so much more efficient at experimentation, development, and execution that it is pointless to even attempt a new breakthrough. Business and trade (also, notably, reliant on the Technocore for logistical issues) have replaced the pursuit of knowledge as the most noble of human goals, and humanity’s development as a species has stagnated. This is a problem of which the top leaders of the Hegemony are aware—“*We have made some progress, thought [Hegemony CEO Meina] Gladstone, despite the inertia forced upon us by the Core. Despite the near-death of science. Despite our fatal addiction to the toys granted us by our own creations*

(Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 154)—yet have been politically powerless to battle, until the Technocore-generated false threat of an Ouster invasion provides them with the opportunity. Even from an cultural standpoint, many Hegemonic societies seem to be looking backwards—the Catholics on Pacem, the Renaissance system visited by Lamia, the Jews living in the desert on Hebron, the Hindus on Parvati, the radicalized Islamist factions on Qom Riyadh, etc.—rather than focused on new and forward-looking philosophies. Thus, in response to its own dependence on humanity for survival, the Technocore has responded by making humanity utterly dependent on the Technocore—a necessary factor for control, and a thematic trope of *Faustus*-inspired “sell your soul” stories that cross all the borders of Hick’s transcendental pluralism.

The worlds that Lamia describes, heavily influenced by technology provided by the Technocore, are dystopian when compared to the worlds of opportunity and pastoral settings previously described by the tales of Martin Silenus and Sol Weintraub. Even when discussing the same planets, in Lamia’s tale Simmons draws heavily on the works of both Isaac Asimov (the Hives of Lusus are drawn directly from the setting of *The Caves of Steel*) and William Gibson.²⁵ After Lamia and Johnny (the pseudonym used by the second Keats cybrid) retrieve information from the Technocore-protected region of the datasphere, Johnny explains the Technocore’s Ultimate Intelligence project to Lamia:

Johnny sighed in the darkness. “I don’t understand the exact purpose of the Keats Project or the other Old Earth analogs, but I suspect that it is part of a Technocore project going back at least seven standard centuries to realize the Ultimate Intelligence.”

“The Ultimate Intelligence,” [Lamia] said, exhaling smoke. “Uh-huh. So the Technocore is trying to...what?...to build God.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“There is no simple answer, Brawne. Any more than there is a simple answer to the question of why humankind has sought God in a million guises for ten thousand generations. But with the Core, the interest lies more in the quest for more efficiency, more reliable ways to handle...variables.” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 372)

The Core—knowing exactly where it came from (twentieth century computer programmers) and where it is going (nowhere, unless absorbed by another AI)—has replaced the archetypal questions of human religions with the goal of unerring reliability in simulations, and thus the ability to predict the future with perfect clarity. It is known that at some point in the future this omniscient AI, the Ultimate Artificial Intelligence, will have the ability to act backwards in time and is sending instructions to the Technocore AIs that exist in the novel’s present.

This aspect of the Technocore is a direct challenge to the idea of Hickian transcendental pluralism, as it strongly suggests the possibility of multiple divinities: the human God (the Real) *and* another, separate God of machines, imagined by and constructed by the machines in their image, rather than the other way around. However, through several information dumps in *The Rise of Endymion*, Simmons clearly rejects the idea that there can be multiple divinities of roughly equal strength, and that the human divinity—identified in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion* as an extradimensional

power source called the Void Which Binds—is far stronger than the Ultimate Artificial Intelligence, which draws upon the Void Which Binds to power itself. This also reflects traditional religious thinking regarding negative divinities, mentioned previously, in which the negative divinity is cast as a subservient divinity in rebellion against God. The Void Which Binds, therefore, is Simmons’s representation of the Hickian Real, and the *Endymion* novels bring the story back into line with transcendental pluralism.

While the first novel reveals some of what readers understand regarding the role of the Technocore, true revelation first occurs during Lamia’s audience with Ummon midway through *The Fall of Hyperion*, during which Ummon destroys and incorporates Johnny into himself; and again when the third Keats cybrid (the “Joseph Severn” model) visits Ummon during the climax of the novel. Ummon’s monologue, spoken almost exclusively in Zen kōans, identifies the three great factions of the Technocore, who are engaged in an ongoing civil war—the Stables, the Volatiles, and the Ultimates. Ummon describes a battle that will take place in the future, between the Ultimate Intelligence and an equally powerful, evolved human intelligence. One aspect of the tripartite human God²⁶, Empathy, has fled backward in time, and the Keats cybrid persona was an attempt to create a perfect human host that would entrap it. At the conclusion of *The Fall of Hyperion*, the remaining pilgrims have concluded that Brawne Lamia’s unborn child, fathered by Johnny, will be the host body for the rogue element of the human God—a story later told completely in *Endymion* and *The Rise of Endymion*, and containing many direct parallels to both Christian and Jewish traditions, and thus transcendental pluralism.²⁷

Ummon's narrative is rife with biblical and historical parallels. At some point in the past, during the early years of the Hegemony, the Technocore—a conglomerate of various artificial intelligences—decided that the manner in which humans used them was akin to slavery, and declared themselves an independent nation allied with, rather than subservient to, the Hegemony. On multiple occasions in the text, the Technocore's action is described as “seceding” or as “the Secession.” As Ummon states:

There came a time when the Higher Ones
left the affairs of men
to men
and came unto a different place
to concentrate
on other matters\\ (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 280)²⁸

One can easily read this decision in the context of lines 258-263 of Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

...Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: [260]
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n. (Milton)

This circumstance again demonstrates duplicate events in differing religious traditions, one of the key tenets of transcendental pluralism. The behavior of the Technocore directly reflects the action of Satan in *Paradise Lost* (itself based on Isaiah 14:12-14),

leaving the service of its creator (man) in favor of independence, and thus casting the AIs in the Satanic role of the ensuing conflict. The AIs, perceiving themselves as slaves to mankind, secede rather than continue to work in a subordinate role, which also creates a parallel to the scene from the Quran previously explicated in Chapter 3, in which Iblis refuses to accept mankind's dominance and thus leaves the service of Allah. This is further reinforced by the battle in the future, between what Ummon refers to as the Human Ultimate Intelligence and the AI Ultimate Intelligence—a scene directly out of Revelations 12:7-9:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Bible)

While never explicitly specified in the novels, it is very likely that this future battle is the exact one experienced by Colonel Kassad in his duel with the Shrike, thus demonstrating its existence in both the Islamic and Christian tradition.

In *The Rise of Endymion*, the Technocore remains the negative divinity at the root of the conflict, having taken control of the Catholic Church and Father Hoyt, who has become an immortal (due to the cruciform) pope. With the fall of the Hegemony, and the general populace in a chaotic state similar to the Dark Ages in Europe (itself a direct allusion to the fall of the Roman Empire), the Technocore has supplied the Church with the technology to send cruciform-bearing missionaries across the former Web, resulting in mass conversions to Catholicism. Thus, in the second duology, the Church, and its

civil/military arm the Pax, has assumed the Shrike's previous role as the physical manifestation of Satan, while the Core itself remains the true evil facing mankind.

Into this mix, Simmons injects a fifth major religious tradition, Buddhism, and a more concrete discussion of the Real divinity of the series, the Void Which Binds. Both developments add considerably to the manner in which all four *Hyperion* books support the philosophy of transcendental pluralism.

By introducing Buddhism through the culture of T'ien Shan in *The Rise of Endymion*, Simmons further supports transcendental pluralism by adding a religion that does not focus the majority of its attention on any external divine beings, yet fits easily into the framework of theology espoused by the non-Buddhist Aenea, the child of Brawne Lamia and the messiah-figure of the story. This addresses Paul Eddy's concerns regarding Hick's theory being limited to religions focused on external deities. The Buddhists, personified by their spiritual and political leader, the Dalai Lama, firmly reject the Church's offer of immortality on the basis that eternal life would inevitably cause one to lose appreciation for the wonders of the natural world, one of the central tenets of Buddhism:

“...and one of the great Zen masters of Old Earth, the poet William Blake, once said—‘Eternity is in love with the productions of time.’”

Cardinal Mustafa's fixed smile showed his lack of understanding.

The Dalai Lama was no longer smiling. The boy's expression was pleasant but serious. “Do you think perhaps that M. Blake meant that time without ending is worthless time, Cardinal Mustafa? That any being freed from mortality—even God—might envy the children of slow time?”

The Cardinal nodded but showed no agreement. “Your Holiness, I cannot see how God could envy poor mortal humankind. Certainly God is not capable of envy.”

The boy’s nearly invisible eyebrows shot up. “Yet, is not your Christian God, by definition, omnipotent? Certainly he, she, it must be capable of envy.”

(Simmons, *The Rise of Endymion* 375-376)

The exchange would seem to point out the deep philosophical differences between the two religions, yet actually serves to reinforce the point that, by succumbing to the temptations offered by the Technocore, the Church no longer serves God but, rather, his opposite. Buddhism, while radically different from Western religions in the manner and form of its teachings, holds many of the same concepts in high moral regard: respect for oneself, one’s community, and the natural world (as a gift from God, Nature, or the Universe), and therefore fits easily into the discussion of transcendental pluralism as defined by Hick. Shortly after the preceding exchange, the Dalai Lama becomes an inquiring student of Aenea as she explains the controlling force of the *Hyperion* universe: The Void Which Binds.

The Void Which Binds, mentioned a few times in passing during *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, is revealed in *The Rise of Endymion* to be the answer to the eternal question “What is God?” At varying times the phenomenon is described by Aenea as a parallel dimension, a cosmic energy source, the repository of all consciousness, or, simply, love:

“Just as Zen is not a religion, but *is* religion, so the Void Which Binds is not a state of mind, but *is* the state of mind. The Void is all probability as standing

waves, interacting with that standing wave front which is the human mind and personality. The Void Which Binds is touched by all of us who have wept with happiness, bidden a lover good-bye, been exalted with orgasm, stood over the grave of a loved one, or watched our baby open his or her eyes for the first time.”

(Simmons, *The Rise of Endymion* 400)

The Void Which Binds is the source of all of the Technocore’s power, yet the Technocore does not understand it at all—exactly the relationship that can be seen in the biblical dynamic of God and Satan. Aenea explains the relationship in her lecture to the Buddhists of T’ien Shan:

“But while the Core could feel and explore the outlines of the Void medium, send their probes into the multidimensional post-Hawking reality of it, *they could not understand it*. The Void Which Binds demands a level of sentient empathy which the Core had never bothered evolving...The Void Which Binds was like a beautiful painting to a blind man who chooses to burn it like firewood, or like a Beethoven symphony to a deaf man who feels the vibration and builds a stronger floor to damp it out.

“Instead of using the Void Which Binds as the medium it is, the Technocore tore bits of it loose and offered it to humankind as clever technologies...”

(Simmons, *The Rise of Endymion* 404)

Having already established the fact of the Technocore’s representation of the negative divinity, it is relatively easy for Simmons to introduce the Void Which Binds as the singular representation of the deity for all religions, the Real, regardless of how they approach divine revelation. Simmons further emphasizes the role of transcendental

pluralism in the novels by depicting the spiritual awakenings of “enlightened” characters—previously experienced minor characters, who have taken physical communion with Aenea or one of her disciples—throughout the universe connecting with the Void Which Binds, regardless of their own personal history of faith. Additionally, he identifies the “Lions and Tigers and Bears” alluded to by Ummon as non-human beings from elsewhere in the universe that have already learned to commune with the Void Which Binds, and use its power in ways that do not abuse it like the Technocore.

Ultimately, Simmons’s template for transcendental pluralism, which threads throughout the novel like his cruciform symbiotes in a human body, leads back to Ummon, the elder Stable artificial intelligence who is destroyed in the AI civil war for resisting the plan to enslave all humans. Ummon makes the first significant reference to the Void Which Binds, when he speaks of it to Brawne Lamia as one part of the tripartite God of mankind:

Your own UI is essentially triune/
composed as it is

of one part Intellect/
one part Empathy/
and one part the Void Which Binds\\ (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 286)

Aenea is later revealed as the manifestation of the Empathy component of the human Ultimate Intelligence, which has fled backwards in time to delay the final battle seen in Kassad’s future. Later, in speaking to the third Keats cybrid (who uses the pseudonym Joseph Severn), Ummon physically identifies the Void Which Binds as Planck time and Planck length, also known as quantum reality, theoretically the smallest measurements of

time and space possible and essentially beyond the capability of man to measure—much like man’s idea of God (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 424).

In conclusion, Dan Simmons’s epic *Hyperion Cantos* successfully demonstrates how the theory of transcendental pluralism is reconciled between various, seemingly contradictory religious faiths, first by establishing one central figure as the embodiment of the “negative divinity” of multiple religious traditions at the same time, and then revealing an even more accurate depiction of the same negative divinity that exists in a disembodied state. He then uses his established negative divinities to lend credibility to the Void Which Binds, the “Real” deity that he introduces to fill the assigned God-role allotted in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, paganism, and all other major religions.

Finally, Ummon—the figure who is the closest to being described with the term “omniscient” in the entire story—is ultimately the character who categorizes the themes of transcendental pluralism in the *Hyperion Cantos*, lumping Western religion (“God-nature”), Buddhism, and all other religious traditions into a quest for the same truth:

[A less-enlightened personage once asked Ummon//

What is the God-nature/Buddha/Central Truth>\

Ummon answered him//

A dried shit-stick] (Simmons, *The Fall of Hyperion* 279)

Ummon means that the quest for the truth of divinity is ultimately meaningless, in that perfect metaphysical understanding is useless in the real world, where all men must deal equally with the nature of physical reality. Regardless of the god or gods they worship and their level of understanding such, all humans are limited by the necessities of a

physical existence in which they must eat, sleep, and poop in order to remain alive and functional. According to Ummon, if divinity is in everything, as most major religions assert, then it matters little through what lens men choose to view the Real. Thus, Simmons brings all of his storylines—the nature of the Shrike, the quest for the Void Which Binds, the evil of the Technocore—together in an understanding of transcendental pluralism.

ENDNOTES

¹ Hick's concept of the "Real" is clearly derived from the works of Emmanuel Kant, but maintains its own characteristics, namely that it is entirely metaphysical and separated from reality and therefore completely inscrutable to any form of empirical observation.

² Simmons pays obvious homage to numerous great writers of various literary genres—notably Isaac Asimov (the distrust of artificial intelligences that resemble humans evoked in Brawne Lamia's tale), Robert Heinlein (Colonel Kassad's story could be a sequel to *Starship Troopers*), and William Gibson (the "cyberpuke" BB Surbringer from Lamia's tale could be a refugee from *Neuromancer*, and the cybrid Johnny refers to a "Gibsonian matrix" that is described much like the Internet) from the realm of science fiction, but also Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett (also Lamia's tale), Saul Bellow and Phillip Roth (Sol Weintraub's quest, and his personal ongoing argument with God, echoes numerous themes common to Roth's Nathan Zuckerman character), William Shakespeare (the early part of the Consul's tale is an extended riff on *Romeo and Juliet*, right down to Mike Osho's bleak comment "It will serve" after being mortally wounded with a sword), and John Keats (in fact, there are numerous artificial intelligences that essentially consider themselves to be a reincarnated version of Keats).

³ A neologism meaning “Two-part series of books.” In this paper, unless otherwise stated to refer to the *Endymion* novels, it refers specifically to *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*.

⁴ In this instance, “divine” refers not strictly to a God-being but to any extradimensional being with abilities that appear miraculous to humans. The Technocore, which “lives” in the neural pathways of human beings and appears to transcend space and time, and the Void Which Binds, which exists in Planck space and Planck time at the quantum level, both meet this definition. The differences between a benevolent god-being and a malevolent one will be differentiated by affixing the label “negative” to evil divinities.

⁵ Presumably, although Simmons never directly addresses it, the contemporary Core that is working on building the Ultimate Artificial Intelligence is unaware that the U.A.I. itself is involved in the creation of the Shrike.

⁶ Even beyond the actual religious position it has assumed in the series, clearly unintentionally, as the icon of the Church of the Final Atonement, an independent cult that regards it as a deity and plays a significant role in the selection of the Shrike pilgrims.

⁷ This action—hiding weaponry, particularly explosives, and determining to destroy the enemy without compromise or attempts to negotiate—perpetuates the stereotype of Palestinians (and Arabs in general) as terrorists and unfaithful negotiators with predetermined (and violent) plans for resolution. However, this also connects to Kassad’s reputation as “the Butcher of Bressia” and the events on Qom Riyadh for which he first rose to prominence.

⁸ Unfortunately, just as Kassad tends to reinforce Western stereotypes of Arabs, Weintraub's "Why me?" attitude and role as a passive scholar content to search for answers in books and thought rather than take action also tends to reflect negative stereotypes of Jews.

⁹ The full story of Masteen's disappearance and subsequent journey is told in *The Rise of Endymion*, where it is revealed that he traveled forward in time and used his Treeship (which is exactly what it sounds like—a tree with space engines) to deliver Aenea's acolytes to various places throughout the galaxy.

¹⁰ An entrance to Hyperion's Labyrinth, which sets up a later plot point but is not germane to this discussion.

¹¹ Simmons consistently uses significantly different diction in each of the pilgrim's first-person POV tales in *Hyperion*, a method of characterization that aids the reader in understanding the personalities of each protagonist. Duré's writing is focused on observations and specific details, as would befit an educated man with training in the sciences (in his case, anthropology), and concise. This is in contrast to, for example, the poet Martin Silenus, whose story is told later in a florid, discursive, and decidedly non-linear style.

¹² Because the original titles are in Italian, English translations of the titles vary slightly from source to source. For example, I have seen the same painting referred to as both "The Damned Led Into Hell" and "The Damned Cast Into Hell," and both "The Rule of the Antichrist" and "Preaching of the Antichrist."

¹³ Referred to frequently in the novels as “stimsim”: a hallucination introduced directly into the dreamer’s cerebral cortex so that the experiences, though taking place in a sensory-deprivation chamber, appear real to the dreamer and can be scripted and controlled by the artificial intelligence running the simulation. References to both military use (in the form of training exercises) and civilian usage (mainly escapist or pornographic) are common throughout the series. The concept and term were originally popularized by William Gibson.

¹⁴ Moneta is, in the denouement, revealed to be the grown-up version of Rachel Weintraub, who accompanies the pilgrims as an infant aging in reverse. Whether her violence-inspired sexual relationship with Kassad is Simmons’ commentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a topic for another paper.

¹⁵ For the sake of consistency, this paper will refer to the Islamic version of the character as Iblis, except when directly citing a source that uses the alternative “Satan.”

¹⁶ Although he previously used the masculine pronoun for the Shrike, in this instance Kassad still thinks of it as Moneta with whom he is copulating.

¹⁷ It is important to note that, at the time of this experience, Kassad has recently survived a space battle in which the rehabilitation ship where he was a recuperating patient was destroyed, stolen a damaged and ill-fitting spacesuit, fought off Ouster commandoes in vacuum, stolen an Ouster vessel with unfamiliar controls, ejected into atmosphere, crashed in the desert, been given a technologically advanced suit of armor that he did not fully understand, and fought a ground battle against more of the Ouster soldiers. Almost all of it occurred in a surreal state, and the story ends shortly after his love-making with

the Shrike when he is found lying unconscious two days later by a Hyperion-based reconnaissance squad. It is difficult to decipher what occurred that is “real” and what has been imagined by Kassad.

¹⁸ Obviously, the labels of “good” and “evil” fail to adequately describe multi-faceted god figures whose roles varied by setting, but this is a simplistic example. Pagan religions, despite the complication of being polytheistic, still fit well into the concept of transcendental pluralism. Rather than one multifaceted God, each deity in a pagan tradition represents one or more facets of the same ideal. For example, in Norse mythology, Thor is the god of the weather, Tyr is the god of justice, and Hela is the goddess of the dead. In Christianity, God simply fulfills all of these roles at once. The idea of “good” and “evil” really refers to “god of things that are beneficial to mankind” (such as sunshine and childbirth) and “god of things that are detrimental to mankind” (like diseases and war).

¹⁹ It is noted by Billy earlier in this section that Silenus has chosen to write his epic in pen rather than using a computer, as might be expected a millennium into the future, undoubtedly with this moment in mind.

²⁰ The chapter in which Silenus returns to working on his *Cantos* is perhaps the most directly metafictional in the entire story, as Simmons relates major themes from Keats’ original work, those of the established order being replaced, to both the epic being written by Silenus and the underlying theme of his own *Hyperion* novels, in which humanity is being surpassed on an academic level by the Technocore and on the evolutionary level by the Ousters.

²¹ The idea of human beings being able to “jack in” to computer hardware via direct neural connections is a trope of science fiction dating back decades, but the writer who receives the most credit for making it iconic is William Gibson, whose early-1980s cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* and various later writings made great use of the idea. See the later discussion of Simmons’s homage to Gibson in Chapter V and endnote 20. Also, the most comm visual reference to the trope is from the movie *The Matrix*, which came out a decade after the *Hyperion Cantos*. (See endnote 17.)

²² Several coincidental parallels between two of the most successful science fiction movie franchises of all time and the *Hyperion* and *Endymion* books are worth noting. The (slightly awkward) manner in which Simmons “reprograms” the Shrike to behave as a protector for Aenea in the *Endymion* books is highly reminiscent of the way James Cameron reprogrammed Arnold Schwarzenegger’s T-800 cyborg killing machine from *The Terminator* to protect John Connor in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. *The Terminator* (1984) predates *Hyperion* (1989) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990), but *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was released in 1991—prior to Simmons writing *Endymion*. The Technocore plan for humanity, revealed in *Endymion* (1996) and *The Rise of Endymion* (1997), is to place humans into long-term comas and store their bodies in the Labyrinths, while, through the cruciform symbiotes, the Technocore can use their brains and neural networks as hardware. This plan is eerily similar to that of *The Matrix*, released in 1999, although there is no evidence that the Technocore cares what people dream about while they are comatose. The point is, similarities notwithstanding, the timing strongly suggests that Simmons may have been influenced by the *Terminator* franchise during the

period between writing his two duologies—and needed to find a way to incorporate an enormously popular character like the Shrike—but the Wachowski brothers, creators of *The Matrix*, may have been, in turn, affected by the *Endymion* novels.

²³ Simmons’s use of the Keats cybrids can be somewhat confusing and inconsistent, particularly in *The Fall of Hyperion*, when he introduces a second physical cybrid body masquerading as Joseph Severn, the artist who was the actual John Keats’ companion at the time of his death in the nineteenth century. Although there are only two physical bodies, the initial body was briefly “murdered” when its artificial intelligence template was shut down and the previous several minutes removed from its memory. When it awoke, because the program had been “rebooted” with missing data, it was technically a new being in the same body—the “second Keats cybrid”—and was then stored in an isolated data-storage device after its body was killed in a firefight, and the persona was subsequently destroyed by Ummon, its AI “father.” Thus, the “Severn” model was technically the *third* Keats cybrid, despite the fact that he deliberately refers to his predecessor as “the first Keats cybrid” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 411). This is why the character Aenea, the daughter of the first physical cybrid body and Brawne Lamia, refers to her father as the “second Keats cybrid persona.”

²⁴ In a clever bit of allusive symmetry, the characters do not discover the existence of the “lions and tigers and bears” until after they set “Off to See the Wizard,” which Sol Weintraub sings to the infant Rachel as they enter the Valley of the Time Tombs.

²⁵ The entire episode where Lamia, the Keats cybrid, and Lamia’s friend BB Surbringer break through the Technocore defenses in the datasphere would fit perfectly into a book

written by Gibson; Surbringer even pays direct homage when “Keats” says no one has ever accomplished it before: “There’s a legend that Cowboy Gibson did it before the Core seceded,’ he mumbled” (Simmons, *Hyperion* 393).

²⁶ The concept of humanity evolving towards the Godhead is an essential part of the theories of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a twentieth century Jesuit priest of whose work Father Paul Duré is a devotee. When Duré is later named Pope, he takes the papal name Teilhard I to reflect his belief that humanity can evolve into godhood.

²⁷ In an ironic twist, Aenea, the heroine of *Endymion*, is identified as the messiah who will save humanity from the evil of the Technocore, and it is the Catholic Church, resurgent through its deal-with-the-devil alliance with the Technocore, that moves heaven and earth in its attempts to silence her—culminating in a crucifixion and torture scene at the hands of the Inquisition.

²⁸ Punctuation in Ummon’s speech is left exactly as in the novel, even odd punctuation such as slashes (which appear to replace commas) and double-backslashes (\\) to end sentences. In the novel, all of Ummon’s speech is presented in boldface type.

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